MINUTES OF THE SIGNIFICANT ECOLOGICAL AREA TECHNICAL ADVISORY COMMITTEE (SEATAC) MEETING OF MARCH 27, 2006

PERSONS IN ATTENDANCE

SEATAC MEMBERS	REGIONAL PLANNING STAFF
Jonathon Baskin, PhD	Joe Decruyenaere
Ty Garrison	Daryl Koutnik
Mickey Long	

Project T2004-00716 Representatives

Tillie Alvacado	(661) 268-1214
Sean Bergquist	(310) 260-1520
Art Gallindo	(661) 268-1214
Irena Mendez	(310) 260-1520

Project TR053653 Representative

David Magney	(805) 646-6045

Project 02-109 Representatives

Ray Anderson	(626) 712-0735
George Bayse	(714) 577-9146
Tony Bomkamp	(949) 837-0404
Michael Huff	(619) 992-9161
Jeff Maisch	(714) 577-8258

MINUTES
March 27, 2006

AGENDA ITEMS

1. Garrison moved and Long seconded to approve the January 9, 2006 SEATAC meeting minutes as written.

OLD BUSINESS

2. **Project T2004-00716 –** See Attachment Item 2.

3. **Project TR053653 –** See Attachment Item 3.

4. **Project 02-109 –** See Attachment Item 4.

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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 T2004-00716

SEATAC MEETING DATE MARCH 27, 2006, ITEM 2

Biota Report Prepared by Sapphos Environmental, Inc., dated February, 2006

Initial SEATAC review of Biota Report; BCA reviewed July 11, 2005

PROPOSED PROJECT: T2004-00716 – An application to re-permit existing facilities at an established campground in Soledad Canyon. Facilities include 100 recreational vehicle hookups for disposal, water, electrical, and telephone lines; swimming pool; two hot tubs; restaurant lodge; recreation room; snack bar; three bathroom facilities; laundry room; ranger station; two caretakers' units; and storage yard within the Santa Clara River SEA (SEA 23).

SEA DESCRIPTIONS: Soledad Canyon and the Santa Clara River (**SEA No. 23**) possess several populations of the unarmored threespine stickleback (*Gasterosteus aculeatus williamsoni*). This species was formerly found in the Los Angeles, San Gabriel, and Santa Ana Rivers, but is now restricted to the Santa Clara River and San Francisquito Canyon. For these reasons and due to threats to its habitat, the fish species has been placed on the state and federal endangered species lists. In the Santa Clara River, the unarmored threespine stickleback is limited to permanent streams and pools from the mouth of San Francisquito Canyon west to the Ventura-Los Angeles County line, and from near Lang Station east to Arrastre Canyon near Acton.

The reason the unarmored threespine stickleback has been able to survive in the Santa Clara River is that its remaining habitat has been relatively undisturbed. The Santa Clara River is unique in being the only major river draining the San Gabriel Mountains that has not been extensively channelized. The vegetation consists of fresh water marsh, coastal sage scrub, oak woodland, and riparian woodland communities. The broad wash association is unlike that found in steeper mountain canyons, and is increasingly rare in Los Angeles County. The trees serve as habitat for many raptorial bird species. The red-shouldered hawk is restricted to woodland communities, and the species is becoming increasingly uncommon in southern California due to habitat destruction. The National Audubon Society and others have expressed concern for the hawk's welfare.

The primary concern for the survival of the unarmored threespine stickleback is the loss of suitable habitat. The species requires clean, free-flowing, perennial streams and ponds surrounded by native vegetation. Intermittent areas connecting perennial streams are also important during the wet season when surface water is present. The natural vegetation and stream course slow heavy runoff during the rainy season, decrease destruction and siltation of habitat in downstream areas, and provide habitat for stickleback migration between populations.

SEATAC COMMENTS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR PROJECT T2004-00716:

1) The Biota report has been improved significantly from the Biological Constraints Analysis reviewed previously. Minor inconsistencies remain, such as between the stated occurrence potentials for coastal western whiptail given in the sensitive species text and table accounts. Cite published material (e.g. Schoenherr for herpetofauna, Boyd for Liebre Mountains flora, and Bell for fishes of the Santa Clara River) wherever possible. Avoid permissive language such as 'should' and 'would' in favor of definitive language such as 'shall' and 'will.'

2) The continued protection of the Santa Clara River is the highest priority for development in Soledad Canyon. Foot traffic will be impossible to prevent, and use prohibition of the site by hikers is not intended by SEATAC. Trails must be designated to direct hikers and other campground users away from sensitive areas of the site; provide fencing and/or signage to guide hikers to trails and the existing stream crossing at the west end of the site; utilize plantings of locally indigenous thorny species such as roses or blackberries to discourage entry into riparian areas.
3) Vehicle traffic and storage must be kept as far as possible from the creek and depicted on Exhibit A; no off-highway vehicle use is to be permitted on the site other than that which is necessary to enter and leave designated camping areas.
4) Water shall not be allowed to pond on the site for periods sufficient to encourage invasive or pest species.
5) SEATAC supports the applicant's intention not to develop his property north of the railroad line.

