

# On the Future of BALLONA WETLANDS ECOLOGICAL RESERVE

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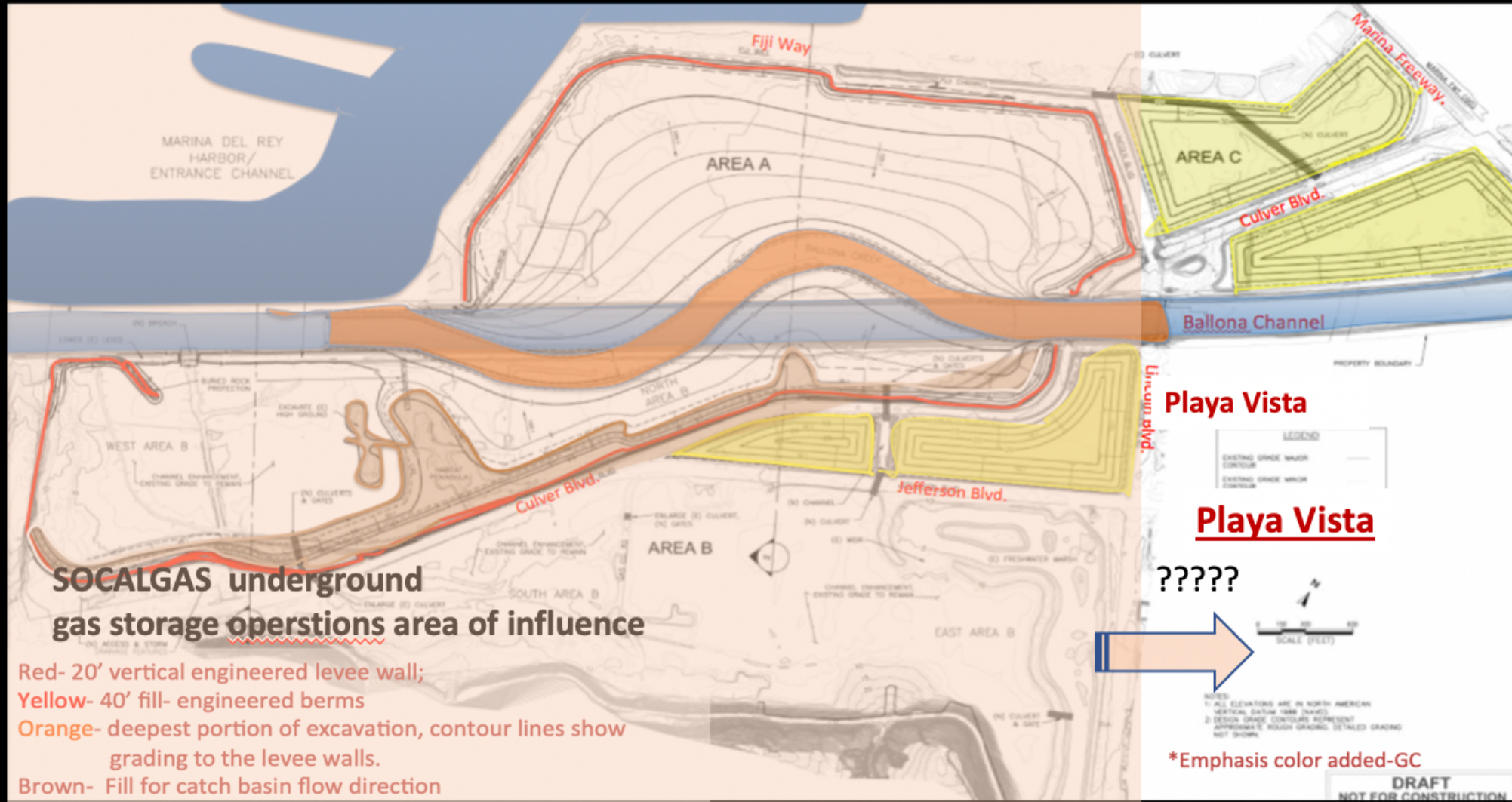
Sierra Club Airport Marina Group - Grassroots Coalition  
Patricia McPherson



Culver City Democratic Club – April 22, 2020



# What Is The State's Intention? Their Preferred Plan- non-historic Estuarine – is a massive...



... public works/ flood control project designed to create a catch-basin for the toxic effluent and trash that flows down Ballona Channel. Rather than cleaning up the dirty runoff- upchannel and at the source of contamination, Ballona will become the toilet of the City. This non-self sustaining project will destroy the existing ecosystem and have to be perpetually managed with public dollars dredging out the toxic sediments and debris-. That is not what the public paid for.



B  
A  
L  
L  
O  
N  
A



See more of Ballona Wetlands Ecological Reserve  
- Google Jonathan Coffins' photos at Flickr, Stonebird





Culver Blvd.

Lincoln Blvd.

Jefferson Blvd.

Playa Vista

Ballona Channel

Culver Blvd.

Marina del Rey

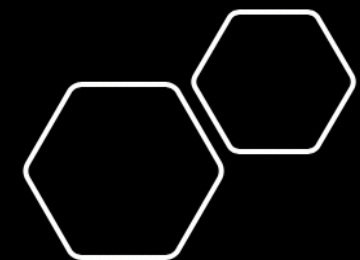
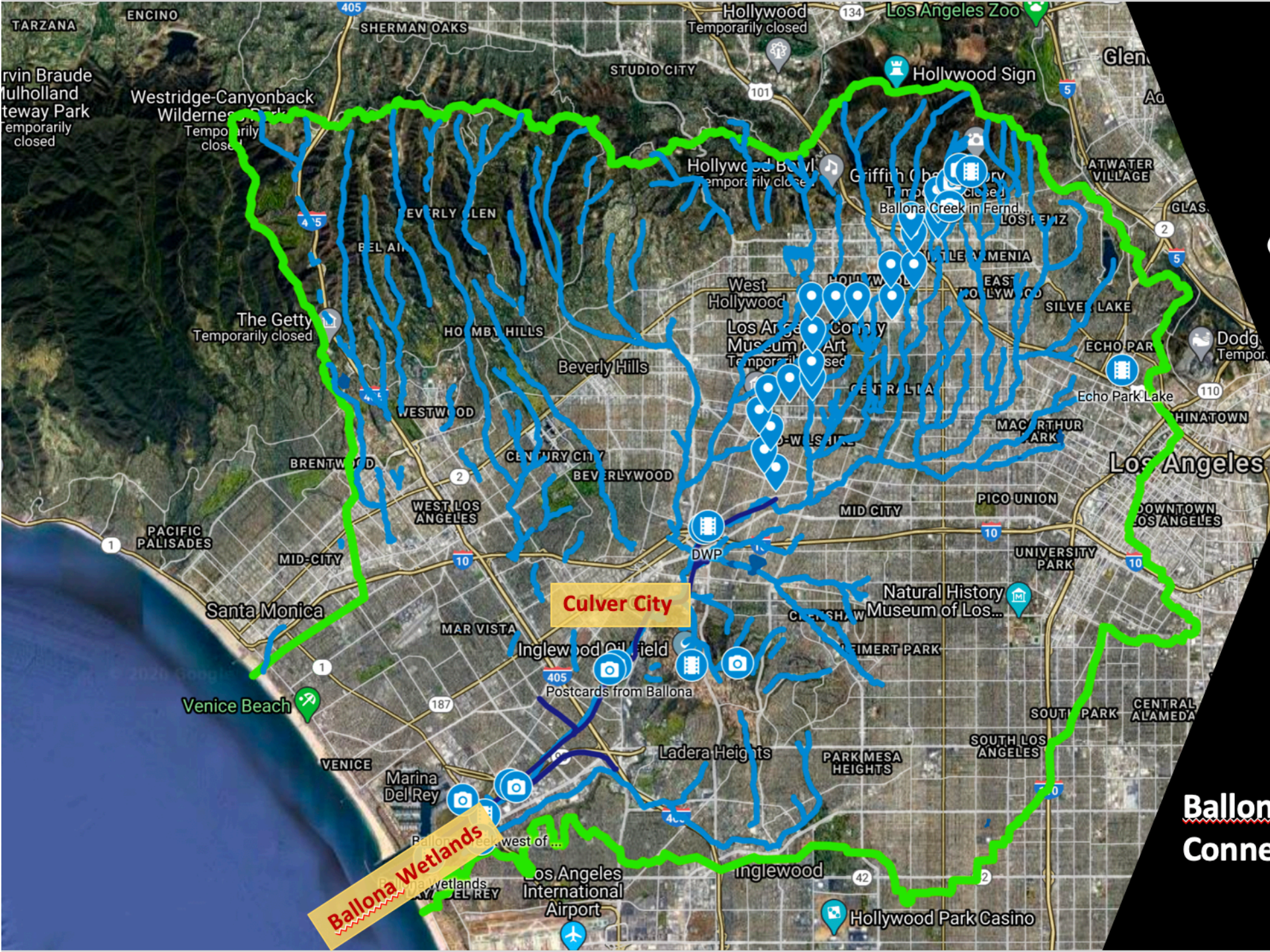
A

