

Inter Canyon League
Minutes of the Special Meeting
Thursday, June 29, 2017 at 7:00 PM Modjeska Community Center

Dana Rochat, Paul Meltzer, and Zach Kantor-Anaya from The Wildlands Conservancy gave a PowerPoint presentation about their organization and their Irvine Mesa property in Silverado. A copy of the slides will be provided later. They were not prepared to discuss vandalism or present easements since their lawyer was not present.

Presentation highlights:

TWC began in 1995, with a focus on biodiversity and education. They are the largest nonprofit landowner in California. Nature tours and camping are provided at several TWC reserves in the state. \$45 million was donated to OC's Inside the Outdoors program, with associated land reverting to TWC if not used for education.

Some event dates:

2008 – original Silverado land acquisition

2010 – Conservation Fund help

2011 – OCTA meetings

2012 – OCTA considered some land “not that important”, Big Oak property was transferred to the USFS, and 91 acres in Black Star were transferred to the USFS

2013 – 33 acres were sold to Earthroots Field School

Some recent comments considered by TWC to be “off,” with TWC responses:

“Deals fell through”:

2012 - \$1.5 million price for all Silverado property except the Collar house

2013 -

2015 - \$2 million for all property including Collar, no public access – killed; according to OC Parks, groups didn't support it

2016 - \$2 million for a conservation easement – no

2016 – OC Parks \$1.2 million offer: no, wanted original deal or nothing

“Land apparently to be parceled out”:

Properties are not being sold for development

“Contradicts original landowner's intention”:

The donor expected sale of land because of no support otherwise

“ [?] ”:

No organization provided funding or support

“Master Plan of Trails”:

No master plan of trails was found

“TWC locks out users”:

There is a gate and reservation system. Rain prompts safety measures. Ruts cause problems. People misused the property such as with Jeeps and winches around the beginning of 2017. There were multiple incidents of vandalism in Feb/Mar/Apr. The tractor was used for rut repair, not development.

Some comments from Janet Wilson in response to the above:

ICL, etc. reached out repeatedly. It is “baffling” to hear otherwise.

ICL contacted Supervisor Spitzer because Dana R. said a deal could be made for \$2 million by about Labor Day. Spitzer got the money. There was a meeting Sept. 11, 2015 with not just The Conservation Fund. Representing the community, the ICL's position was that “continued public access” for the lands should be preserved.

Linda May then read or paraphrased questions for TWC submitted from the audience. These included the following (with TWC's response):

“Which groups have you dealt with?”

Naturalist For You (Joel and Patrick), Chay (Peterson), and IRLC/ILC/ICL(?). Money was offered to groups to start a conservancy.

“How did you find groups?”

From public inquiry, Google, and Joel (a former employee). Dana attended the ICL 2008 meeting.

“Was there vandalism before or after land was put up for sale?”

There was an uptick a year ago, when real estate signs were put up. Graffiti, trash, and the gate left open happened before.

“A USGS biologist called the mesa a corridor. Is that important?”

Yes.

“Why was there no issue in April 2016 when there were also ruts, horses, etc. (the same terrain)?”

It was always noted that a reservation was needed. The Sotheby's “for sale” sign was put up after a dead end was reached on prior efforts. A donation to TWC is not necessarily for a wildlife preserve. It is understood that there's disagreement about other avenues being exhausted. The original donor felt that “for sale” was the best path.

“Why were gates put up in 2016? Are ruts natural?”

Sandbags were moved, people kept the gate locked open, and 4-wheel vehicles entered every day.

“Why was ICL not mentioned?”

There was one meeting, and extensive phone calls and email.

“Why is the land for sale?”

For money.

A question from TWC:

“Is anyone willing to speak up for private property?”

(Audience member) Yes, trespassing has occurred for a long time, and you've done nothing to stop it.

(TWC) That comment was from an attorney who has said he is not representing the general public.

Linda's recollection of discussion among David Myers (TWC), Scott Ferguson (The Conservation Fund), and the Supervisor's office: David said TWC was willing to sell the land for \$2 million if there was a promise to conserve it, otherwise it would be the developer price. All agreed to public access. Months later the deal changed as to terms and price.

Janet's recollection of meetings: changing terms, and a reduced amount of land.

TWC's recollection: the Transportation Corridor Agency offer made no sense, so TWC turned it down.

Other audience questions/comments, with TWC responses:

“Crossing TWC property is the only safe way between Williams Canyon and Silverado (“School Road”). Would you consider an easement for the school/library?”

We can't answer that.

“Would you consider an easement due to 7 years of use?”

That is a legal issue.

“There is a local (SMRPD) trail plan: unless that has changed, you should be aware of it. See the SMRPD web site.”

“ICL has public meetings and wants to be at the table. Things went awry when we were not at the table.”

“Why not transfer TWC land to the USFS?”

That is too complicated. Parcels are not contiguous with the forest.

“Do you have volunteers? We haven't heard of any.”

The land is not open to the public.

“Years ago, we heard that this property was not as important. What changed?”

The TWC preserve system is meant to highlight places that people can go to: restrooms, parking, etc. There is no funding for small properties for small groups. So if the Mesa had a destination, parking, safety, etc., the situation would be different. The TWC mission/vision is wider than local. Management cost is about \$100,000/year for an open reserve. Last year about \$15,000 was spent here on a closed reserve. Wildlife connectivity would be preserved with deed restrictions on one home per 100 acres.