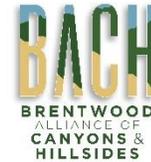




CITIZENS FOR
LOS ANGELES
WILDLIFE



March 15, 2021

Mayor Eric Garcetti
City of Los Angeles
200 N. Spring Street
Los Angeles, CA 90012

Honorable Mayor Garcetti:

The COVID-19 pandemic has taught us many things, and a critical lesson that should not be overlooked is the link between environmental health and the health of people. A key element of environmental health is biodiversity, which is declining worldwide primarily due to loss of habitat (Chase et al., 2020). In the City of Los Angeles, there have been overtures towards addressing our declining biodiversity, but crucial and meaningful steps have not been solidified into policy. The undersigned organizations urge you to fully fund the City’s Wildlife Pilot Study Program and Wildlife Corridor Pilot Ordinance in your draft 2021/2022 budget, and in alignment with your Sustainability Plan of 2019, direct Planning to deliver a draft ordinance to the City Council by June 30, 2021. By taking these necessary steps to protect the City’s biodiversity, the City will also be supporting the health and sustainability of the people, wildlife, and ecosystems of Los Angeles.

As a reminder, in 2019’s LA’s Green New Deal Sustainability Plan, the 2021 Milestones and Initiatives are to “Set biodiversity targets and pilot LA’s first wildlife corridor.” However, in 2020, after the pandemic’s initial impact, LA’s draft emergency budget for fiscal 2020/2021 eliminated the Planning Department’s Wildlife Pilot Study Program, which is the City’s key contribution to the wildlife corridor pilot zone in the eastern Santa Monica Mountains. In response to this omission, hundreds of individuals and organizations wrote to the Planning Department and City Council, and through true grassroots interests, a reinstatement of some funding to the Planning Department kept this program alive.

We are reaching out to you to ensure this omission does not happen again and that you will include adequate funding in your draft budget for the Planning Department to timely complete this project. If we want our City’s legacy to include the Green New Deal, we cannot end funding and suspend one of its important milestones.

To pull funding for the Wildlife Pilot Study and Ordinance would contradict the City's goals for a "prosperous, livable, safe and well-run" city as heralded in the 2019/20 open budget for the City, and runs contrary to related work and investments currently supported on both city and state levels. This Wildlife Pilot Study and Ordinance must continue to be an important priority, even in times of crisis, because it implements the City's immediate goals for the health and sustainability of the people, wildlife, and ecosystems of Los Angeles. We also note that as of March 10th, 2021, the City is expected to receive \$1.35 billion from the federal relief package, which will help address the City's budget constraints.

The City has an obligation under state law to protect endangered or threatened animal populations, and not approve development projects that may jeopardize the survival of such populations. The mountain lions of the Santa Monica mountains are provisionally listed under the California Endangered Species Act and are presently at risk of extinction, primarily due to loss of habitat connectivity and open space caused by poorly sited development and lack of wildlife crossings (Gustafson et al. 2018; Benson et al. 2016; Benson et al. 2019). The City has an obligation not to push this population closer to extinction by allowing further degradation of existing wildlife corridors through poorly sited development. The Wildlife Pilot Study and Ordinance are critical steps toward meeting the City's legal obligations and preserving the City's biodiversity.

Ensuring the protection of open space is also equally important for people. Open space has been vital to many communities during the pandemic and provided essential community spaces for safe socially distanced gatherings. This reaffirms the need for continued preservation and increased access to ensure all Angelenos experience the physical and mental health benefits of nature. Native landscapes help us regulate our climate, purify our air and water, pollinate our crops and create healthy soil (Lawler et al., 2014). In addition to the direct benefits from access, preservation of our native habitats and the species that rely on them is critical to our long-term health and wellbeing (Martin et al., 2020).

We know these times are challenging for Los Angeles and we applaud your work in protecting human health and safety. As we continue to fight the immediate threat posed by the pandemic, we must also look ahead and prevent future health crises from occurring. By supporting the City's long range wildlife corridor program, the City can join other leaders in forward-thinking efforts in biodiversity and environmental health, such as Governor Newsom's 30 by 30 conservation goals, and Representative Schiff's steadfastness in passing the Rim of the Valley Preservation Act.

For all of these reasons, we urge you to fully fund the City's Wildlife Pilot Study Program and Ordinance in your draft 2021/2022 budget and direct Planning to deliver a draft ordinance to the City Council by June 30, 2021.

Thank you for your consideration of these comments.

Sincerely,

Tony Tucci
Chair
Citizens for Los Angeles Wildlife

J.P. Rose
Staff Attorney
Center for Biological Diversity

Damon Nagami
Senior Attorney, Nature Program
Director, Southern California Ecosystems Project
Natural Resource Defense Council

Jim Hines
Team Leader, California Wildlife Team
Sierra Club

Beth Pratt
California Executive Director
National Wildlife Federation

Kelsey Jessup
Urban Conservation Program Manager
The Nature Conservancy

Gerry Hans
President
Friends of Griffith Park

Marian Dodge
Chairman
Federation of Hillside and Canyon Associations

Wendy-Sue Rosen
Co-founder
Brentwood Alliance of Canyons and Hillsides

References

- Benson, J. F., Mahoney, P. J., Sikich, J. A., Serieys, L. E. K., Pollinger, J. P., Ernest, H. B., & Riley, S. P. D. (2016). Interactions between demography, genetics, and landscape connectivity increase extinction probability for a small population of large carnivores in a major metropolitan area. *Proceedings of the Royal Society B: Biological Sciences*, 283(1837), 20160957.
- Benson, J. F., Mahoney, P. J., Vickers, T. W., Sikich, J. A., Beier, P., Riley, S. P. D., ... Boyce, W. M. (2019). Extinction vortex dynamics of top predators isolated by urbanization. *Ecological Applications*, 29(3), e01868.
- Chase, J. M., Blowes, S. A., Knight, T. M., Gerstner, K., & May, F. (2020). Ecosystem decay exacerbates biodiversity loss with habitat loss. *Nature*, 584(7820), 238-243.
- Gustafson, K. D., Gagne, R. B., Vickers, T. W., Riley, S. P. D., Wilmers, C. C., Bleich, V. C., ... Ernest, H. B. (2018). Genetic source–sink dynamics among naturally structured and anthropogenically fragmented puma populations. *Conservation Genetics*, 20(2), 215–227.
- Lawler, J. J., Lewis, D. J., Nelson, E., Plantinga, A. J., Polasky, S., Withey, J. C., ... & Radeloff, V. C. (2014). Projected land-use change impacts on ecosystem services in the United States. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, 111(20), 7492-7497.
- Martin, L., White, M. P., Hunt, A., Richardson, M., Pahl, S., & Burt, J. (2020). Nature contact, nature connectedness and associations with health, wellbeing and pro-environmental behaviours. *Journal of Environmental Psychology*, 68, 101389.