

**MINUTES OF THE SIGNIFICANT ECOLOGICAL AREA
TECHNICAL ADVISORY COMMITTEE (SEATAC)
MEETING OF February 4, 2008**
(Approved as amended by SEATAC on April 7, 2008)

PERSONS IN ATTENDANCE

SEATAC MEMBERS

Ty Garrison
Mickey Long
Ian Swift
Dr. Thomas Scott

REGIONAL PLANNING STAFF

Jim Hulbert
Hsiao-ching Chen

Young Nak Retreat Center Project Representatives:

Jay C. Kim	(310) 475-6171
Daryl Koutnik	(951) 787-7808
Greg Ainsworth	(805) 437-1900

San Gabriel River Discovery Center Project Representatives:

No one present

Observing:

Ali H. Mir (626) 564-1500

SEATAC MINUTES

February 4, 2008

AGENDA ITEMS

1. SEATAC Coordinator postponed approval of the January 14, 2008 and November 5, 2007 SEATAC meeting minutes until the next meeting on March 3, 2008.

OLD BUSINESS

2. **Young Nak Retreat Center, Review of Revised Biota Report**– See Page 2.
3. **San Gabriel River Discovery Center, Review of Additional Information from the Updated Biota Report** – See Page 7.

NOTE: SEATAC MEETINGS ARE INFORMAL WORKING SESSIONS. MEMBERS ARE APPOINTED VOLUNTEERS IN AN ADVISORY CAPACITY. MINUTES ARE PREPARED BY PLANNING STAFF PRIMARILY FROM NOTES. SESSIONS ARE ALSO TAPE RECORDED BUT THE TAPES ARE PRIMARILY FOR BACK-UP USE BY STAFF. VISITORS ARE ADVISED TO TAKE PROPER NOTES AND/OR RECORD THE SESSION. ISSUES NOT DISCUSSED BY SEATAC DO NOT IMPLY TACIT APPROVAL. NEW OR CLARIFIED INFORMATION PRESENTED IN SUBSEQUENT SUBMITTALS MAY RAISE NEW ISSUES AND MAY REQUIRE FURTHER ANALYSIS. MINUTES ARE GENERALLY APPROVED AT THE NEXT SEATAC MEETING. DRAFT MINUTES MAY BE REQUESTED BUT ARE SUBJECT TO REVISION.

SEATAC REPORT AND COMMENTS

PROJECT: Young Nak Retreat Center

SEATAC MEETING DATE FEBRUARY 4, 2008, ITEM 2

Updated Biota Report prepared by Impact Sciences, Dated December, 2007

Second SEATAC Review of Biota Report.

Project Description: Revised Biota Report for The Young Nak Retreat Center, Project No. 03-221 - Significant Ecological Area Conditional Use Permit, Parking Permit, and Oak Tree Permit for the continued use of a 30.5 acre site as a church retreat with 20 mobile home units and one single family residence, and for the proposed expansion of the facility with the construction of a chapel retreat center, a two-story dormitory building, a cafeteria, swimming pool, two meeting rooms, an office and gift shop, an outdoor amphitheater, a parking area and installation of a new septic system and an entryway monument. The proposed facility will serve up to 250 guests on site at any given time during the summer months of July and August and a maximum of 100 guests during the remainder of the year. The proposed project is located at 24100 Pine Canyon Road, west of Lake Hughes, east of Danielson Road, and immediately north of the Angeles National Forest, within the Portal Ridge/Liebre Mountain Significant Ecological Area (#58).

SEA Description: The Portal Ridge/Liebre Mountain area (**SEA No. 58**) is in close proximity to the Mojave Desert, the San Gabriel Mountains, and the Tehachapi Foothills. This position, at the intersection of three major geographical regions has produced the most diverse and unique flora found in the county. The area contains ten distinct plant communities, representing the transition between desert, foothill, and montane environments. The diversity of the area is further enhanced by the presence of many northern species, some of which are rare in the county, reaching their southern limit here.