B

C





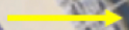


**Ballona Wetland's  
Connection to the Watershed**



# Ballona Wetlands Ecological Reserve Areas A, B, C

Ballona Lagoon  
Marine Preserve



Marina del Rey

Ballona Channel

Del Rey Lagoon

AREA A

AREA B

AREA C

Culver Blvd

Jefferson Blvd

AREA D  
PLAYA  
VISTA

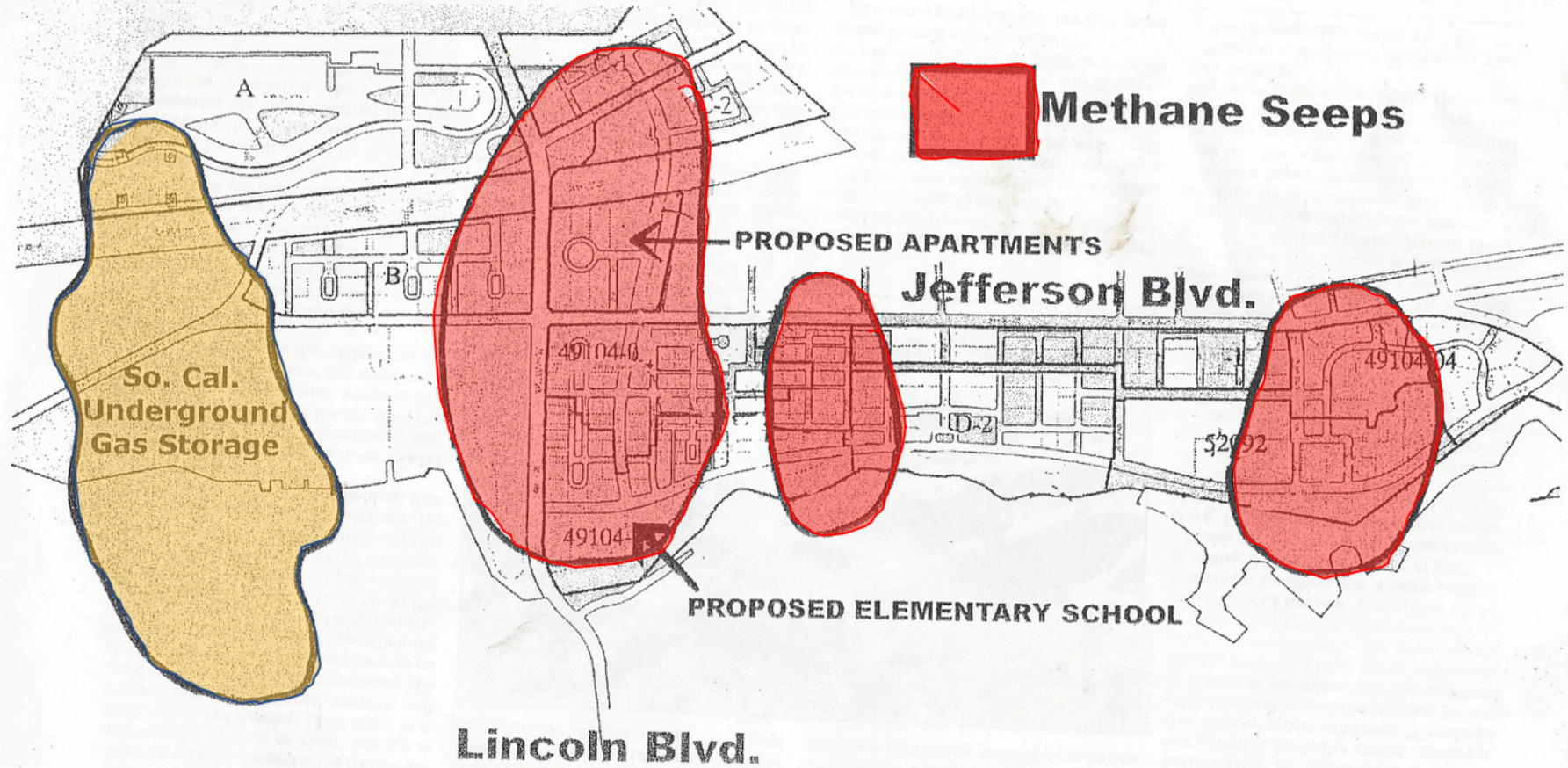
Lincoln Blvd

FRESHWATER MAR

POK Facility

Google Earth





# PLAYA VISTA METHANE HAZARDS

Excerpted from "Under the Surface"

by Bill Gibson, printed in the L.A. Weekly May 12, 2000

"A new report on Playa Vista says the site of what would be Los Angeles' largest commercial and residential development sits on vast pockets of explosive methane gas and straddles a potentially active earthquake fault."



Friends of Ballona's flyer cites that:

30 years ago we saved Ballona from development,

Really? The FBW v California Coastal Commission Settlement Agreement (SA-1990)--- which was a challenge to the CCC's approval of the Land Use Plan----reads differently.

Actually, a coalition of groups DID work to compel Playa Capital llc into becoming a willing seller. The groups, after working with the City of LA Building & Safety Department to unveil the tremendously dangerous oilfield gases discovered surfacing throughout the area; LADBS declared that all the Ballona lands west of Lincoln Blvd. were not allowed to be built with residential construction due to the land's location over the underground gas storage operations of SoCalGas. Playa Capital LLC meanwhile, had become a willing seller and the land was publicly owned by 2004.

