

Menace of Urbanization – Downfall of Development

I stumbled upon my greatest passion by accident. It was just a case of choosing to follow my heart, despite all setbacks.

From my beginning my parents instilled in me the golden rule, “Treat everyone how you wish to be treated,” and this standard is something I hold dear. The summer before my senior year I faced an eye opening, heart breaking, and life changing experience. It was my choice either to step forward and take initiative or stand aside and do nothing like all those before me. I chose the former and the results I achieved were far beyond any expectation.

In the city I grew up in, development is a frequent occurrence as our cow town has transformed to a modern-day suburb. Many parks have been constructed in the past eight years, and along with the parks a large-scale environmental displacement was happening simultaneously right under citizens noses. I was passing by a 27-acre park early August and noticed that dozens of helpless California Black-Tailed jack rabbits were trapped behind construction enclosures; following the commencement of construction the hares, along with a great many other wildlife species not as apparent or easily spotted with the naked eye, were forced out of their habitat by recreational development. I contacted many local news stations, city council members, the Department of Fish and Game, wildlife associations and countless residents living around this park. Everyone felt badly for what was happening and yet no one had been brave enough to step up and stand against the City and Parks and Recreation and speak mind – that is until me. I am a moderately shy and reserved person and always have been, so all

the attention I received and have had to channel for the rabbits has definitely been a learning experience and has shaped me to view confidence and strength in a drastically different way.

These parks are being constructed on the last plots of empty land in the area, this land served as a safe haven for all wildlife previously displaced by housing and business development. When park construction began and the fences were put up, nothing was being done for those animals that are not endangered or threatened. All life, despite labels, deserves to live, and to ignore species because of their reputation is immoral, unethical and in all aspects, wrong. Jack rabbits are looked upon in a negative manner but that fact should not enable agencies to overlook their value and destroy their homes because they are standing in the way of a project's completion. I feel it is completely unfair that some species are given priority while others are left to struggle and eventually die out. It is quite clear that most agencies choose the easy route when it comes to environmental issues: either leaving the animals to suffer and ignoring their existence or having them exterminated; and both are poorly made decisions, because of the lack of information given to Decision makers on the subject.

The relocation of the wildlife displaced by these parks would have been the most ethical and morally sound way to address this issue. Two reserves are nearby: The Stone Lake National Wildlife Refuge, and The Consumnes River Preserve, and although anxiety is created because of the relocation and injuries could be fatal to the rabbits, I have been informed by a Department of Fish and Game representative that more fatalities will likely occur if the dozens of California Black Tailed Jack Rabbits are left to fend off human forces alone. One major claim made by both CSD and Department of Fish and

Game is the ecological impact made on the wildlife already established in the location that the Jack Rabbits of Morse and Bartholomew parks will be relocated to. Ecosystems cycle and when large-scale disturbances occur, these cycles cannot function properly. Construction of any kind greatly disrupts the cycle of an ecosystem. Wildlife is fully capable to take care of themselves when left alone, but when humans and machines disturb natural habitat, the cycle loses balance resulting in too much of one species and not enough of another. For example, the threatened Swainson's Hawks were protected under the EIR and given the chance to relocate, which the species readily does at the end of every nesting season. Their prey, however, being mammals, face a much more difficult relocation; especially when surrounded by thousands of homes, businesses and traffic. It's quite hard for a defenseless jack rabbit to get to safe open grassland without assistance.

These active recreation parks are the result of Elk Grove residents and it is our community's duty to uphold morals, values and standards that demonstrate our deep concern for environmental, economic and recreational issues, but it is not our right to choose which of these three is most important. The Jack Rabbits of Elk Grove deserve more respect than to simply be left to suffer, die out and be killed. Wildlife is a large component of what makes parks fun, educational and healthy. What good is a park without the natural element of wildlife?

No individual should be forced to feel guilty about an environmental issue that can easily be solved if the correct measures are taken by our CSD decision-makers. This is one issue that our City and all others could immediately reverse and prevent from ever

happening in the future. And I deeply hoped that could have been the conclusion to this crisis.

Throughout the endeavor I gained priceless insight into the realm of environmental activism. It is completely unthinkable to ponder how cases like this are occurring around the globe and there aren't individuals that are brave enough or skilled enough to combat the agencies which allow and promote the fallacies in environmental impact reports that I have witnessed firsthand. I purchased copies of the EIR's for Morse Community Park and was shocked by how the city I grew up in dealt with all the species who called the large plot of land home. I found it completely and utterly unfair and inhumane to simply turn away when one came to a species which was not endangered, threatened or a species of special concern. In speaking with Wildlife Biologists and other activists and media personnel it was the "same old story" - these types of large-scale environmental disturbances occur everyday and no one does anything to change the process and the system of dealing with the species that are consistently overlooked. That, is the change I wish to see in the near future and through letters to congressmen and representative and appearance at city hall and Parks and recreation meetings making speeches and rallying support, I hope to gain the exposure and spread the knowledge needed to create an environmental foundation for all the lives that deserve fair and humane treatment – no life left behind!

I have put all my time and effort into this issue and after months of commitment my efforts have paid off and gained attention and exposure. I have attended Elk Grove City Hall meetings, and our Consumnes Community Services District (CSD) board meetings, following the CSD board meeting an article appeared in our Elk Grove Citizen,

which was the pressure needed for the Board President to listen and react to my concerns.

I wish, through my research and efforts, that I may attain a policy, in writing, stating animals that are not endangered or threatened will still be assisted prior to development in our city and many others.

I have shown our growing community that even a teenager can make a difference if initiative is taken, determination never wavers and pride and selfish wants are put aside. The need for justice is dire and despite the fact that these jack rabbits aren't an endangered or threatened species is beyond the point. They matter, they have worth and value and I feel it is my moral and ethical duty to be their spokeswoman; the voice of the voiceless.

Substantiating proof of involvement – Personal involvement:

ABC-News10 video URL:

<http://www.news10.net/video/default.aspx?menuid=174>

Keyword: Elk Grove Rabbits

Video Title: “Shhhh ...Wabbits Hunting For Home in Elk Grove”

* all information I received was per telephone conversation, which cannot be cited, and the names of the individuals were asked to not be disclosed. They are given credit, although, when I speak of the specific agencies.