



City of Lancaster requests Antelope Valley Conservancy's services

The City of Lancaster has enlisted Antelope Valley Conservancy's help with mitigation acquisitions.

Mitigation conditions of development project approvals can require that comparable habitats be preserved in perpetuity to compensate for habitats lost to development. AV Conservancy provides land stewardship and acquisition services to regional lead agencies and developers, and helps to coordinate resources—through consensus—toward regional conservation goals.

AV Conservancy Directors Callyn Yorke and Wendy Reed were invited to meet with Community Development Director Brian Ludicke in February. Subsequently, they were invited to speak at the March 20 Planning Commission meeting, at which the Commission discussed the advantages of using the Conservancy's services, and directed staff to continue working with the Conservancy to achieve local biological mitigation goals. (continued on page 2, see *City of Lancaster*)

Una Lake acquisition grant still available

A \$265,000 grant from Rivers and Mountains Conservancy to City of Palmdale, toward purchase of land by Una Lake, has a performance period extension that ends June 30th. According to the RMC, the City is working with the new owner on opportunities for conservation on the site, and our hope is that the lake and buffer riparian habitat will be preserved intact.



Scott Harris, a biologist with California Department of Fish and Game believes preservation of the Una Lake habitat is important to indigenous and migrating birds and waterfowl, including the endangered least Bell's vireo (in photo at left).

Una Lake is a sag pond of the San Andreas fault. It is one of the largest natural wetlands in the Antelope Valley. The area offers Joshua and juniper woodlands, willow scrub, and proximity to approved trails. Palmdale Water District has an easement for overflow from its dams on Palmdale Lake, and supports conservation of the surrounding area.

Welcome to the first newsletter issue

Welcome to the first issue of *The Conservancy News*. The true pleasure of introducing this issue is the fact that there is good news to report.

A synergy of efforts has produced regional attitude and policy changes. Antelope Valley Conservancy is pleased to have an opportunity to serve in this important effort.

Conservancy volunteers have been gratified to find so many people, at many regional organizations, who share a genuine commitment to local natural land preservation. The community sentiment to preserve natural lands while they still exist has gained momentum, now that a local conservancy exists.

AV Conservancy is grateful for the generosity and support of our founding donors and volunteers, and for the time and information generously shared with us by our Advisory Board and our community neighbors.

The *Conservancy News* is published by Antelope Valley Conservancy, P.O. Box 3133, Quartz Hill, California 93586, (661) 943-9000, and is available via email subscription. To subscribe, or for Conservancy information, please visit www.avconservancy.org.

Why is land preservation important?

There are as many reasons for land preservation as there are residents of the Antelope Valley.

People enjoy the mountain vistas, Joshua tree woodlands, and the peaceful open spaces that characterize our Valley. Residents walk, jog, ride bikes and horses, and watch birds, and children learn important values by being in proximity to nature. “Livable communities” with open space and natural lands recreation have higher property values, and attract higher-end corporations and employers.

Land preservation supports important watersheds, safe haven and sustenance to migrating birds, and habitats for resident plants and animals. Some Antelope Valley residents are so rare, they are protected by state and federal laws.

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As Mr. Ludicke explained to the Commission, the lack of a local conservancy has meant that off-site mitigation to date has largely funded land conservation outside the Antelope Valley. Mr. Ludicke and Dr. Yorke explained the benefits and opportunities the Conservancy offers to the community. Partnering with other regional stakeholders, the City of Lancaster can achieve larger and more effective conservation projects.

Commission Chairman Ron Smith, an avid bird watcher and artist, condemned the destruction of burrowing owl habitat at the 40th Street



West site. AV Conservancy had pursued a project to move the subject burrowing owls to sanctuary lands, prior to that destruction. While the Conservancy could not save those owls, it works to save others. Conservancy Director Reed believes the owls helped to strengthen the region’s commitment to mitigation and land conservation.

One of over 200 local land trusts in the State of California, AV Conservancy was formed in spring 2005 by community volunteers who recognized the need for a local conservancy. Donations of funds and lands to the Conservancy, a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization, can offer tax advantages, and the resulting sanctuaries can be named in memory of a donor or loved one.

This article was approved as accurate for publication by the City of Lancaster.

Director’s Notes: Clarity from muddy puddles

Biologists are kneeling by a muddy puddle. A miniscule fairy shrimp, gravid with eggs, wriggles on the palm of a hand. As far as the eye can see, dark lichen spots the desert sand. This is alkali scrub habitat, supporting



Photo: Heath McAllister

the alkali mariposa lily (photo at left) and other ancient treasures.

One role of alkali scrub and alkali sink habitats is to support birds migrating from distant northern and southern destinations, whose survival may hinge on the fairy shrimp and the lichen that sprout in spring rains. As I walk with the biologists, my mind’s lens zooms out to an image of the western hemisphere. The big picture of the land’s ecological importance comes into view with crystal clarity.

This spring, I hope you will let the muddy puddles of our desert remind you – with crystal clarity – of the big picture. Resources must not solely be defined by our ability to use them. In many cases, the importance of land conservation has nothing to do with human beings.