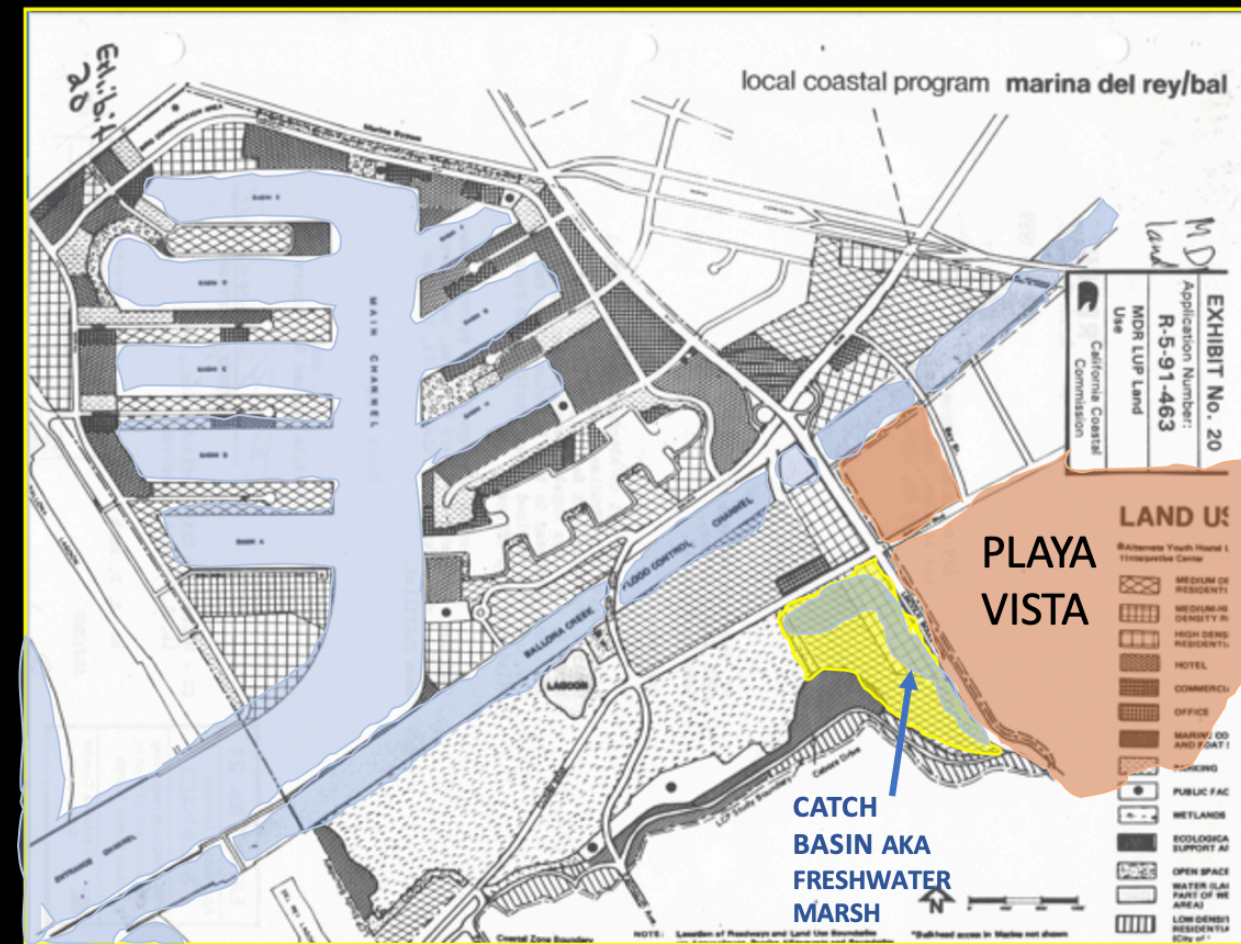
### FRIENDS OF BALLONA'S

### SETTLEMENT AGREEMENT GARNERED THE YELLOW AREA

That area is FBW's legacy-- a portion of Playa Vista's flood control system, aka the freshwater marsh—which uses freshwater pumped from under Playa Vista that is ultimately sent into the Bay via a large drain that connects into the south levee of Ballona Flood Control Channel. & FBW cites that:

There are groups that oppose any restoration that could Bring Back Ballona.

Grassroots Coalition is aware of no organization that opposes restoration.



Above, is the Land Use Plan that Friends of Ballona challenged and came to a Settlement Agreement in 1990. As you can see, most of the land below Ballona Channel & west of Lincoln Blvd. was assigned as wetlands in the LUP. The FBW did 'win' the land adjacent to Lincoln Blvd. & south of Jefferson Blvd., now known as the freshwater marsh—which is part of Playa Vista's flood control system. Playa Capital LLC argued it out of the Ballona Wetlands Ecological Reserve because it is their flood control system (Tyrrell/Playa Capital LLC Letter to State Lands Commission.)

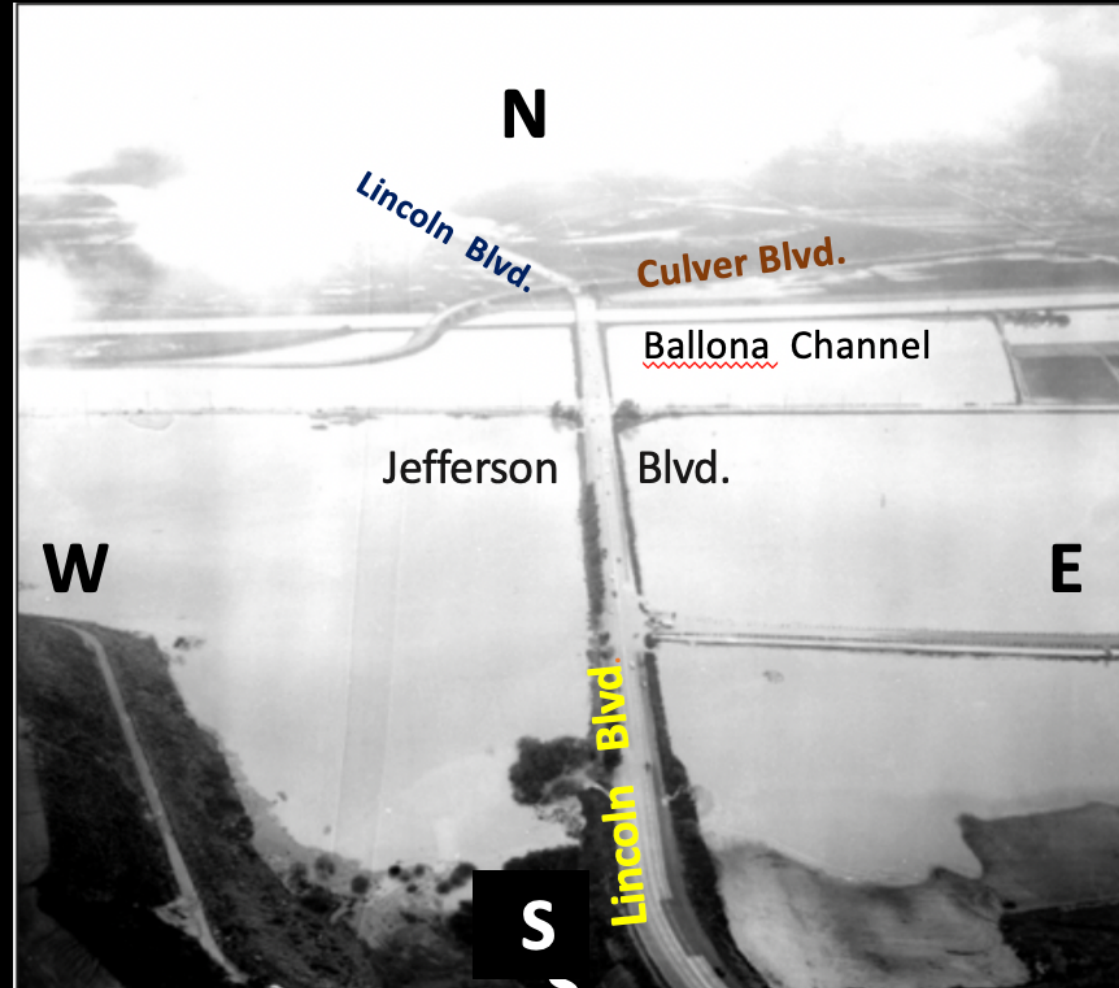




1952 Spence photograph. Courtesy UCLA –Air Photo Archives

The Ballona Channel levees contain the Los Angeles seasonal storm flow runoff to the Santa Monica Bay.

Seasonal rainwater ponding between the raised roadways demonstrates the predominantly freshwater nature of Ballona Wetlands.