ACTION TAKEN: No further SEATAC review of the project is required; incorporate the above comments and recommendations in the Mitigation Monitoring Plan, along with those of the final Biota report.

SEATAC REPORT AND COMMENTS

PROJECT TR053653

SEATAC MEETING DATE MARCH 27, 2006, ITEM 3

Revised Biota Report Prepared by David Magney Environmental Consulting, dated February 2006

Previous SEATAC review for Biota Report, dated November 2005, begun December 5, 2005 and completed January 9, 2006

PROPOSED PROJECT: TR053653 – A Tentative Tract Map application to subdivide the 232 acre subject property into 107 lots consisting of 93 single-family lots, 1 condominium lot (9.26 ac.) for 93 senior housing units, 1 fire station lot (2.05 ac.), 5 open space lots, and 6 debris basin lots. Both primary and secondary means of access are from the Old Road. The project also includes an Oak Tree Permit to remove/encroach on oak trees and a Conditional Use Permit for development within an SEA and hillside management area and a density bonus request. The proposed project is located west of the I-5 Freeway south of Stevenson Ranch and Sagecrest Circle and north of Calgrove Boulevard, partially within SEA No. 20 (Santa Susanna Mountains) and SEA No. 63 (Lyon Canyon).

SEA DESCRIPTION: The Santa Susana Mountains (**SEA No. 20**) are one of several relatively small ridge systems that form the Transverse Ranges and blend eastward into the larger San Gabriel and San Bernardino Mountains. The Santa Monica Mountains are also part of this system and form a coastal barrier shielding the interior ridges from the direct influences of moist marine air, making these interior ridges drier than the coastal ones. The vegetation of the Santa Susana Mountains consists of coastal sage scrub on south-facing slopes, dense chaparral on north-facing slopes, and oak, walnut and riparian woodlands in valleys. The oak woodland communities are extremely diverse, supporting six species of oak. These include coast live oak (*Quercus agrifolia*), valley oak (*Q. lobata*), canyon live oak (*Q. chrysolepis*), scrub oak (*Q. berberidifolia*), interior live oak (*Q. wislizenii*), and a single known location of Palmer's oak (*Q. palmeri*). The latter species is known in Los Angeles County only from this area. The walnut woodlands are frequently found in canyons supporting intermittent streams and consist primarily of southern California black walnut (*Juglans californica* var. *californica*), flowering ash (*Fraxinus dipetala*), Mexican elderberry (*Sambucus mexicana*), and coast live oak. Fires appear to promote the expansion of walnut woodlands within this area. Unusual southern California black walnut-flowering ash woodlands occur at mid-elevations within canyons of the north-facing slopes. This community appears to be unique to the Santa Susana Mountains. The bigcone spruce (*Pseudotsuga macrocarpa*)-canyon live oak forest at higher elevations represents one of the northwestern-most examples of this community.

The Santa Susana Mountains are the main representative of these small low, dry interior mountain ranges in Los Angeles County. The core of this range is in good condition and has not been heavily disturbed by human use. These mountains are becoming isolated from surrounding natural areas by continued urban expansion in the San Fernando, Simi, and Santa Clarita Valleys. As this isolation occurs the Santa Susana Mountains are becoming an important wildlife corridor for gene flow and species movement between the San Gabriel and Santa Monica Mountains via the Simi Hills.

The interior areas of the Santa Susana Mountains, away from peripheral development, support healthy, natural biotic communities. Some encroachment has taken place in the form of unimproved roads, ranches, and a limited number of oil extraction sites. The majority of the land is privately owned.

Lyon Canyon (**SEA No. 63**) is relatively narrow, supporting oak woodland surrounded by extensive chaparral and coastal sage scrub communities. The oak woodland is found in the southerly portion of the area and contains both coast live oak (*Quercus agrifolia*) and valley oak (*Q. lobata*). Higher elevations in the canyon support chaparral and scrub communities consisting of sugarbush (*Rhus ovata*), California lilac (*Ceanothus* spp.), black sage (*Salvia mellifera*), and chamise (*Adenostoma fasciculatum*), which is the dominant shrub. Drainages are dominated by mulefat (*Baccharis salicifolia*) scrub and riparian woodlands consisting of coast live oak, western sycamore (*Platanus racemosa*) and willows (*Salix laevigata* and *S. lasiolepis*); marsh assemblages, dominated by saltgrass (*Distichlis spicata*), occur where drainages merge with the flat bottomlands.

At present, Lyon Canyon is largely undeveloped, except for the remains of ranch outbuildings found at the mouth of the canyon, just outside of the SEA. The site has been grazed and was used for filming in the 1970's and 1980's. Thus, large areas of the bottomlands are disturbed, with a heavy cover of native and non-native ruderal species, and ornamental trees remain surrounding the former ranch buildings.

