



SFPUC Hears What People Want In Environmental Plan

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Staff and consultants for the San Francisco Public Utilities Commission (SFPUC) conducted the third of four hearings slated for the agency's scoping of topics to be covered in a subsequent environmental review that would lead to the development of a habitat conservation plan (HCP).

The plan will cover the 44,000 acres in the watershed that comprises the San Francisco PUC's land in the Sunol Valley and adjacent property. The area reaches south to Calaveras Dam, and north to the south Pleasanton hills.

The plan would enable SFPUC to "take" or remove species and habitat as part of its work in maintaining its operations on the land. In exchange, SFPUC will outline the mitigation it expects to perform to allow that kind of taking. It's up to the federal Fish & Wildlife Service (FWS) to approve or deny the plan.

The meeting was held Monday evening in the Dublin public library.

Jeff Miller, spokesman for the Alameda Creek Alliance, urged the staff to include several items that they have left out of the scoping so far. The agency should specify in the subsequent EIR how it would deal with environmental impacts of the quarry that will be dug over the next 30 years, and how pesticides used on land leased to nurseries and the Sunol Golf Course will impact the area.

The SFPUC should also include preservation of habitat for the Bay checkerspot butterfly, a species that exists only on Mount Diablo and in a small area south of Alameda Creek in Sunol, said Miller.

Joanne Wilson, land and resources planner for SFPUC, said that the agency hired a specialist knowledgeable in this butterfly species. It was his opinion that the environment suitable for the butterfly on SFPUC land was so minimal that it would not create habitat.

The quarry issue raised by Miller is being dealt with separately in an environmental plan that was part of the permit granted by Alameda County to the quarry firm.

On dealing with pesticides in the HCP, the FWS does not require SFPUC to deal with pesticides, said Wilson. "It's not really known how pesticide use affects species. They (FWS) are not willing to grant a permit for it. It's not our decision. It's the decision of FWS," she said.

Miller mentioned to the Independent that SFPUC never replied to a letter that the Creek Alliance sent in summer of 2004.

Wilson said that “we haven’t sent Jeff a letter. We do go through letters we receive. We incorporate new information. We do consider it as part of the environmental review process for sure, which is required under CEQA. At this point, we are just getting the information out there.”

On the topic of getting out the word about the meeting, several ranchers near the watershed lands said that many landowners in the area had not heard about the meeting.

Wilson said there is a mailing list of 1600 people, some of whom received invitations and brochures about the meeting. There will be one more meeting, probably in spring, about the scope of what should be addressed. Then the final draft of the scope will be published. After that, the environmental review process will begin for creating the HCP.