

**SANTA MONICA MOUNTAINS CONSERVANCY**

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June 23, 2008

Ron Kosinski, Deputy District Director  
California Department of Transportation  
Division of Environmental Planning (405/101 Connector)  
100 South Main Street MS 16A  
Los Angeles, California 90012

**Southbound I-405 to the Westbound U.S.-101 Connector  
Improvement Project Draft Environmental Assessment/Initial Study Comments**

Dear Mr. Kosinski:

The Conservancy concurs with Caltrans staff that Alternative 1 should be the preferred project. With this alternative the unbroken habitat block located south of the Sepulveda Dam would be partially fragmented by two ramp structures. Removal of the existing southbound on ramp and connector would provide new restoration area. Per the Environmental Assessment (EA) the new connectors would be elevated approximately fifty-foot-high.

The EA was not clear about how much right-of-way width will be retained by Caltrans to conduct habitat restoration and creation. The EA is not clear if any habitat restored in the right of way could be removed for future road widening projects.

Because the project partially fragments an area with high restoration potential in close proximity to the largest and highest quality habitat area in the San Fernando Valley, commensurate ecological mitigation must be included. The replacement planting of removed coast live oak trees is insufficient. The only adequate mitigation is to take virtually all of the vacant land located south of the proposed Connector B (to west bound 101) and create high quality woodland and grassland habitat. That habitat should be created on both sides of the Los Angeles River channel leading from the dam.

The role of the Army Corps of Engineers in that decision process should be addressed in the final environmental document.

Ideally extensive bat roosting and potential owl nesting sites should be incorporated under the elevated portions of both connector ramps.

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Page 2

Please direct any questions to Paul Edelman of our staff at (310) 589-3200 ext. 128 and any correspondence to his attention at the above letterhead address.

Sincerely,

RONALD P. SCHAFER  
Chairperson