



Santa Susana Mountain Park Association

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January 1999 Newsletter

DWP Manhandles Chatsworth Nature Preserve/Reservoir

By Dorian Keyser

Recent Department of Water and Power activities at the Chatsworth Nature Preserve/Reservoir confirmed past experiences that DWP supervisory and working-level personnel are insensitive to the plants, animal, educational, and other important assets of the preserve. In November:

1. Heavy equipment used by DWP personnel to remove dried grass from beneath oak tree canopies tore off large branches from several trees (see top photo next page).
2. Responding to the need for cleaning out live and dead vegetation from within concrete drainage channels, DWP workers removed numerous willow trees, cattails, and other riparian trees and plants from a large wetlands area which is not related to these channels, leaving only bare earth to replace the feeding and home sites of numerous birds and other animals. Gone is the filtering action of the riparian plants upon the water which had kept it odorless and relatively clean.
3. A large amount of water from the El Nino rains remains in the Reservoir/Nature Preserve adjacent to the rear of the lots along Schuman Road. Sometimes this water may advance into the rear of these properties, thereby affecting their septic/cesspool systems. Clearing a narrow band of vegetation along the property line and building a drainage channel is suggested.

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Dayton Canyon in Danger

By Judy Garris

Dayton Canyon is in danger. A lush, shady hiking trail on the western side of the San Fernando Valley may be lost to the public for recreation. In the basin of Dayton Creek, a stately Sycamore tree testifies to a stream that quenches the thirst of wildlife even in the hot summer months. The creek contributes to the headwaters of the Los Angeles River. Oak, walnut and elderberry trees line the easy hiking trail following a tributary to the creek. The new owner, a developer, does not provide public access to this trailhead.

The Woolsey/Dayton Canyon region is a crucial part of the wildlife corridor linking the Simi Hills, Santa Susana Mountains and the Santa Monica Mountains. Residents in the canyon have reported three sightings of mountain lions in the past five years. This writer has observed evidence of mule deer in Dayton Canyon, although neither of these animals are mentioned in the Draft Environmental Impact Report (DEIR) produced by L.A. City Planning. We can expect the loss of many small animals due to the destruction of 51.59 acres of native habitat. Larger animals would be forced to retreat.

Dayton Canyon lies within the county designation of Significant Ecological Area #14 (SEA14). This designation protects high quality chaparral, coastal sage scrub, southern oak woodland, and riparian woodland. The rare Plumber's and Mariposa Lilies have been found on the site. The developer plans to *annex the western portion of the project* to the City of Los Angeles, thus eliminating the protective status of the SEA designation.

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The next SSMIPA General Meeting will be held on Monday, January 18, 1999, at 7:30 p.m. at the Rockpointe Recreation Center, 22300 Devonshire St., Chatsworth (south side of street, 1 - 1/2 blocks before entry to Chatsworth Park). Chief Charlie Cooke, SSMIPA Board Member, and other representatives of the Native American community will tell stories, discuss current issues, and field questions from members and guests. No general meeting will take place in December.

DWP Manhandles Chatsworth Nature Preserve/Reservoir

Continued . . .

Previously, the DWP cut off low-lying branches of numerous oaks (see lower photo) to facilitate the removal of grasses, a practice which severely impacts the trees' long-term survival, as do the mounds of dirt that the DWP placed near these trees. Clearly, an independent oak tree expert should be hired to ensure that environmentally sound practices are followed.

The DWP has shown a continuous lack of concern for the native plants within the preserve. Fire abatement is performed in ways that threaten wildlife and lead to a decrease in the oak tree population. Only this year has the DWP stopped the detrimental practice of discing the ground for fire abatement, rather than mowing the grass. Years of discing have killed almost all of the seedling oaks, as well as other native plants. Old trees are left with few to replace them as they collapse. Changing the levels of the soil within the drip lines of these trees threatens their long-term survival.

Clearly, the survival of the native plants, birds and other residents of the preserve requires long-term commitments to preserving them by a governmental agency that



This oak tree's branch was torn off.



Multiple lower branches were removed from this oak.

