

Conservation Notes September 2020 - Bruce Schoppe

The Conservation Committee has not met during the summer months and, of course, we cancelled our scheduled April meeting because of COVID-19. It seems unlikely that we will be able to meet in person any time soon; so, we will plan on virtual meetings via Zoom.

Meanwhile, issues of interest continue to merit attention:

We joined Los Padres Forest Watch and other environmental groups to oppose a Forest Service proposal to clear chaparral and log trees across 755 acres of Pine Mountain Ridge in Los Padres National Forest. The project, promoted by the administration to reduce the risk of fires, sought use of a "categorical exclusion" to avoid scrutiny under a "normal" environmental review. The comments were submitted on August 14th. Clearing chaparral results in replacement by cheat grasses and other non-native grasses which are even more flammable. Moreover, the area is 35 miles from the nearest homes. Jim Hines reports that the Secretary of Agriculture is frustrated that regional foresters are not moving fast enough to implement administration policies. The positions of 7 regional foresters have been listed as "vacant".

AB 1788, the California Ecosystem Protection Act of 2020 would prohibit the use of second-generation anticoagulant rodenticides. This bill has been supported by VAS and California Audubon and most other environmental groups, but has faced considerable resistance. It has passed the Assembly and, on August 20, after amendment, passed out of the Senate Appropriations Committee on a 5 to 2 vote. Next stop is a vote in the full Senate the week of August 24, 2020. It must then go back to the Assembly.

Other legislation with strong support from Audubon (including VAS) is AB 3030 which declares it to be the policy of the state to protect at least 30% of the state's land areas and waters and to help advance the protection of the nation's oceans. AB 3030 is, I think, inspired by the efforts of renowned biologist E. O. Wilson who advocates protecting half of the world's land and waters in pristine condition (half-earthproject.org). AB 3030 was amended in the Senate on August 13th and placed in the suspense file.

Locally, CFROG and other local groups have advocated amending the county's zoning ordinance to provide greater oversight of the oil wells and operations which function under permits granted long before modern environmental laws took effect. The intent is to require requests to drill new wells or other activities on these sites to undergo stringent environmental review including, if appropriate, preparation of an EIR. The proposal was approved by the County Planning Commission and now goes to the Board of Supervisors, probably in October. VAS wrote a letter of support.

Ventura County is in the process of updating its General Plan. The final draft is now available for review and comment at www.vc2040.org.