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**FRIENDS OF THE VENTURA RIVER • GREENLATINOS • KEEP SESPE WILD**  
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**SAVE OPEN SPACE AND AGRICULTURAL RESOURCES (SOAR)**  
**SAVE OPEN SPACE/SANTA MONICA MOUNTAINS • SIERRA CLUB, LOS PADRES CHAPTER**  
**SURFRIDER FOUNDATION, VENTURA COUNTY CHAPTER**  
**TEMESCAL CANYON ASSOCIATION • THE NATURE CONSERVANCY**  
**VENTURA AUDUBON SOCIETY • VENTURA CITIZENS FOR HILLSIDE PRESERVATION**  
**VENTURA COUNTY WILDLIFE TRACKERS • WILDEARTH GUARDIANS**  
**WILDLIFE CARE OF SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA**

March 11, 2019

Ventura County Board of Supervisors  
800 S. Victoria Ave.  
Ventura, CA 93009

Re: Support for Habitat Connectivity and Wildlife Movement Corridor Ordinance  
Agenda Item #31, Board of Supervisors Hearing, March 12, 2019

Dear Chair Bennett and Members of the Board:

We applaud the County of Ventura for its multi-year effort to identify wildlife corridors and develop a set of standards to protect our local wildlife as the county continues to grow. The protection of wildlife

corridors will safeguard animals and their habitat within key travel ways that connect the Los Padres National Forest, Santa Monica Mountains National Recreation Area, and other open space throughout the county.

Scientists have long studied population dynamics of local wildlife species, the decline of which has been attributed to habitat loss and fragmentation throughout our region. Animals that exemplify Ventura County's rugged nature and reflect its residents' strong will and tenacity depend on the conservation of connected habitat in order to survive long into the future. This proposal will encourage smarter development practices that will undoubtedly protect mountain lions, bears, bobcats, foxes, coyotes, badgers, birds, aquatic species, and other wildlife for generations to come.

Our region's wildlife are increasingly impacted by non-native plant infestations, outdoor night lighting, wildlife impermeable fencing, and development in sensitive areas such as along streams and across critical animal movement pathways. The proposed ordinance would substantially reduce these effects by prohibiting the intentional planting of invasive species near streams, limiting the amount and type of lighting that can be used at night, reducing the cumulative area of wildlife impermeable enclosures, and discouraging sprawling development—especially in sensitive areas. Without these standards, wildlife that live in and traverse Ventura County will continue to be negatively affected.

Importantly, the proposal benefits wildlife without placing excessive burdens on landowners. The ordinance contains dozens of exemptions designed for agricultural producers, livestock managers, and other landowners. It does not prohibit activities and development but rather relies on the County's existing permitting process to improve the mitigation of environmental impacts. For example, the ordinance will make some types of development subject to discretionary permitting rather than ministerial near surface water features. This is something already employed by neighboring counties such as Santa Barbara.

Contrary to the talking points of well-financed opponents of this proposal, the ordinance contains exemptions allowing landowners to continue creating and maintaining defensible space around their structures to protect them from wildfire. The County Fire Chief stated in a letter dated January 8, 2019 that "there are sufficient accommodations and exemptions in the ordinance to allow the Ventura County Fire Department the ability to maintain vegetation management and fuel treatments in the proposed wildlife corridors," and the Ventura County Fire Protection District stated numerous times during the January 31, 2019 Planning Commission hearing that wildfire mitigation would not be impacted by the ordinance.

Unfortunately, the draft ordinance before you now is less robust than the version that County staff presented to the Planning Commission in January 2019. We urge you to reject some of the changes which serve to weaken the ordinance's goal of protecting wildlife habitat connectivity and movement. The ordinance is already the result of significant compromise—it should not be diminished further. Specifically, the Board should approve the ordinance and reject the following amendments:

- exclusion of large areas from the overlay zones, especially the Tierra Rejada Valley; and

- reduction of surface water feature setbacks from 200 feet to 100 feet that would allow development to further encroach on sensitive riparian zones—buffer areas that help to protect all water resources downstream.

The forethought of this proposal and the Board’s original direction cannot be understated. Adoption of a strong ordinance will position Ventura County as a leader in wildlife protection not only throughout the state but throughout the nation as well. This major step forward will ensure that our children and their children will get to experience both the wonder of our local wildlife and the critical benefits that wildlife provide to the healthy ecosystems on which we rely.

Sincerely,

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