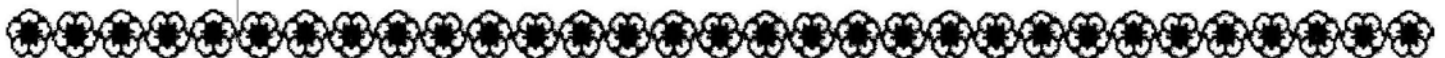
fully understands and supports this concept and which encourages passive educational activities within the preserve.

Federal protection and the environmental orientation of either California State Parks or the Santa Monica Mountains Conservancy are vital. Entrusting the preserve to the care of the changing personnel of L.A. City government, including the DWP Commission, who easily change commitments via ordinances or rulings, is not a viable alternative.

Hopefully, the wishes of the present President of the DWP Commission will be overruled by wiser heads, and environmentally aware organizations will take over management of the Chatsworth Nature Preserve. ❀

Dorian Keyser, SSMIPA Lands Committee Chair, can be reached at (818) 345-3795.

Significant information for this article, plus the oak tree photos shown on this page, were supplied by Chris Van Schaack, who grows local native plants and provides information about their needs. Chris can be reached at (818) 888-2318.



Dayton Canyon in Danger

Continued . . .

We would lose 135 oaks. According to the city ordinance on oak trees, mitigation includes planting two 15 gallon specimens for each oak removed, but studies indicate replacement oaks have a low survival rate. Because of the slow growth rate of oaks, many animals including Mule Deer will not have acorns as a food source, and millions of insects and the birds that eat them would no longer exist in this area.

According to archaeologist Albert Knight, Vice President of SSMPA, the area contains numerous archeological sites, some of which have yet to be examined. Al has officially protested any development in Dayton Canyon.

Although some agencies commend the developer for proposed dedication of 214.4 acres to a conservancy as open space, the National Park Service, SSMPA and other environmental organizations strongly oppose this development.

Additionally, extensive grading would occur requiring 6 to 8 months to complete, and 1,730,000 cubic yards of dirt would be rearranged. A 200-foot wide zone would surround the edge of the project as fire abatement. This would destroy additional open space. The plan calls for tennis courts, swimming pools, and a gated community. The DEIR admits to a significant impact on aesthetics due to nighttime illumination. Incidentally, this is the only impact considered "significant" by the city.

On December 7, 1998, the new owner/developer, Suncal Companies held an open house for community input. Over thirty people attended. Many area homeowners expressed concern about the increased traffic from an additional 175 homes. They complained of present traffic problems at rush hour. The developer said this problem will be alleviated by widening portions of Roscoe and Valley Circle Blvds. William Rattatazzi, the developer, claimed they had no plans for a gated community *at this time*. He also stated there would be access to the hiking trails. The public comment period for the DEIR ends January 7th, 1999. There will be public hearings in April after the presentation of the Environmental Impact Report. ❀

Judy Garris is a naturalist known to impart significant information about the plants, ecosystems, geology, and history of our local environment. A frequent leader of nature hikes in our local mountains, she can be reached at (818) 346-7654.



Dayton Canyon Development Impact

Suncal Companies of 21601 Devonshire Street, Chatsworth, is proposing a 175-home development to be called Dayton Canyon Estates on 68 acres at the corner of Valley Circle and Roscoe Blvds. in West Hills. Our analysis of the preliminary Environmental Impact Report notes these consequences, among others:

Destruction of 135 Oak Trees: The developer proposes removal of 135 of 194 oaks.

Destruction of Significant Ecological Area: 50% of the project area is within the County SEA#14. This description indicates that it serves as a buffer and wildlife corridor between the Chatsworth Reservoir and the Simi Hills. This area will be removed from protected status by annexation into the City of Los Angeles. The developer is presently communicating with County officials on this issue. Contact your County Supervisor and urge them to reject the developer's request for annexation of this area to the city.

Destruction of Hillides and Ridgelines: Massive grading will dramatically alter ridgelines west of Valley Circle, interrupting sightlines from the open space and the neighboring community.

