

**LOS PADRES FORESTWATCH • CALIFORNIA CHAPARRAL INSTITUTE
CONEJO VALLEY AUDUBON SOCIETY • DEFENDERS OF WILDLIFE
KEEP SESPE WILD COMMITTEE • SIERRA CLUB, LOS PADRES CHAPTER
VENTURA AUDUBON SOCIETY**

January 30, 2019

Ventura County Planning Commission
800 S. Victoria Ave.
Ventura, CA 93009

Re: Support for Habitat Connectivity and Wildlife Corridor Ordinance (PL16-0127) Item #6, Planning Commission Hearing, January 31, 2019

Dear Chair Aidukas and Members of the Planning Commission:

Ventura County Planning staff's proposed amendments to the Ventura County General Plan and Non-Coastal Zoning Ordinance would protect areas throughout the county that are critical for the movement of local wildlife between important habitat areas such as the Los Padres National Forest and the Santa Monica Mountains National Recreation Area.

These protections would establish Ventura County as a regional leader in ensuring the long-term viability of important species, proper ecosystem functioning, and the area's natural heritage. It would ensure that our region's wildlife are able to survive amidst an increasingly fragmented landscape and ensure that their populations remain healthy long into the future.

Well-documented declines of many local wildlife species have been attributed to habitat loss and fragmentation. Animals that exemplify the rich natural history of Ventura County—such as the iconic mountain lion, black bears, and deer—are threatened by population isolation due to an ever-expanding network of roads and developments. Scientists have pointed to the need for wildlife corridor protection in order for local and often keystone species to continue existing in our region.

The proposed amendments were developed through a robust public input process, one that incorporated the concerns of agricultural producers and other landowners in the county during three stakeholder meetings and multiple site visits. Planning staff made several changes to the proposal to address these concerns, such as numerous exemptions to restrictions on outdoor lighting, fencing, and

vegetation modification that give landowners flexibility without compromising the wildlife and habitat protection goals of the proposal.

For example, these exemptions allow for landowners to continue creating and maintaining defensible space around their structures to protect them from wildfire, and 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.”

This proposal is an important first step toward protecting the many mammals, birds, reptiles, amphibians, fish, and native plants that rely on the habitat within the Habitat Connectivity and Wildlife Corridors delineated in large part by a large, collaborative effort of scientists and local, state, and federal agencies. Not only will these species benefit from the proposal, but the people who live in and travel through Ventura County will benefit due to increased safety from collisions with animals on roadways and conservation of local ecosystems that provide us with drinking water, clean air, and places to recreate.

We the undersigned organizations therefore urge you to adopt a resolution recommending that the Board of Supervisors adopt the proposed amendments to the General Plan and Non-Coastal Zoning Ordinance.

Sincerely,

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