Foothill woodland is an uncommon plant community that occurs in this area. It is a community containing both oak parklands of blue oak (*Quercus douglasii*) and valley oak (*Q. lobata*), and foothill pine woodland (*Pinus sabiniana*). This community is more common in northern and central California where it occurs along foothill and valley borders in the inner Coastal Ranges and western foothills of the Sierra Nevada. The distribution of this community extends south through the Tehachapi Mountains to the San Gabriel Mountains to reach its southern limit on Portal Ridge/Liebre Mountain. This is the only place this community is found in the county. Similarly, several of the component species including blue oak, foothill pine, and California buckeye reach their south limits here, and are found nowhere else in the county.

On the lower slopes and in the valleys south of the main ridgeline, southern oak woodland, valley grassland, riparian woodland, and coastal sage scrub can be found. Higher slopes and ridge tops are covered with chaparral and yellow-pine forest. On the north-facing slopes, which are under desert influences, pinyon-juniper woodland habitat is present. Joshua tree woodland or sagebrush scrub cover the lower desert hillsides in the area.

All of these communities are relatively common in the county with the exception of sagebrush scrub. This community, dominated by great basin sage (*Artemisia tridentata*), is not common in

California south of the Owens Valley. Populations in southern California are probably relics from an earlier time when the community extended much farther south than it does today.

Despite the commonness of most of the plant communities present, this area is very valuable because it possesses such a concentrated diversity of vegetation types. This creates an outstanding opportunity for educational use, nature study, and scientific research.

Action Requested: Review the revised Biota Report prepared in December 2007, by Impact Sciences, Inc.

**SEATAC COMMENTS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE YOUNG NAK
RETREAT CENTER PROJECT AT THE MEETING OF FEBRUARY 4, 2008:**

1. Valuation of sensitive species still not the best. Goldfinches (*Carduelis tristis*), for example, are at least migratory visitors.
2. Can Impact Sciences work their client to modify impacts? Any efforts to move or shift construction? Keep people away from the sag ponds? Could improvements be relocated to avoid or lessen impacts?
3. The project is almost entirely within SEA #58. There are therefore more direct impacts. The project site is located in a remote area, so impacts are greater, not lesser as opposed to what they may be in a more developed area.
4. Are any existing structures to be removed?
5. There are many places in the Biota Report where levels of significance are discussed, but only in the context of the property itself. There are no descriptions or maps of other resources in the region. There are claims that the impacts are insignificant, but these are not measured or quantified, so it is difficult to assume that there is no impact without an evaluation of what the resources are. This could be corrected by describing all resources in the region, and perhaps showing their locations on a map. In addition, there should be a table that lists resources and their significance on the project site, the SEA, and the entire region by comparison. Mitigation measures that are proposed should also be compared in the three areas of concern.
6. On page 47, Table 5, there is a figure that shows that 81% of the pine-oak woodlands onsite would be lost due to development, yet it is stated that the results of that loss are insignificant. Perhaps that loss is not insignificant, as there is no information presented about similar pine-oak woodlands in the SEA or the region. This should be assessed to determine true significance in a larger context. Best available sources of information should be used. Data obtained should be both qualitative and quantitative. The Forest Service has done plant studies and there are management plans and habitat conservation plans from the Forest Service with many maps that could be used.
7. Runoff or water flowage from the property goes into a creek, possibly going all the way to Antelope Valley. This should be assessed.

