

August 2, 2013

## SSFL Conversation with Council Member Englander's Office

Yesterday, SSMPA board members Teena Takata, Bob Dager, Tom Nachtrab and I had a meeting with staff at Councilmember Englander's office, in Chatsworth. Attending were Nicole Bernson, Megan Cottier and Seme Park. The meeting had been set up about two weeks earlier and discussion was limited to the **Santa Susana Field Lab**.

This is what we told them:

Area II at SSFL (NASA owned property) is up for sale. You can see the listing at: [www.gsa.gov/ssfl](http://www.gsa.gov/ssfl)

We believe that the **National Park Service** is the only Agency that has the expertise and experience to manage the site, in perpetuity, as wilderness and as a museum.

That being said, there are sacred and prehistoric sites that belong to the descendants of the Native Americans who used to live here. Those descendants should control, or have significant input on the management of, these sacred treasures. This includes: access, interpretation and educational programs, especially in the **Burro Flats Archaeological Complex** and the associated rock art cave.

We believe the best stewardship arrangement for Area II, would be a partnership between the National Park Service (NPS) and the **Santa Ynez Band of the Chumash**, the only federally recognized Chumash tribe in existence. I don't know what form that partnership will take. I see three obvious possibilities:

1. Santa Ynez could own the entire parcel, with NPS as consultants on preservation and wildland management
2. NPS could own the property, with Santa Ynez becoming a "Cooperating Agency" that manages selected areas, OR,
3. NPS and Santa Ynez may hold equal ownership interest as true partners, sharing management and liability issues.

Or it could evolve as something in between.

The NPS will need to act soon because the GSA process may move forward to other bidders. If it does, then the property goes to the highest bidder, including commercial/residential land developers ... and there'll be no going back.

NPS told me they'd need some time to get things in order for a transfer to take place. I told them we'd need some time to demonstrate strong public acceptance and support.

This campaign is not about "Saving Rocketdyne". It's about saving the entire mountain range, stretching from Ahmanson Open Space on the south, to Oat Mountain, north of the 118. The NASA parcel is only about 450 acres. But it's in the middle of the 3200 acres that represent the whole SSFL, and as such, disposition of the NASA parcel may well set the path for what happens to the rest of the property. How the SSFL is disposed of will influence development policy in these hills for the next 20 years. This could also help drive the **Rim of the Valley Study's** approval by Congress.

Our campaign is all about the community's voice.

In our campaign to the Neighborhood Councils and other community organizations, I have heard two things consistently;

1. People want the SSFL preserved as open space and parkland.
2. They want it cleaned up to a reasonable standard.

We asked the Councilmember's staff if they had a plan...

Last December I was told that if I wanted our agenda to go through, I would need to get influential people on our side. So, we went to the most politically influential group I know, the **Chatsworth Neighborhood Council**, and they voted to sign a resolution calling for the NPS to step up and take ownership of the property. They enthusiastically started the ball rolling. Our next stop was the **West Hills Neighborhood Council**. They also signed on encouraging acquisition of the NASA parcel by NPS for future open space as well. Now, 7 months later, 9 neighborhood councils, 3 environmental organizations and the **Valley Alliance of Neighborhood Councils** have endorsed our resolution or written one of their own. These Councils are the grass roots representatives for over 400,000 constituents. We are booked to give presentations through August! During this same period we have collected over 700 individual signatures on petitions.

We also asked staff to please start attending the SSFL Community Advisory Group (CAG) meetings in order to remain current on the progress of the cleanup.

The CAG is the biggest boon to the community in terms of having their voice heard in quite a while. Our first two meetings went smoothly and surprisingly, there was a lot of cooperation and consensus. I'm hopeful for the future.

The **Community Advisory Group** Mission is:

Clean up what we MUST.

Preserve what we CAN.

And PROTECT for the Future

The Santa Susana Field Lab, in a manner representative and inclusive of the Community.

Sounds pretty good to me. What do you think?

The CAG is made up of a broad cross section of people from our community. There is an emphasis on stakeholders with a special skill set, like resource workers and archaeologists. We have, as well, ex workers and a nuclear physicist. There are also concerned homeowners. It is a broad spectrum. Most of the CAG members live in CD12 and CD3. They are the Council member's constituents. We invited staff to come meet them and listen to our deliberations.

I think the conversation is in full swing. Stay tuned!

*John Luker Vice President, SSMPPA*