

**Goleta Valley Planning Community Advisory Committee  
12-17-08 Meeting  
Comments by Brian Trautwein, Goleta Valley Resident**

**INTRODUCTION**

I am Brian Trautwein, a 38-yr resident of the Goleta Valley. I am speaking as an individual. I am on the County's list of biological consultants and founder and long-time director of the Santa Barbara Urban Creeks Council. I've led many of the Goleta-area creek restoration projects beginning in 1990. I've worked for the Environmental Defense Center (EDC) as an Analyst since 1997 but am speaking as an individual. My background is in planning and natural resource management.

Planning staff provided a great presentation. The Goleta to Gaviota area is a global biodiversity hotspot. This is in part because the region near Point Conception represents an overlap of many southern and northern species. The Goleta Community Plan update should include more effective policies for protecting biological resources.

**LAND USE PATTERNS ENDANGERING BIOTIC RESOURCES OF GOLETA**

Focus Question #2 in your meeting packet is "*What land use patterns in Eastern Goleta Valley protect or endanger species, habitats and ecosystems?*"

I will touch on two land use patterns in Goleta causing adverse ecological impacts in the community plan area.

(1) The first pattern is an increase in the percentage cover of impervious surfaces, i.e. paving the landscape.

When watersheds exceed around 15% cover, they begin to experience significant degradation in terms of water resources and habitat.

Changing the hydrology by increasing paving reduces groundwater recharge. With less water entering the ground, there is less water to support base flows (summer flows) in creeks. As a result riparian and aquatic habitat and associated species (e.g. red-legged frog and steelhead) are degraded or eliminated. (Note: There were 6 steelhead in Goleta Creeks this year.)

Similarly, when the ground is paved (or graded or cleared) there is less ground water recharge to supply people and wells. In Goleta about 1/3 of the groundwater recharge may come from creeks (based on the GWD "Todd Report").

Also, when the land is paved (or graded or cleared) there is increased runoff and thus increased flooding and erosion. As a result, there are increased health and safety threats and an increased need to spend money on flood control capitol projects and maintenance, and consequently increased impacts to biological resources and water quality in creeks.

Lastly, when impervious surfaces increase there is less infiltration of runoff into the soil, and thus less filtration urban pollutants. This increases non-point source water pollution in creeks and the ocean.

Protecting watersheds from paving maintains interconnected environmental resources:

- Ag Resources (Protecting urban ag land from paving);
- Recreation (e.g. fewer beach advisories);
- Views (Protection of open spaces and Santa Ynez Mountain back drop);
- Water Supply (groundwater recharge);
- Water Quality (as noted above);
- Biological Resources (direct habitat loss and indirect impacts from offsite, up slope and upstream activities); and
- Air Quality (Protecting watersheds protects creeks, riparian habitat and wetlands, and associated the vegetation that filters the air and sequesters carbon).

(2) The second pattern of land use I've witnessed in the last 2 decades is an increase in the clearing and grading of the foothills and Santa Ynez Mountains: Goleta's watershed.

Grading and clearing vegetation in Goleta's watershed causes erosion on steep slopes and sedimentation filling downstream creeks and the important Goleta Slough wetlands. This pattern of development (i.e. grading and clearing) is degrading Goleta's biological resources. **The current GCP is not adequately protecting Goleta's watershed, habitats and species.**

The Gol-ESH (Environmentally Sensitive Habitat) Ordinance, part of the GCP, allows grading and native vegetation on steep slopes and ESH.

On one West Camino Cielo property (Windermere), the owners cleared 40 acres, property line to property line resulting in substantial erosion and ongoing sedimentation of downstream creeks. [Note: The clearing was probably done to degrade the environmental baseline in order to facilitate a large-scale retreat development which was opposed by County planning circa 1999 due to Class I fire, neighborhood compatibility and bio impacts, etc. The retreat development would increase fire hazards by increasing ignition sources and placing more people at risk, and creating a potential evacuation nightmare. Additionally, clearing such a large area (in this case for development) - while it may have incidental benefits of firebreaks - puts people downstream along the creeks and flood plains at greater risk. Moreover, clearing only around homes and structures as required by the Fire Department and insurance companies is effective and efficient, does not increase downstream flood and erosion risks, and does not result in such significant visual and biological impacts (compared to large-scale clearings such as Windermere which put people and the environment at risk).]

Thanks in part to the work of the EDC, the Gol-ESH ordinance was amended after this large-scale clearing on West Camino Cielo. However, the ordinance still allows clearing of steep slopes and ESH on the mountain side. Clearing around homes for fire and clearing for agriculture is still allowed, and should be. But large-scale clearings that go beyond fire protection purposes and are not for agriculture should be restricted to better protect Goleta's watershed. **Grading and clearing Goleta's watershed is currently causing significant degradation of Goleta's water and biological resources and the current GCP is not adequate in this regard.**

When steep hills are cleared or graded, there is significant erosion and this clogs downstream creeks leading to environmental impacts, flooding, erosion, flood control work and the financial and environmental costs of flood control work.

In addition, grading and clearing the mountains and hills:

- Introduces non-native plants such as yellow star thistle and others, which increase fire hazards, threaten agriculture, and degrade habitat;
- Directly removes habitat, and there are numerous rare species in the chaparral and coastal sage; and
- Reduces groundwater recharge and water supply.

**Please consider policies that protect – that really protect - our watersheds.**

## **SOLUTIONS**

Focus Question #3 is about solutions: *“How best can land use planning improve the natural environment while protecting the built environment from natural hazards?”*

**Focus on Redevelopment of the urban core; Protect Agricultural Lands and Watersheds.**

Protecting watersheds and ag land protects:

- Water Supply;
- Water Quality;

Our water supply in Goleta is contributing to the apparent extinctions of species: Southern steelhead have been reduced by 99%, and are barely hanging on in the Santa Ynez River – their most important remaining habitat. This species has been all but extirpated by the Cachuma Project.

The SWP is leading to the apparent demise of the Central Valley Steelhead, other salmon and the Delta Smelt. We need stronger water conservation policies to protect our

important fisheries and ecosystems. Please consider policies that will increase water conservation in Goleta Valley. Given the problems our water supplies and biological resources face, we can and must improve conservation.

Considering California's water supply problems including increasing demand, climate change and decreasing Sierra snowpack levels, water conservation policies should include provisions for **Evapo-Transpiration Controllers (ETCs) for landscape irrigation and High-Efficiency washers for all new development.**

## **GCP POLICIES**

These comments are in response to the Staff presentation:

1. The GCP did not adopt the LCP's policies and is weaker than the LCP at protecting biological resources. As an example, the LCP generally requires avoidance of ESHA unless it would cause a taking of property, but the GCP does not generally require avoidance of all ESHA unless it would cause a taking of property. Please consider language that requires **avoidance of ESHA to the maximum extent feasible. The LCP should serve as a model to update the GCP's biological policies.**
2. The GCP should **include enforceable "shall" language** not "should" language.
3. The policies should **stress avoidance of habitats and impacts, and only turn to compensation as a last resort.** It is not typically feasible to relocate endangered species' habitat or nay habitat, so habitats should be preserved in place.
4. The Western Snowy Plover does exist at Goleta Beach, it just does not nest there anymore. It could again – east of the Slough mouth – with proper management.
5. In addition to native grasslands, annual grasslands also support high biological resources and can be considered ESH, like parts of More Mesa.
6. The San Jose Creek Turkey Vulture Roost is to my knowledge abandoned. it could be recolonized, and should be protected. All current and former nest and roost sites should be preserved by GCP policies.