8. If a mitigation measure is proposed, as the text on page 58, the mitigation plans during construction should be discussed, like separation distance from birds and raptors, accompanied by a literature citation or where and how this information was derived. CDFG data could be used, but there should be evidence to show that it worked in previous projects. There should be more citations, more demonstrated effects, presented species by species. CDFG must have reasons or research for their rule of thumb information.
9. Fuel modification responsibility ends at the property boundary, yet there can be fire dangers present. Development closer than 200 feet to the property line reduces fuel modification zones, and creates a responsibility or burden for adjoining land owners. This represents a transfer of responsibility for fire safety. Land on neighboring property will have to be cleared and managed out to 200 feet. Will the county require applicants to move buildings so that fuel modification zones can be constructed and maintained onsite? An insurance company may require fuel modification zones extending into neighboring properties in order to grant coverage or for a policy to remain in effect. This places a burden on adjoining land owners to clear fuel modification zones. The Bureau of Land Management will allow home owners to clear fire zones on BLM property, perhaps the Forest Service would grant the same privilege. The applicant should talk to the Forest Service to see what they would do. How would they handle a situation such as this?
10. There are 12 oak trees to be removed, and apparently four of them are already dead. Some of the living oaks to be removed are on the periphery of grading. If grading is shifted, could those oaks be saved? Could construction be shifted to save oak trees? There is currently no way to distinguish between the dead oaks and the living ones from the symbols on the map. There should be different symbols used to show dead oaks and living oaks that will be removed.
11. There is a difference in resolution and detail in the maps. Figure seven is much better than Figure 3. The highest resolution map should be used in all contexts. The best map should be used all the way through the document.
12. There should be more work done to determine if pond turtles (*Clemmys marmorata*) are on site.
13. On page 10, the summary of significant impacts is weak or light. All potential impacts are not identified, such as loss of nesting or active nests for special status birds. There should be more details.
14. There should be a plan and a map that indicate how foot traffic will be managed. People who are brought into an area are one of the most significant impacts. Where will the trails be and how will they be managed? Children may want to explore, especially the wetlands and ponds. How will that be controlled? The impact of foot traffic on adjacent Forest Service land should also be evaluated. There should be signs detailing trail management procedures. Signs should also be placed at the entrance to the National Forest that display the rules of the Forest Service. Split rail fences could be used to help manage people. Trails, fences, and other management practices should be described and placed on a map. Attention should be directed towards sensitive areas on the site. 'Sacrifice' areas could be

developed to allow people to get their feet wet, or to play in the mud, while the rest of the resource is protected.

15. There are discrepancies about the number of people to be expected onsite. Different numbers are used. This should be clarified. It would also be helpful to have a percentage of increase in use estimated and included.
16. Broad characterizations were made on page 28 about densities of vegetation. SEATAC has seen Mariposa lilies (*Calochortus sp.*) under fairly dense chaparral, or they become much more visible after a fire. A more exhaustive search for Mariposa lilies should be conducted.
17. Golden eagles (*Aquila chrysaetos*) and Swainson's hawks (*Buteo swainsoni*) may be present as the site offers some foraging potential. Swainson's hawks may also nest close to human activity. The California condor (*Gymnogyps californianus*) and least bittern (*Ixobrychus exilis*) may also be present. These species should be moved to the table where they may occur, but would not likely be impacted.
18. The Tehachapi pocket mouse (*Perognathus alticolus inexpectatus*) may occur onsite. Trapping for small mammals should be done to evaluate their presence. If small mammals are present, the impacts of development could be substantial. The potential to occur is not addressed on page 50.
19. All paved surfaces should be listed as either permeable impermeable. Impermeable surfaces should be replaced by permeable surfaces wherever possible to promote infiltration rather than runoff.
20. The western spade foot toad (*Spea hammondi*) may occur onsite due to the presence of suitable habitat. There should be justification for the statement made that they do not occur on the subject property.
21. Spotted owls (*Strix occidentalis*) and long eared owls (*Asio otus*) may occur onsite. The Forest Service Biologist could be consulted for information.
22. Just because a Biologist visiting a site a few times does not see a species does not mean they are not there. It is important to say that species were not seen, but also to state the potential of occurrence, as likely, moderate, limited, and so on. If a species is seen, the context should be discussed. Surveys should be done to justify conclusions. Nesting for birds is not the only impact. Development could also threaten foraging and roosting.
23. There is little chance that the northern harrier (*Circus cyaneus*) will be present at the site so that is an opposite conclusion.
24. The willow fly catcher (*Empidonax traillii extimus*) and horned lark (*Eremophila alpestris*) were observed, but the descriptions of impacts were weak.
25. On the yellow page 46, the responses to SEATAC's comments were difficult to understand, and appeared to not quite meet what was expected. Does CEQA conflict with local regulations? Impacts may be greater in an SEA than surrounding areas, that's why

there may be enhanced CEQA concerns. Level of significance raised by local policy and makes it more significant. Local policies may not be as listed by CEQA.

