

Open Space Committee Hear about Area's Environmental 'Hot Spots'

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The Tri-Valley area is considered a hot spot for biodiversity, containing a variety of habitats that support a wide range of plants and animals. In some cases, the plants and animals can be found in few other locations.

The Altamont Open Space Advisory Committee is in the process of reviewing which of these areas to focus on with the funding it has available to purchase land.

The money comes as the result of a lawsuit that established a fee to mitigate the impacts of bringing trash to the Altamont Landfill. The Vasco Landfill also collects the fee. The funds can only be spent in Eastern Alameda County.

To launch the discussion, the Open Space Committee has listened to presentations from environmental groups on which areas they believe should have priority for funding.

In May, the committee heard from the Tri-Valley Conservancy, California Rangeland Trust, Livermore Area Recreation and Park District, East Bay Chapter of the California Native Plant Society, and the Greenbelt Alliance.

Last Friday, the East Bay Regional Park District, Save Mount Diablo and the Alameda Creek Alliance offered input on important areas they would like to see conserved.

There were similar sites discussed at both the earlier meeting and at last week's meeting. These include Doolan Canyon, Cedar Mountain, Brushy Peak, and Corral Hollow (referred to as Tesla Park by those opposed to the Carnegie Off-Road Vehicle Park expansion).

Connectivity was one of the issues that merited saving according to presenters. Corridors that allow wildlife to move freely was a major consideration. The ability to provide trails that join open space areas was another benefit.

In addition to connectivity, they said that rare habitat areas providing homes to a variety of endangered plants and animals are important to save.

Protecting hydrological flow, to allow for maintenance of habitat as well as groundwater recharge, was listed as an important goal of land preservation.

Seth Adams, Save Mount Diablo (SMD) conservation director, discussed the Mount Diablo Range, which stretches 150 miles south from Mount Diablo. It includes such critical areas as the Altamont Pass and Corral Hollow. He stated that "waves of conservation" occur, saving areas such as the Sierras, the Redwoods and Coastal areas. "The next big wave will involve saving the inner coast ranges. Diablo is part of that."

He said that East Contra Costa and Alameda Counties are considered hot spots for endangered species in the U.S. SMD is looking at grasslands in Alameda County as important habitat. Raptors hunt in the

grasslands. The largest concentration of golden eagles can be found in the Altamont. The Altamont Pass provides a critical linkage of the north and south Diablo Range, said Adams.

He added that areas along Dyer Road, next to Brushy Peak, would provide a wildlife corridor. Preserving Doolan Canyon and Collier Canyon would help to block road connections going into Contra Costa County. Ridgeland along the Diablo range, including Highland Ridge and Morgan Territory Ridge, provide incredible opportunities for preservation.

Corral Hollow would provide an important connection to Henry Coe Park, which is located in Santa Clara and Stanislaus counties.

Adams stated that the one place other than Tesla, where the use of public dollars would be high priority, would be Cedar Mountain. "The serpentine geology is the single most important botanical hot spot outside of Mount Diablo. Its toxic materials change plants. It should be a state park in its own right," said Adams.

Bob Nisbet, East Bay Regional Park District Assistant General Manager, noted that voters in Alameda and Contra Costa counties, agreed to tax themselves to buy land when they re-authorized Measure WW. The funds can be used to leverage state and federal dollars, as well as grants.

It was pointed out by Adams and Nisbet that mitigation for development has helped to preserve many areas.

Nisbet called Cedar Mountain an area of interest, along with Duarte Canyon, Bethany Reservoir and the Chain of Lakes. Envisioned in the EBRPD master plan is a regional trail that would connect Cedar Mountain to Del Valle Park.

He said, "The district's three top areas are Brushy Peak, Doolan Canyon and Pleasanton Ridge. There is a lot of area around Brushy Peak that we have our eye on. While Doolan Canyon is not yet a park, the potential is there to form a rather large park. On Pleasanton Ridge, connectivity between current parks is a major goal of the district's master plan."

Nisbet added that the district does not actively seek land. It receives tips on potential purchases that they follow up on. "If I could look into a crystal ball, Brushy Peak or Doolan Canyon would be next on our request for funding," he stated.

Alameda Creek Alliance, while not an organization that acquires land, works to preserve important habitats. Ralph Boniello said watersheds that impact its efforts to preserve Steelhead Trout are important to maintain.

General areas of interest include Stonybrook Creek along Palomares Road as well as Arroyo Mocho Canyon. He described Alameda Creek as an anchor watershed for Steelhead. The tributaries include Arroyo de la Laguna, Arroyo del Valle, San Antonio Creek and Calaveras Creek, whose main tributary is Arroyo Hondo. The watershed includes three man-made reservoirs - Lake Del Valle, San Antonio Reservoir and Calaveras Reservoir.

Boniello told the committee, that consideration should be given to preserving areas that assist with groundwater recharge. Some properties are more important than others. These include grasslands, which provide greater recharge ability.

Rich Cimino, Ohlone Audubon, reported that the group's annual Christmas bird count provides a way of keeping track of birds and to monitor changes in land. He listed the Springtown Preserve in North Livermore

as a prime area for wintering raptors. Hawks come in from distances as far away as Canada and Europe to spend the winter. He said there are 75 species of plants and animals found in the preserve. "It is a prime location for birds and endangered species. The preserve is one of only five alkali habitats left in California."

He suggested spending money to fence the preserve.

A concern Cimino raised relates to the potential that future development would block the water flow needed to maintain the area's alkali soils.