Flood Hazard: Dayton Creek, one of the main sources of the Los Angeles River, typically overflows its banks during wet years. The development will increase water flow into the creek.

The comment period on this report ends January 7, 1999. Letters can be sent to:

Irene Paul, Project Coordinator
City of Los Angeles
Department of City Planning
221 N. Figueroa Street, Room 1500
Los Angeles, CA 90012

The case number for the project is: EIR 98-0227 MPR/SUB/DA/ANNEX.

Council persons for the project are Hal Bernson and Laura Chick. ❀

L.A. Environmental Activists, take note:

The Los Angeles City definition of "open space" includes ball fields and cow pastures. Environmentalists, on the other hand, typically regard "open space" as naturalized areas or habitat for wildlife — areas where animals, birds and native vegetation can be left alone.

Environmentalists furthermore object to regarding manicured areas such as lawns and athletic fields as open space since grass seeds are prevented from ripening, effectively removing a food source for wildlife. ❀

Volunteers Needed - SSMPA Has a Lot to Do!!

By Dorian Keyser

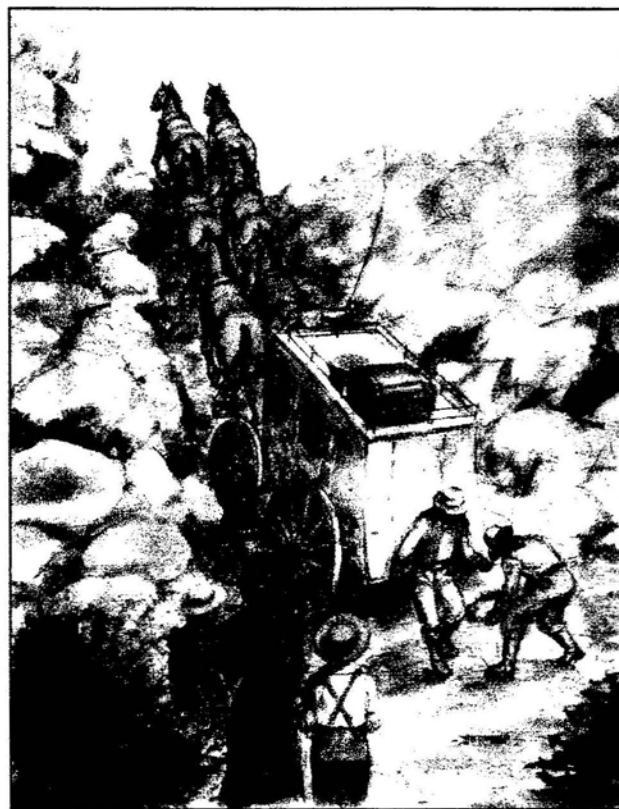
The "Mission Statement" of SSMPA's evolving bylaws states that the "Association's primary purposes are the protection and preservation of the Santa Susana Mountains and Simi Hills:

- As open spaces and wildlife corridors linking the Los Padres and Angeles National Forests with the Santa Monica Mountains via the Santa Susana Mountains and Simi Hills;
- As natural ecological habitats for native plants and animals;
- As locales of unique geological formations;
- As sites of ethnological, archeological, and historical interest;
- To provide recreational and environmental educational opportunities.

A key activity is determining the features of our areas, including the detailed geography and other attributes which need to be protected and preserved. We work closely with the Sierra Club, Santa Monica Mountains conservancy, California State Parks, local jurisdictions, and the Foundation for the Preservation of the Santa Susana Mountains to fulfill our mission. Current high priority projects include:

1. Preserving the entire Chatsworth Nature Preserve/Reservoir with only passive uses.
2. Obtaining our area's fair share of environmental funds from appropriations and bond issues.
3. Ensuring that the Indian Springs and North of Stoney Point acquisitions are completed.
4. Helping California State Parks generate and implement a plan for the wildlife corridor via public sector acquisitions that connect the Santa Clarita Woodlands with Runkle Ranch, Corriganville with Sage Ranch, and Sage Ranch with Ahmanson Ranch and other publicly owned property in the Simi Hills.