1952 Spence Photo; courtesy UCLA Dept. of Geography

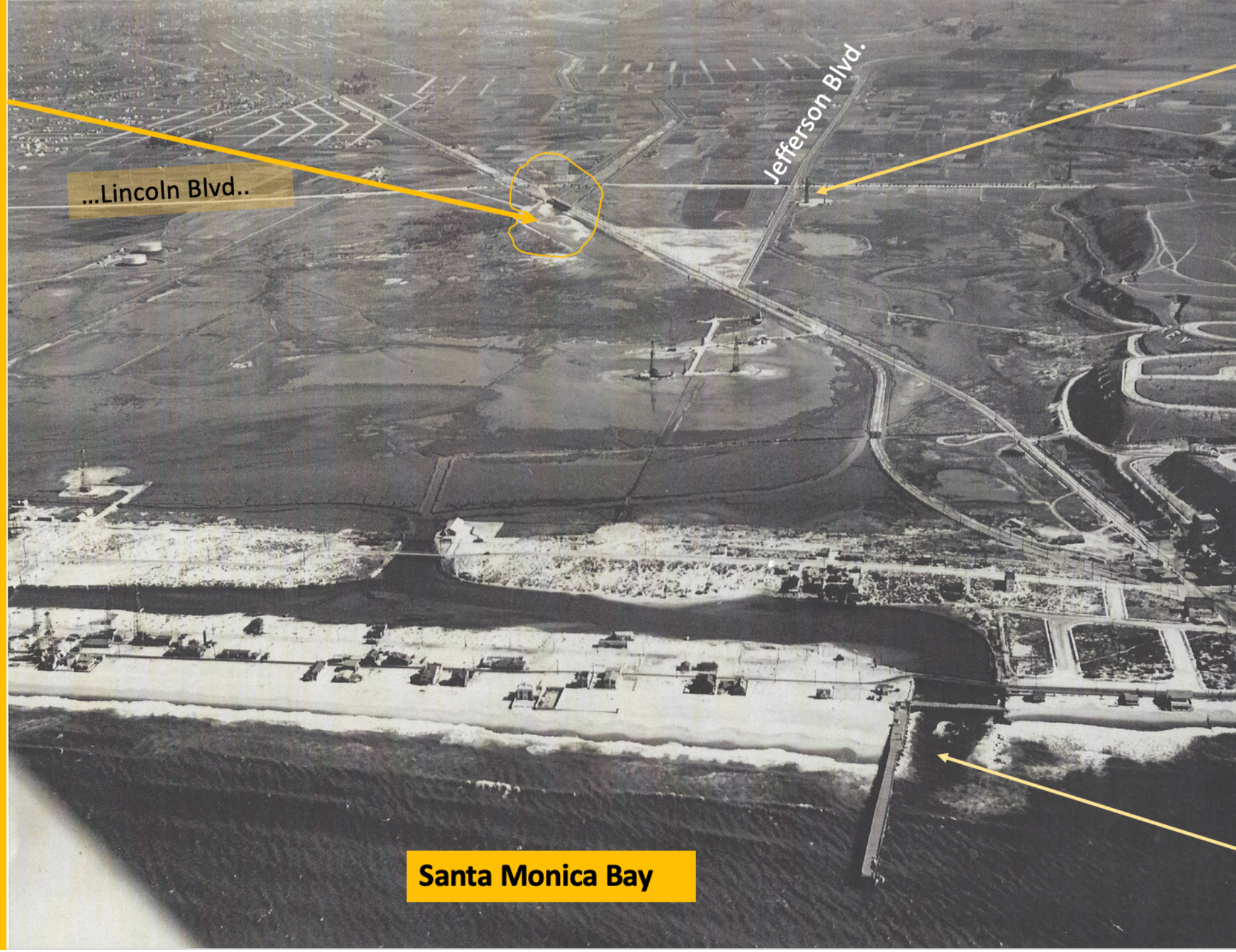
**The state failed to include freshwater hydrology studies of Ballona in the restoration studies. And provide no freshwater restoration alternatives.**



The original Ballona Channel ended by Lincoln Blvd. emptying freshwater into the predominantly seasonal freshwater wetlands .

Note the Channel is curvilinear—storms overtopped.

The Channel was straightened for faster flow and extended to the Bay.



...Lincoln Blvd..

Jefferson Blvd.

Santa Monica Bay

**Note:** University City Syndicate, the oilwell now having outgassing overtop. Currently this area is the 'freshwater marsh' - Playa Vista's flood basin—public trust land.

**Note:** the narrow beach in front of homes. Photo is roughly early 50's.

**Note:** rainwater ponding

**Note:** Manmade opening to the Bay.





**Area A**

Seasonal freshwater ponding.  
*View to north –Marina del Rey*

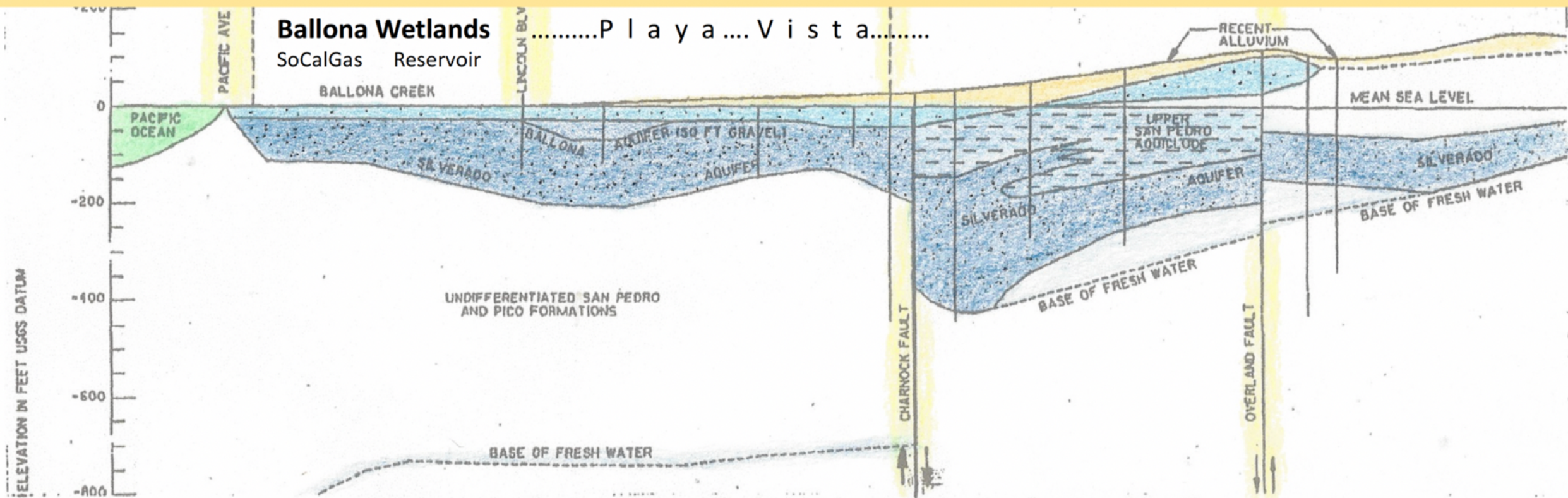




Pollywog (frog) eggs floating atop seasonal rainwater ponding in shallow pickleweed. Area A



# Ballona's Aquifers Are Classified As Potential Drinking Water



**Figure 7. Generalized E-W Hydrogeologic Cross Section**  
(Modified after Cal: Dept. Wtr. Res., 1981 & CDM, 1998)

## **1. Porter-Cologne Water Quality Act disallows harming the freshwater aquifers including-**

- Groundwater protection program under the Safe Drinking Water Act, Section 300 and Title 42 of U. S. Code per Safe Drinking Water Act
- Water quality control standards per Federal Water Pollution Control Act

