

THE ROLE OF COUNTY PLANNING DEPARTMENT

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In the book, "The Intellectual Versus the City," it is said that "men live in cities but dream of the countryside." Since the origin of the city, man has attempted to reintroduce his once close relationship with the natural environment; needless to say, this attempt has proved futile. Sure, token trees line our streets; the landscaper's favorite tool--the juniper--graces our commercial establishments; and the California Department of Transportation has filled our freeway medians with the infamous oleander.

But what about the other half of the biological community--the fish and the wildlife? Is there a need for this biological facet in our urban centers? Well...people go to the zoos; they visit aquariums; they go bird watching; and they go fishing; therefore, it seems evident that many people do enjoy this biological duo.

Since man evolved in the wilds, his existence directly depends on his core-relationship with other living things. His primary requirement for biological and psychological well-being are other people and the natural setting of vegetation and its intermingling wildlife.

As biologists, you recognize the fact that people cannot be totally separated from fish and wildlife, and expect to maintain a healthy culture. The integration of these creatures into our communities cannot only serve mental and physical needs, but economic ones as well. Some of these positive attributes are as follows:

MENTAL HEALTH:

The urban core is causing the disintegration of our society by (1) overloading the system with too many people and (2) by increasing mobility so as to inhibit proper socialization. Increased crime may be a good supporting indicator of the above statement. By providing "naturalized" areas within the city, a location has been set aside whereby many people can come to one place, to experience one feeling--nature. Now that's socialization!! Furthermore, the underlying years to experience the "countryside" would also

be satisfied, and with this satisfaction comes the mental happiness of experiencing something good.

EDUCATION:

School children seem to get a better understanding and appreciation of our natural environment if these biological aspects are introduced to them at an early age; furthermore, this educational experience will also benefit society as a whole.

RECREATION:

With the combination of wildlife and wildlife habitat, a passive recreational need has been supplied. Short walks, bike rides, birdwatching and photography are just a few examples of activities which could be provided to the urban core.

AESTHETICS:

To support fish and wildlife you need habitat--vegetation, soil, clean air and water. Putting these things together, you have created a "living combination" which is most pleasing to the human eye.

PREDATOR/PREY RELATIONSHIPS:

For the urban gardener, the Vector Control Department, the Park Division, and the Health Department, the re-establishment of various types of fish and wildlife can help to reduce certain insect types, decrease the rodent population, and maintain and increase certain types of vegetation by controlling insect pests and distributing seeds to other areas of the city.

It is realized that not all of the above results will occur; in fact, in many of our larger cities, the above happenings may be highly unlikely.

The question now arises, how do you create these naturalized situations? Basically, it all comes down to (1) the personality of the city--is it progressive or conservative; (2) the personal biases of the various city departments; and (3) the attitude of the city council in reference to the importance they place on this type of citizen need. Generally, the means of introducing fish and wildlife into our urban centers is already with us.

Some of the more well known means are as follows:

WILLIAMSON ACT:

Agricultural land, foothill land (grazing), wildlife areas, etc., can be placed under a contract with the State of California. This protects this land from any type of urban development.

PARK ACQUISITION:

Stems from Capital Expenditure Program.

TRANSFER DEVELOPMENT RIGHTS:

Governmental agency buys the development rights from property owner.

FLOODPLAIN ZONING:

Board of Reclamation delineates these boundaries; usually these areas include rich riparian woodlands.

SCENIC HIGHWAYS:

One of the nine mandated planning elements. Can establish certain development criteria for land along these travel corridors.

PLANNED UNIT DEVELOPMENT:

Can distinguish certain areas for open space or passive recreation.

Some of the more interesting means are as follows:

Establish a tree ordinance which only includes trees indigenous to that area. For example, the City of Visalia has an oak tree ordinance where it states it is unlawful to remove any Quercus lobata of a diameter 4" or greater.

Many cities in the San Joaquin Valley have ditches traversing their city limits. Instead of sterilizing the banks of these waterways--a seemly favorite pastime of the irrigation districts and ditch companies--why not create wildlife corridors, by planting trees and underbrush in areas paralleling this waterway.

The City of Porterville is in the process of trying to preserve a grove of Sycamores. Why? Because they serve as a Great Blue Heron Rookery.

The edges of golf courses provide a suitable area for a wildlife habitat; furthermore, the ponds that drive golfers crazy can be stocked with fish. These waterbodies can flourish providing aeration, food, and temperature are closely watched.

In Summation

There is a need for fish and wildlife in the urban areas primarily because it has a humanizing effect.

Appreciation of fish and wildlife helps in time of legislation when acquisition or preservation of wildlife areas is at stake.

Citizen participation can help immensely in preserving wildlife areas.

The California Fish and Game Department should increase their activity in urban centers.