SEATAC COMMENTS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR PROJECT TR053653:

1) Pg 64: SEATAC's previous comment stands – there remains a conflict between the proposed project and wildlife movement through the site; the amount of movement documented on the site suggests that there is heavy use of the site by wildlife and it is an essential and functional part of the regional habitat linkage between the San Gabriel and Santa Susanna Mountains.
2) Lyon Canyon is currently the northernmost route of access from the Santa Susanna Mountains to the I-5 over-crossing of Calgrove Boulvard. Wildlife use of Lyon Canyon will be displaced south to Towsley Canyon with the implementation of this project, and the Biota Report must explore alternative possibilities for avoidance of impacts from development of this site on this part of the regional linkage.
3) There is potential for the project to contribute to cumulative impacts on water quality degradation in the Santa Clara River via the South Fork tributary.
4) SEATAC doubts that Public Works will allow a management program for the proposed retention basin that encourages its use by wildlife. Any mitigation measures involving ecologically sensitive management of flood control structures must be met with a strong commitment by Public Works prior to project approval if SEATAC is to judge the project as being consistent with the SEA Compatibility Criteria.
5) The proposed project, as currently designed, does not meet the SEA Compatibility Criteria, and SEATAC would endorse an alternative that sites construction in the northeastern portion of the property.

ACTION TAKEN: Further SEATAC review of the project is required; revise the Biota Report for inclusion in the Draft EIR addressing the above SEATAC Comments and Recommendations.

SEATAC REPORT AND COMMENTS

PROJECT 02-109 – Aera Specific Plan

SEATAC MEETING DATE MARCH 27, 2006, ITEM 4

Biota Report Prepared by Glenn Lukos Associates, dated December 2005

Continuation from January 9 and February 6, 2006 of initial SEATAC review of Biota Report

PROPOSED PROJECT: CUP 02-109 – A General Plan Amendment, Zone Change, and Specific Plan application to allow the phased development of 3,600 dwelling units, an 18-hole golf course, local and community park uses, local community commercial uses, internal greenbelts and open space preservation on a 2,935 acre site. Approximately 1,435 acres are proposed for residential and commercial development, and the remaining acreage is proposed for active and passive open space uses and habitat restoration. The proposed project is located east and west of State Route 57, partially within the Tonner Canyon/Chino Hills SEA (SEA No. 15). This project falls under the jurisdiction of both Los Angeles and Orange Counties.

SEA DESCRIPTIONS: Tonner Canyon (**SEA No. 15**) is one of three areas in the hilly region of eastern Los Angeles County that still supports relatively undisturbed stands of southern coast live oak woodland, chaparral, coastal sage scrub, and riparian woodland complexes that were once common throughout southern California but have been converted largely to agricultural and urban uses. This is true throughout southern California, resulting in the rapid disappearance of these habitat types from the region. Three areas within Los Angeles County (SEA Nos. 15, 17 and 44) were chosen to serve as representative examples of these once widespread vegetative associations.

The vegetation in Tonner Canyon supports heavily forested areas of California walnut (*Juglans californica*) and coast live oak (*Quercus agrifolia*). The former species is uncommon outside Los Angeles and Ventura Counties and has one of its major populations in this portion of Los Angeles County. Tonner and Brea Canyons are of sufficient size, and in close enough proximity to the other designated SEAs in this region, that they should be able to continue to support relatively healthy wildlife populations if preserved. This probability is increased by the presence of riparian woodlands and intermittent streams in the canyon bottoms.

SEATAC COMMENTS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR PROJECT CUP 02-109:

1) Normative language is prevalent throughout the document; phrases using words such as 'only,' 'just,' 'most of,' etc. may lead the reader to an interpretation of the site as non-sensitive or of the project as minimally impactful. Remove such language and replace it with unequivocal language and data, so that readers may make their own interpretations.
2) The emphasis on the disturbed nature of the SEA is inappropriate, as it obscures the facts that several sensitive species and habitats occur on the site. This is the condition of the area when it was designated an SEA, and the site is a crucial part of an important regional habitat linkage.
3) The proposed project decimates the portions of the SEA on site; there is no way to meet the SEA-CUP Burden of Proof with the currently proposed design. An excessively large number of trees are proposed for removal, and internal habitat corridors on manufactured slopes do not afford sufficient space to be functional.

4) SEATAC recommends substantial redesign of the project that preserves as open space areas of the site that are currently most ecologically functional, rather than a design that proposes restoration and habitat creation as mitigation for the destruction of the site's most valuable resources.

ACTION TAKEN: Further SEATAC review of the project is required; revise the Biota Report addressing the above SEATAC Comments and Recommendations and those of the January 9 and February 6, 2006 SEATAC minutes.