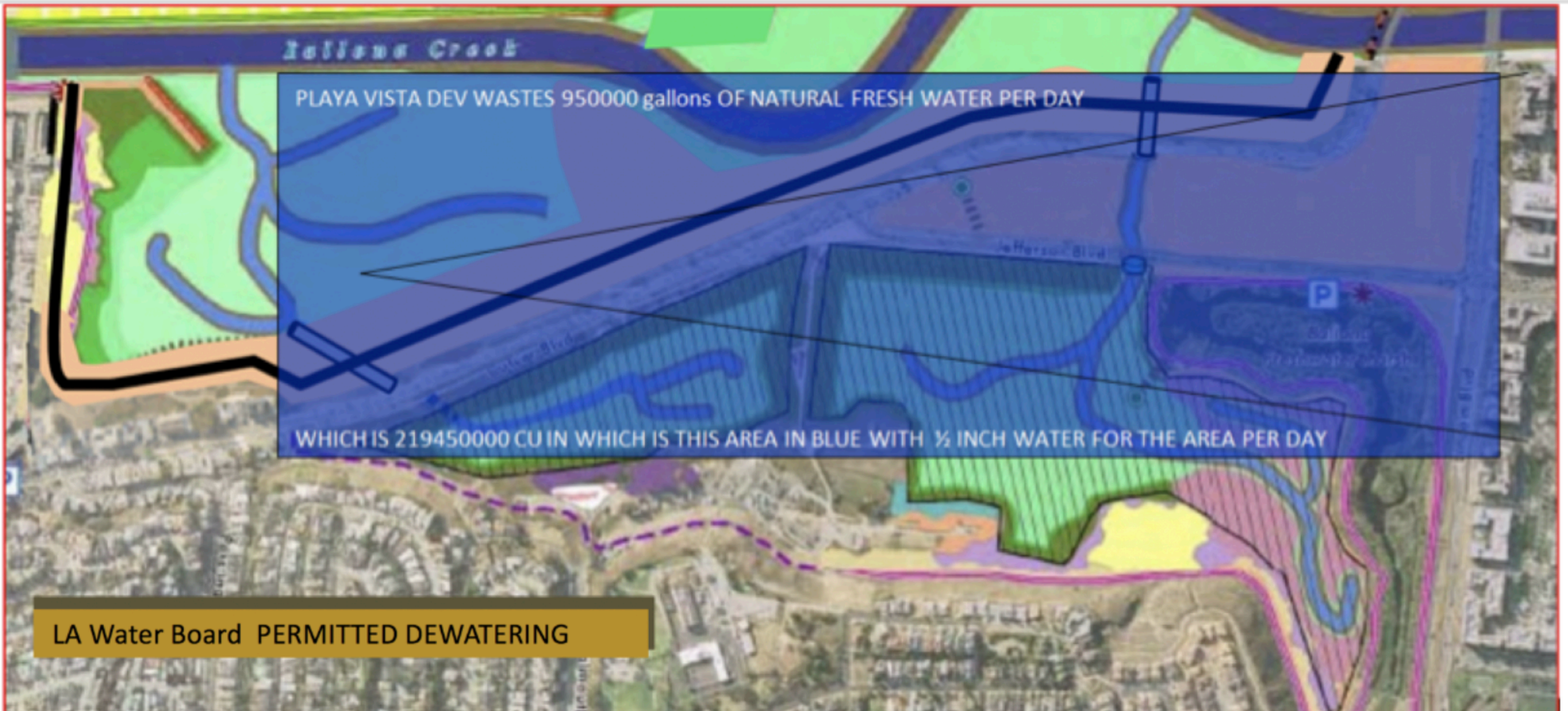
## **2. Groundwater Protection Act & Sustainable Groundwater Management Act disallow harm to the groundwater volumes and quality.**

- To promote groundwater conservation and protect groundwater resources and recharge zones. 10727.4 (a) Control of saline water intrusion.

## **3. Department of Water Resources Resolution 88-88 disallows wasting of freshwater.**

- Disallows groundwater from being discharged without use to the ocean. State Board intends to use its authority under the Water Codes to assure that both misuse of water supply does not occur and that reasonable protection of beneficial uses of water continues.



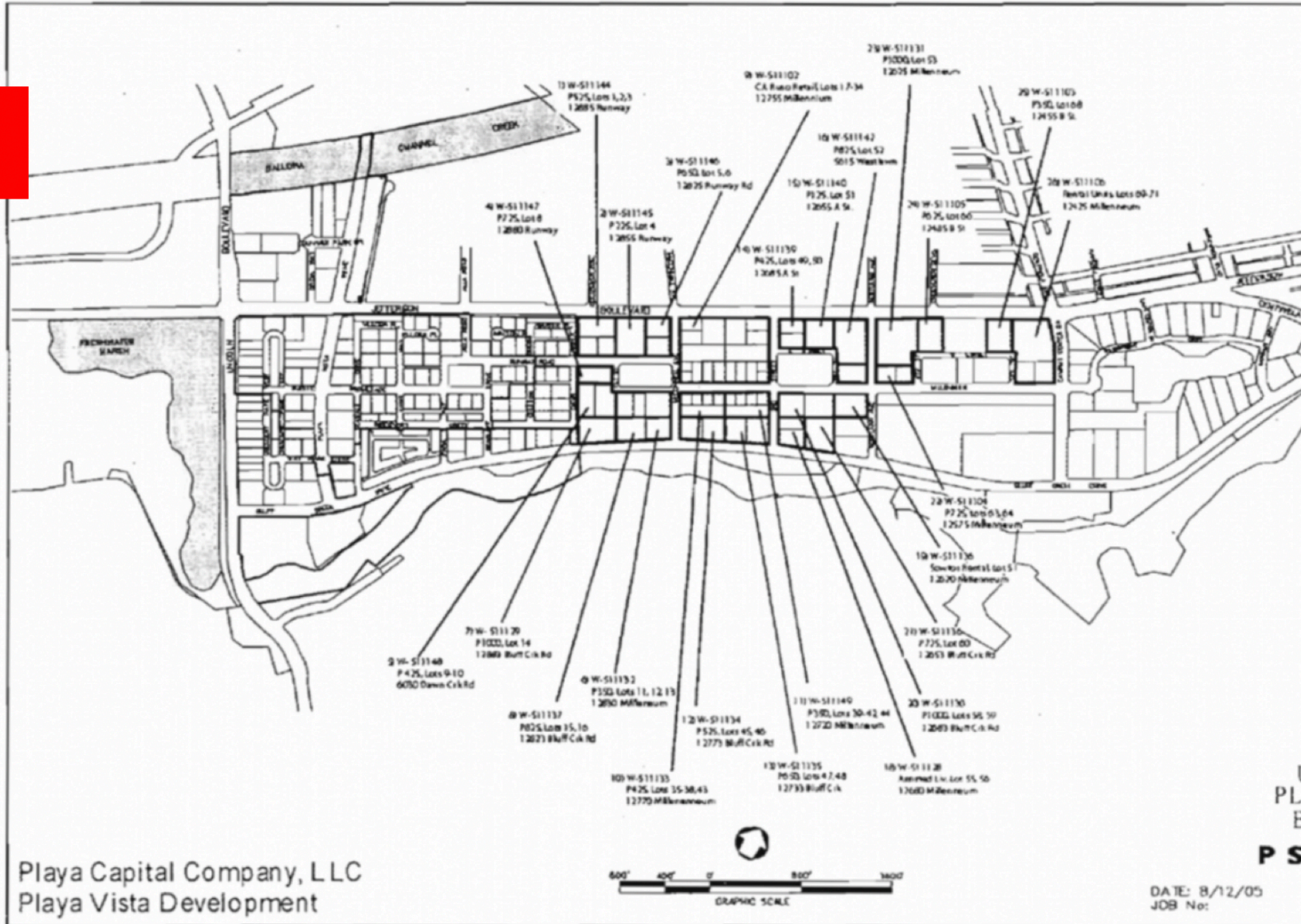


Additionally:

1. Pumped groundwater from Playa Vista's gas mitigation systems can also be returned to Ballona Wetlands.
2. Rainwater is now prevented from draining into Playa Vista's/ CDFW's illegal Drains- WE HAVE RESTORED THIS WATER TO BALLONA
3. Rainwater from the Freshwater Marsh System can be stopped from being thrown away into the ocean, as is current practice.