To make progress on these and other environmental fronts, we need the help of a lot of people. Please contact Dorian Keyser at (818) 345-3795 or Judy Garris at (818) 346-7654 to learn how you can help. ❁



Scaling the Devil's Slide

By Nancy Razanski

The Foundation for the Preservation of the Santa Susana Mountains has made available to the public, for a \$10 tax-deductible donation, a 14" x 11" color print of an original watercolor painted by longtime Chatsworth resident, Bill Razanski. The picture shows a scene from out of the pages of our historic past.

The beautiful Simi Hills surrounding Chatsworth contain an old stagecoach trail that was the only land link between Los Angeles and San Francisco during the Civil War. A mosaic plaque was placed on the steepest part of the trail back on March 17, 1939, by the native Daughters of the Golden West. The stagecoach trail and the surrounding 178 acres was recorded in the National Register of Historic Places in January 1974. On January 27, 1998, 670 acres surrounding the old stagecoach trail was designated as the Santa Susana Pass State Historic Park.

The original watercolor was titled "Scaling the Devil's Slide" because the steepest part of the old stagecoach trail was historically referred to as the "Devil's Slide." Often adult male passengers had to get out of the coach and put rocks behind the wheels to prevent them from sliding backwards and downwards. The picture capturing this historical scene spotlights the courage and determination of our early Chatsworth pioneers.

Contact Nancy Razanski at (818) 341-3512 to purchase a copy of this print. It could make a thoughtful holiday gift. ❁



Native American and Cowboy Heritage Day a Success

By Nancy Razanski, FPSSM President

On Saturday, December 5, 1998, California State Parks Interpreter, Mike Allan, and the Foundation for the Preservation of the Santa Susana Mountains (FPSSM) children's docents put on a fun-filled children's activity for ages 5-12 in Chatsworth Park South.

Mike taught how to create a cowboy leather craft, which children later took home. Janet Lazik taught the children a Native American black walnut dice game. Judy Garris showed children how to grind acorns using mortar and pestle. And Pat Levin led a hike into our new Santa Susana Pass State Historic Park.

On the organizational end of the event, Janet Lazik, Nancy Razanski, Judy Garris and Rodney Harding helped Mike plan the event, while Bill Razanski designed the flyer.

Another children's nature crafts event is planned for February 27, 1999. More details on the event will be forthcoming in the February 1999 newsletter. ❀

North of Stoney Point Acquisition

By Dorian Keyser

In November, the North of Stoney Point acquisition entered escrow — which should close by the time that you receive this newsletter.

Many people deserve congratulations, especially Councilman Hal Bernson, members of the Trust for Public Lands, Santa Monica Mountains Conservancy's Executive Director Joe Edmiston, Jan Hinkston, and Virginia Watson.

Now we need to become a part of the planning process that preserves this unique property for the public.

We also need to continue our efforts to obtain funds to procure the Hoerner property, the DeYoung property, and the Mineo property, thereby obtaining public ownership of a continuous wildlife corridor from within Brown's Canyon through Corriganville. ❀

SSMPA Executive Board

Charlie Cooke, Member-At-Large	805-269-1244
Theodore Dent, Recording Secretary	818-882-4664
Judy Garris, Member-At-Large	818-346-7654
Susan Gerke, Treasurer	818-704-9304
Holly Huff, Member-At-Large	805-526-0961
Jeff Johnston, President	805-643-1721
Dorian Keyser, Member-At-Large	818-345-3795
Albert Knight, Vice President	818-252-3466
Patricia Levin, Corresponding Secretary	818-998-5224
Doreen Rusen, Member-At-Large	818-360-0894

Publicity Chairman: Diana Dixon-Davis - 818-341-4242

SSMPA Elections

The annual elections for the SSMPA Board of Directors will occur at our March General Membership Meeting. All paid-up members of SSMPA, who have been members for at least 14 days, are eligible to vote, as well as to be candidates for our board. Please consider becoming a candidate for the SSMPA Board of Directors. We need to elect people who can assume various responsibilities. We also suggest that you contact others to urge them to run.