26. Disturbed oak woodlands not addressed, the oak tree ordinance is not fully addressed. Mitigation measures proposed may not meet state oak woodlands law. Replanting cannot exceed more than 50% of the lost trees. Other forms of mitigation must therefore be addressed.
27. On page 53, Greata's aster (*Symphyotrichum defoliatum*) is not currently found in the fuel modification zone, but could be in the future if there are changes. There is a need to further describe impacts of fuel modification on Greata's aster.
28. On page 67, fencing should be closer to the resource.
29. In the tables of the relative abundance of species beginning on page A-3, and A-10, there is no differentiation between native and non-native species.
30. There should be more ornithological work. Just because a species is found does not mean it is common. Seasonal occurrences of birds in the tables beginning on page A-3 is way off. Warblers are mostly migrants, not residents. Must be better delineation. Red breasted nuthatches (*Sitta canadensis*) are not common anywhere. Blue grosbeaks (*Passerina caerulea*) are not common, either. The sightings of crows (*Corvus brachyrhynchos*) were likely ravens (*Corvus corax*) instead.
31. There is much missing information on abundance in the botanical survey beginning on page A-10. The missing information should be found to complete the table.
32. The butterfly survey was good.
33. Maintenance on busses while they are parked onsite. This should not occur. As many measures as possible should be taken to minimize all runoff from parking areas and roadways to the ponds.

Action Taken: Applicant will come back with revisions.

SEATAC REPORT AND COMMENTS

PROJECT: San Gabriel River Discovery Center

SEATAC MEETING DATE FEBRUARY 4, 2008, ITEM 3

Updated Biota Report prepared by EDAW, Dated December, 2007

Third SEATAC Review of Biota Report.

PROPOSED PROJECT: San Gabriel River Discovery Center – the project consists of the construction of: a new one story 18,230 sq. ft. main building, built to meet the U. S. Green Building Council's, "Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design" (LEED) standards; a 150 car parking lot; a maintenance building; an open air outdoor classroom; a covered outdoor classroom; a constructed riparian/wetland area; connecting pathways from these locations and utilities. The lease boundary area for the project is 11.3 acres, however, construction will be limited to the 7-acre construction impact area. The balance of the lease boundary area is 4.3 acres and this will be set aside for habitat preservation and restoration. Regular hours of operation would be 9:00 AM to 5:00 PM seven days a week. Depending on availability, meeting rooms would be available for reservation from 8:00 AM to 10:00 PM seven days a week, which includes time for setup, and take down. The parking lot and remainder of the site would be open during daylight hours only. The proposed project is located within the Whittier Narrows Natural Area, which is part of the Whittier Narrows Recreation Area (WNRA). The WNRA is located between the San Gabriel River and the Rio Hondo and the proposed project is within the existing SEA No. 42, "Whittier Narrows Dam Recreation Area".

SEA DESCRIPTION: The Whittier Narrows Dam County Recreation Area (SEA No. 42) contains an extensive area of excellent lowland riparian and freshwater marsh habitat, most of which has been set aside as a wildlife refuge. A nature center with excellent educational and interpretive facilities has been established on the property, and successful habitat restoration and management programs have been implemented.

The area is located in the southern San Gabriel Valley along the San Gabriel and Rio Hondo Rivers. The area is a low flood plain with a high water table and rich soils. The adjacent portions of the San Gabriel River and most of the Rio Hondo remain in a fairly natural state, supporting impressive streamside vegetation of willows, sycamores, cottonwoods, and mulefat. In addition, there are several lakes in the area that support freshwater marsh vegetation. Many of these habitat areas are protected within the nature center boundaries.

The area provides habitat for a very rich and diverse vertebrate fauna, including 24 species of mammals, 240 species of birds, 8 reptiles, 4 amphibians, and several fish. Many of these are restricted to riparian and freshwater marsh habitats and are uncommon in Los Angeles County.

The nature center provides educational and interpretive programs with a nature trail system, museum, and tours for school children. It also includes a habitat restoration program where replanting with natives and re-introduction of wildlife are reestablishing a natural balance in areas previously affected by man.

Status: The vegetation along the Rio Hondo and San Gabriel Rivers has remained in a fairly natural state. However, most of the area has been man-altered at one time through grazing and clearing. Native vegetation is now being reestablished over much of the area.

Action Requested: Review the revised Biota Report prepared in December 2007, by EDAW.

ACTION TAKEN: Further SEATAC review has been postponed. Applicant is to provide additional information as requested at previous SEATAC meeting of January 14, 2008.