Playa Vista  
Phase 2



Playa Capital Company, LLC  
Playa Vista Development

UPDATED  
PLAYA VISTA  
BASE MAP  
**PSOMAS**

DATE: 8/12/05      REVISED ON:  
JOB No:                      SHEET 1 OF 1  
11/16/07\_01



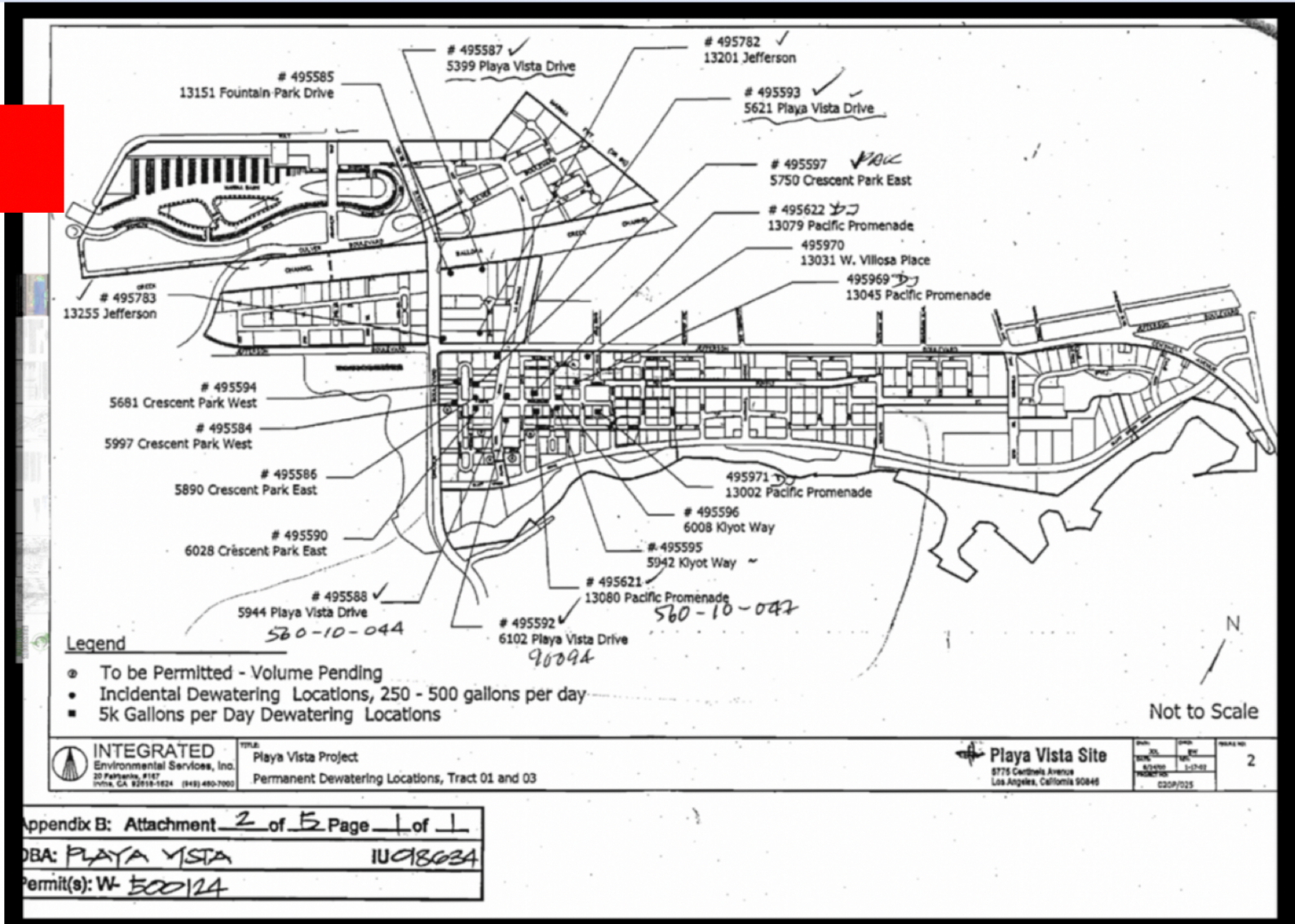
**THE WASTEFUL, NEEDLESS**  
**THROW-AWAY OF**  
**BALLONA'S FRESHWATER.**



The historic water table is at or near the surface at Ballona. Playa Vista's gas mitigation systems must be kept free of water. All the Playa Vista sites shown must be continually dewatered. The water is being thrown-away into the sanitary sewer.

This clean freshwater should be going to Ballona Wetlands Ecological Reserve.

Playa Vista  
Phase 1



THE WASTEFUL, NEEDLESS

THROW-AWAY OF

BALLONA'S FRESHWATER.



CDFW & Playa Vista: DRAIN FRESHWATERS OF BALLONA= Violation of the Coastal Act & Unpermitted 2004-2017

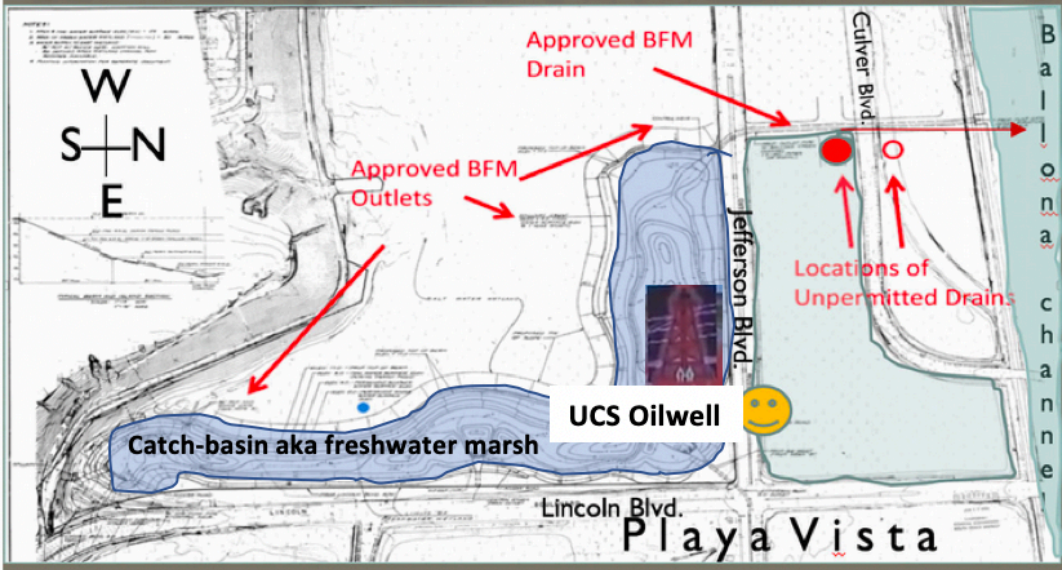
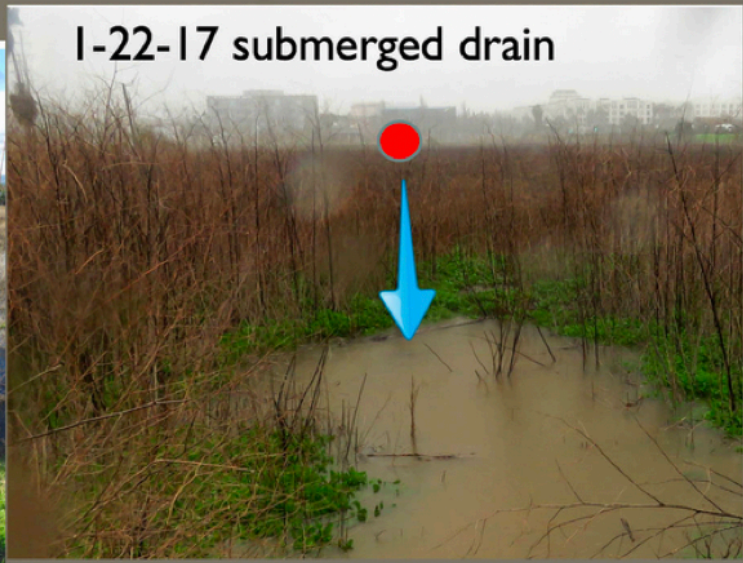