If you or another member would like to be nominated for the SSMPA Board, please prepare, or have that other member prepare, a brief statement (several sentences to a couple of short paragraphs) on why the Association's membership should vote for you. Send or give your Candidate's Statement to newsletter editor Patricia Milow, 22129 Cantlay Street, Canoga Park, CA 91303. Candidate Statements will be published in the February or March SSMPA newsletter.

Please also note that the February SSMPA General Meeting will consist of a Candidates' Forum. All candidates who wish to identify themselves to the Association membership (and any guests) can and should plan to make a brief statement on they should be elected to the SSMPA Board to the membership at the February General Meeting.

All members are encouraged to attend the February General Meeting, and to get to know the candidates, ask the candidates questions, make suggestions about what the Association should be doing, and otherwise make themselves heard. ❀



December-January Hikes

Stagecoach Trail and Exploration Series hikes are offered by the Santa Susana Mountain Task Force (SSMTF) of the Sierra Club and publicized by the SSMPA and the Foundation for the Preservation of the Santa Susana Mountains (FPSSM).

Stagecoach Trail Hikes

SSMTF hikes are conducted every *Sunday*, October - June (except for very rainy days) from the parking lot of Chatsworth Park South Recreation Building, located at the western terminus of Devonshire Street, about one mile west of Topanga Canyon Boulevard.

Hikers meet at 9:00 a.m. with the hike leader for the 4-mile (700 ft. gain) loop up the Stagecoach Trail in the hills west of the park. Bring water and a snack in a back or hip pack. Lug sole shoes or sturdy, closed shoes, and a hat are advised. All hike leaders are knowledgeable and experienced.

Stagecoach Trail Hike Leaders

First Sunday: B.J. Freeman
Second Sunday: Judy Garris
Third Sunday: Lindsay Wilhelm
Fourth Sunday: Lee Baum
Fifth Sunday: Al Knight/Milt McCauley

Hike leaders on the fifth Sunday of the month alternate between Al Knight who leads Archaeology and History hikes, and Milt McCauley who leads Botany hikes. ☼

Our thanks to Norm Grow at Office Depot at Topanga Canyon and Roscoe for his donation of printing services, i.e., the printing of our newsletter. We truly appreciate it!

Santa Susana Exploration Series

Sunday, January 24, 1999 — Garden of the Gods

This will be an easy, 1-mile walk into an interesting Conservancy park off of Old Santa Susana Pass Road. See the Simi boulders of the Chatsworth Formation up close at the old Western movie set location. Meet at 9:00 a.m. at Red Mesa Road. Take the 118 freeway to Topanga Canyon Blvd. Go south about one mile to Old Santa Susana Pass Road (turn right - going west), then turn left on Red Mesa Road and drive about 1/4 mile to the trailhead on the left. Call Judy at (818) 346-7654 for more information.

Copies of Selected Notes of Jan Hinkston Now Available!

After Jan Hinkston, founder of the Santa Susana Mountain Park Association, moved to Oregon, Al Knight, current SSMPA Vice President, went through Jan's archives and culled out approximately 100 pages of especially interesting information. These pages focus on the SSMPA's origins, on activities and causes that the Association has been involved in over the last quarter century, and lots and lots on local history (Indian, Spanish, Mexican and American).

This nicely bound collection of notes and clippings is available from the SSMPA for only \$10.00, with all proceeds going to the SSMPA. Contact Susan Gerke at (818) 704-9304 to purchase this compendium of West Valley environmental history. ☼



SANTA SUSANA MOUNTAIN PARK ASSOCIATION

WE INVITE YOU TO JOIN / RENEW / REJOIN S.S.M.P.A.

Investing in the future of our communities and its resources is probably one of the best expenditures of our time and efforts. Return this cutoff with your contributions to help ensure our futures. Please make checks payable to SSMPA and send to SSMPA, P.O. Box 4831, Chatsworth, CA 91313-4831.



- Senior or Student (\$5.00) Individual (\$10.00) Family (\$15.00)
 Business or Organization (\$25.00) Life Member (\$100.00)

Name: _____ Phone: _____

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Special Interest/Expertise: _____