Photo location, Continued Draining



Ballona Wetlands Ecological Reserve



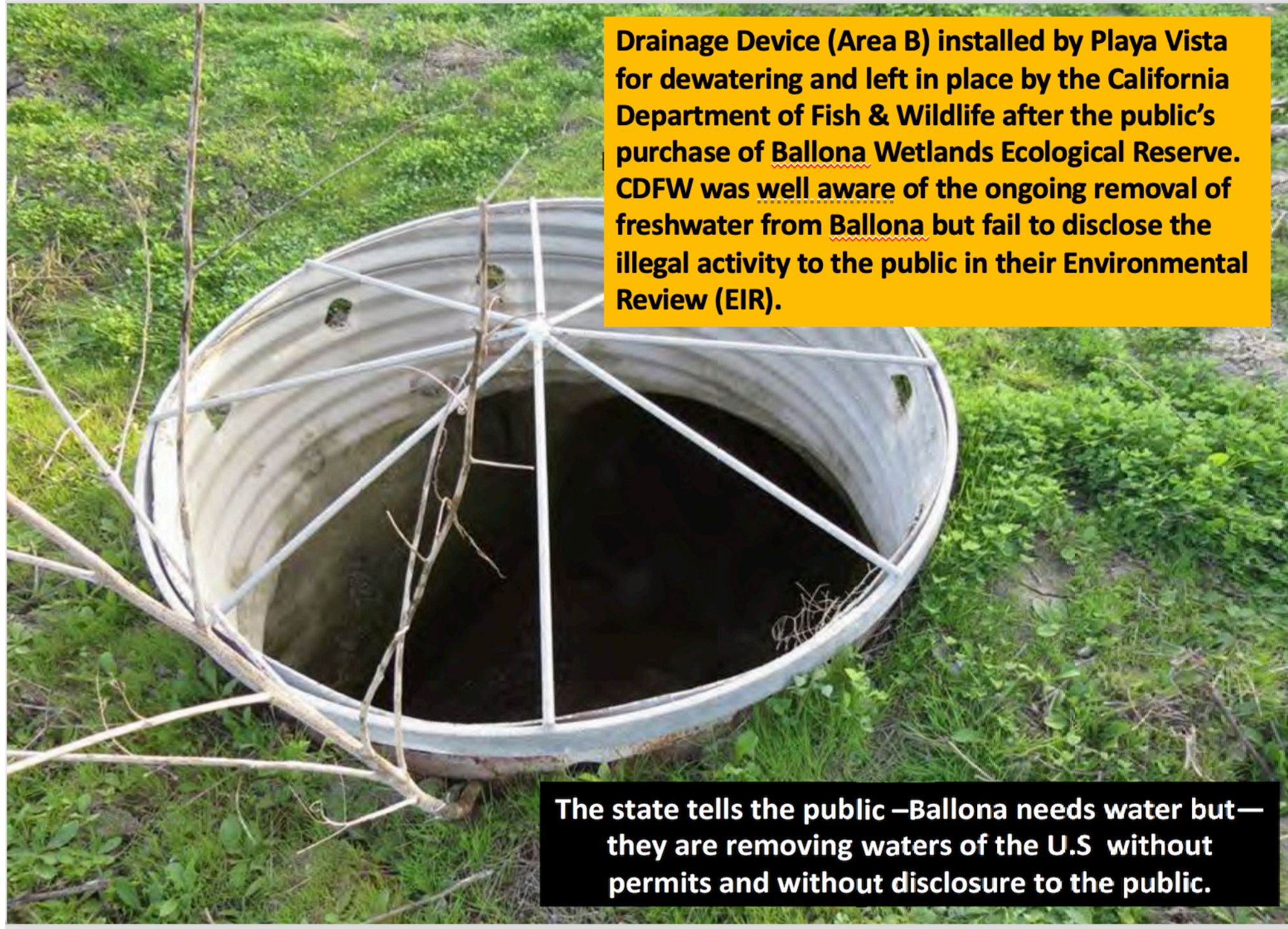
Roughly 100,000-200,000 cubic feet of water is thrown away each rain event shown.



1-23-17 Rainwater has been drained into Ballona Channel







**Drainage Device (Area B) installed by Playa Vista for dewatering and left in place by the California Department of Fish & Wildlife after the public's purchase of Ballona Wetlands Ecological Reserve. CDFW was well aware of the ongoing removal of freshwater from Ballona but fail to disclose the illegal activity to the public in their Environmental Review (EIR).**

**The state tells the public –Ballona needs water but— they are removing waters of the U.S without permits and without disclosure to the public.**

Grassroots Coalition sued both CDFW & Playa Vista for this Violation of the Coastal Act and prevailed.

The California Coastal Commissioners ordered the capping of the unpermitted Drains and the removal of its infrastructure pending a CDFW Application that was not to be related to the CDFW Restoration Plan (EIR).

CDFW after capping the drains, submitted an Application wholly attached to their Plan, while still not disclosing the issues in the FEIR.





## **BURNING QUESTIONS**

The bag of collected oilfield outgassing from the Playa Vista catch basin—  
Public Trust Lands/ Water.



Recent Picarro methodology graphics of atmospheric methane gas taken along Jefferson Blvd and various streets within Playa Vista. (Grassroots Coalition mapping with Picarro street mapping pioneer Nathan Phillips of Boston.)

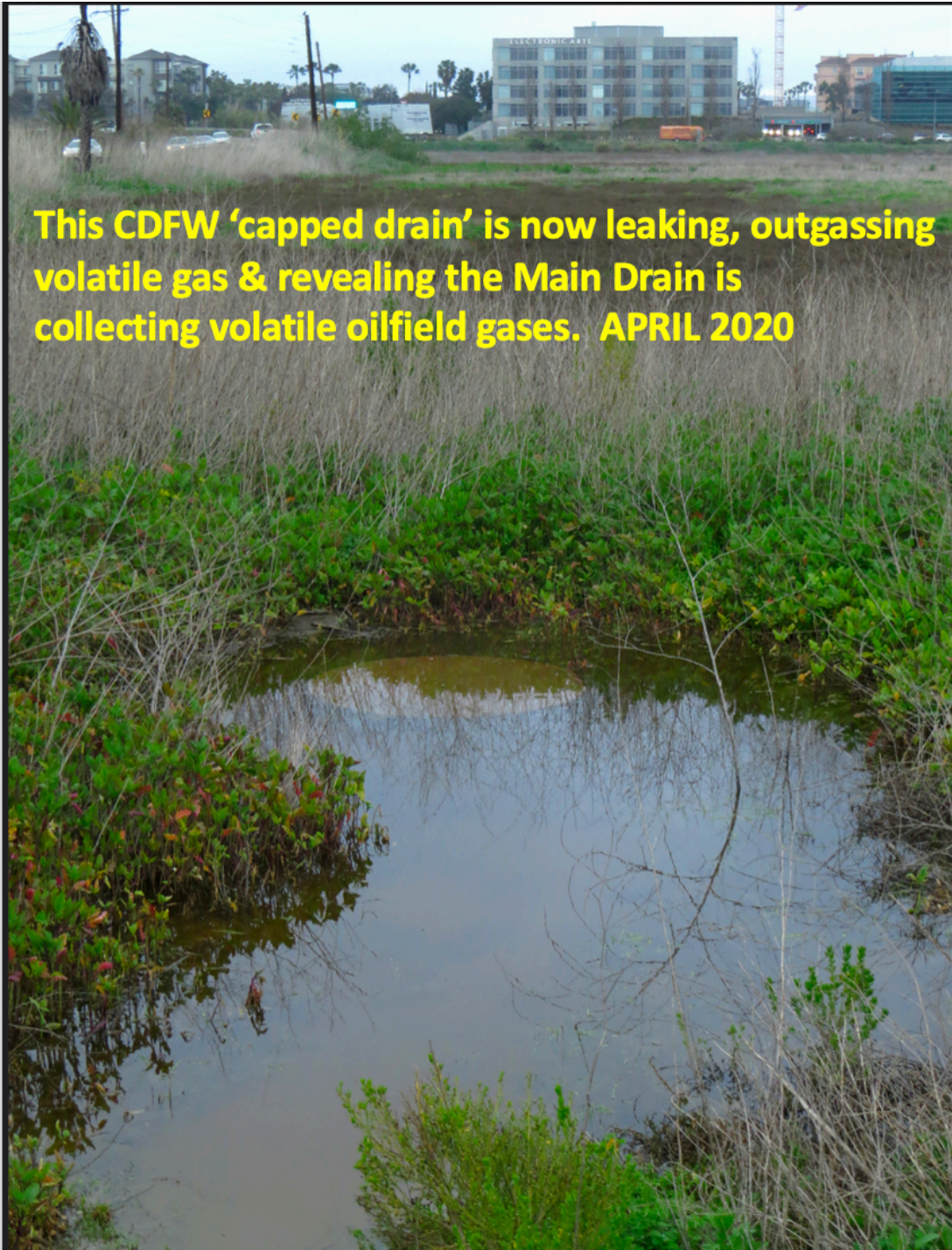
## GOT GAS?

### **SOCALGAS Underground Gas Storage Problems & Oilfield Gas Leakage**



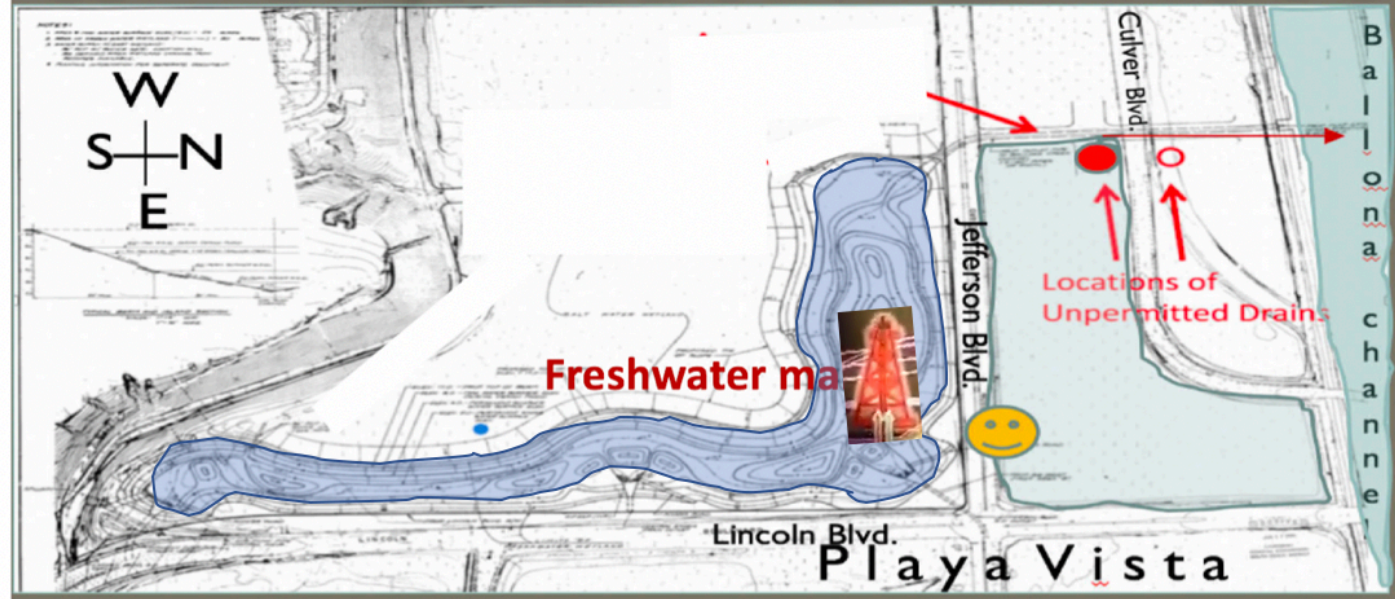
Grassroots Coalition provides a portion of atmospheric methane gas studies for the Ballona/ Playa Vista area. SoCalGas Operations of the underground gas storage facilities have been documented by the Division of Oil & Gas and Geothermal Resources (DOGGR) to be leaking reservoir gases into the atmosphere. (DOGGR shut down Order 1008)  
The BALLONA DEIR/S provides no independent analysis of the oilfield gas issues. CDFW relies solely upon SCG and Playa Capital LLC contractors.





**This CDFW 'capped drain' is now leaking, outgassing volatile gas & revealing the Main Drain is collecting volatile oilfield gases. APRIL 2020**

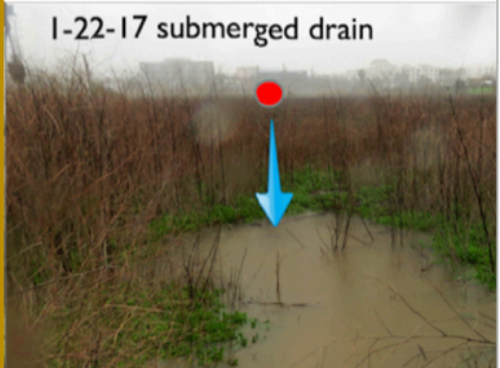
# CDFW & Playa Vista: DRAIN FRESHWATERS OF



**March 2, 2019**

**This newly capped drain IS SUBMERGED due to rain, and no longer drains rainwater out to sea.**

**Contrary to Playa Vista/ Psomas/ CDFW's REPORT that the Drains Submerged in 2017, only due to water backed up from the freshwater marsh.**







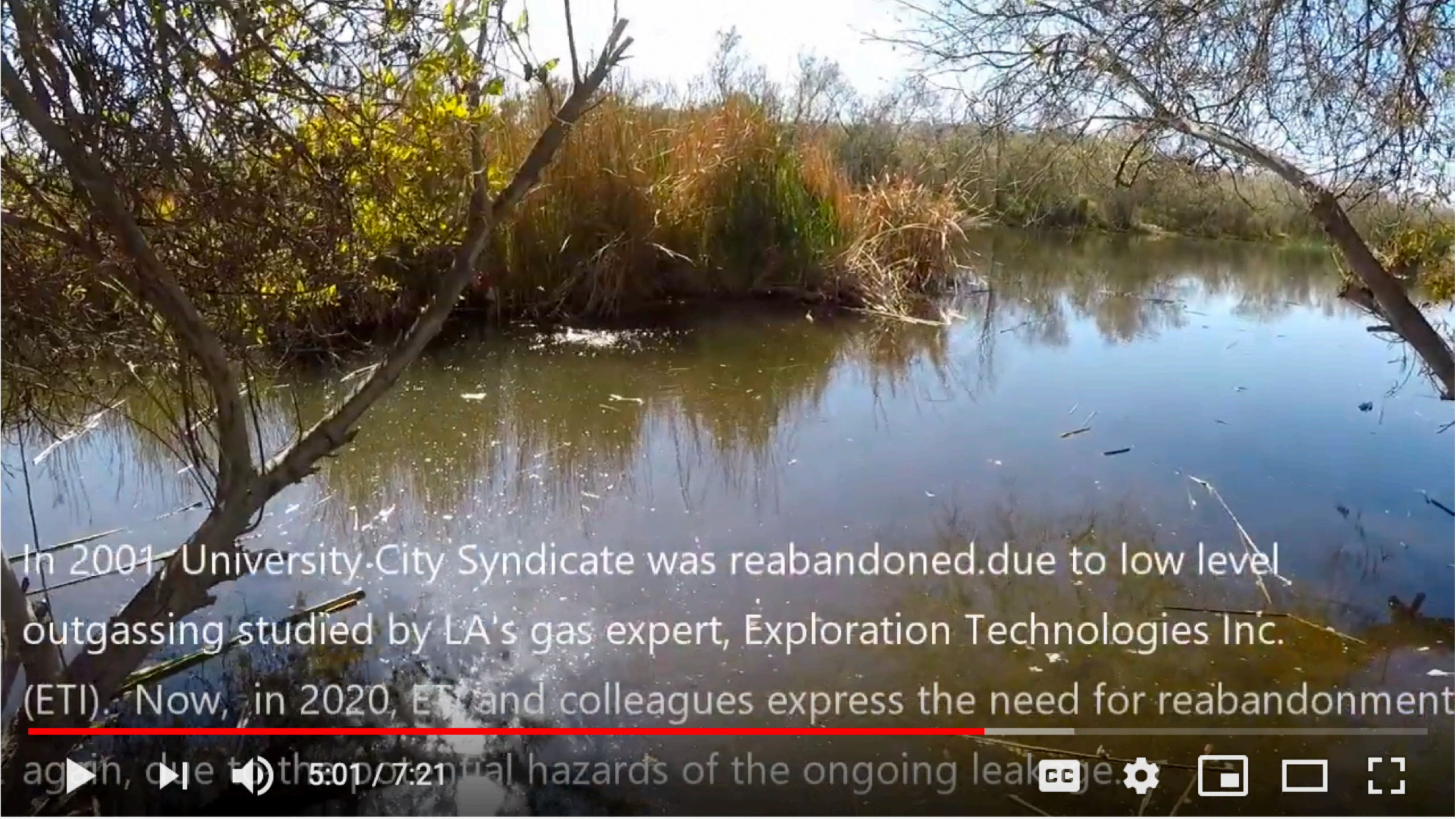
The rainwater submerged 'CAPPED DRAIN' is seen outgassing volatile gas at left.

CDFW's claims of sealing the Unpermitted Drain are visibly wrong.  
April 2020.

Currently, contrary to the Coastal Commissioner's order to NOT connect the removal of the Drain's infrastructure with the 'restoration plan', CDFW's Application for removal of the Drain's infrastructure is tied directly to the 'restoration plan.'






CDFW continues to harm Ballona Wetlands Ecological Reserve.



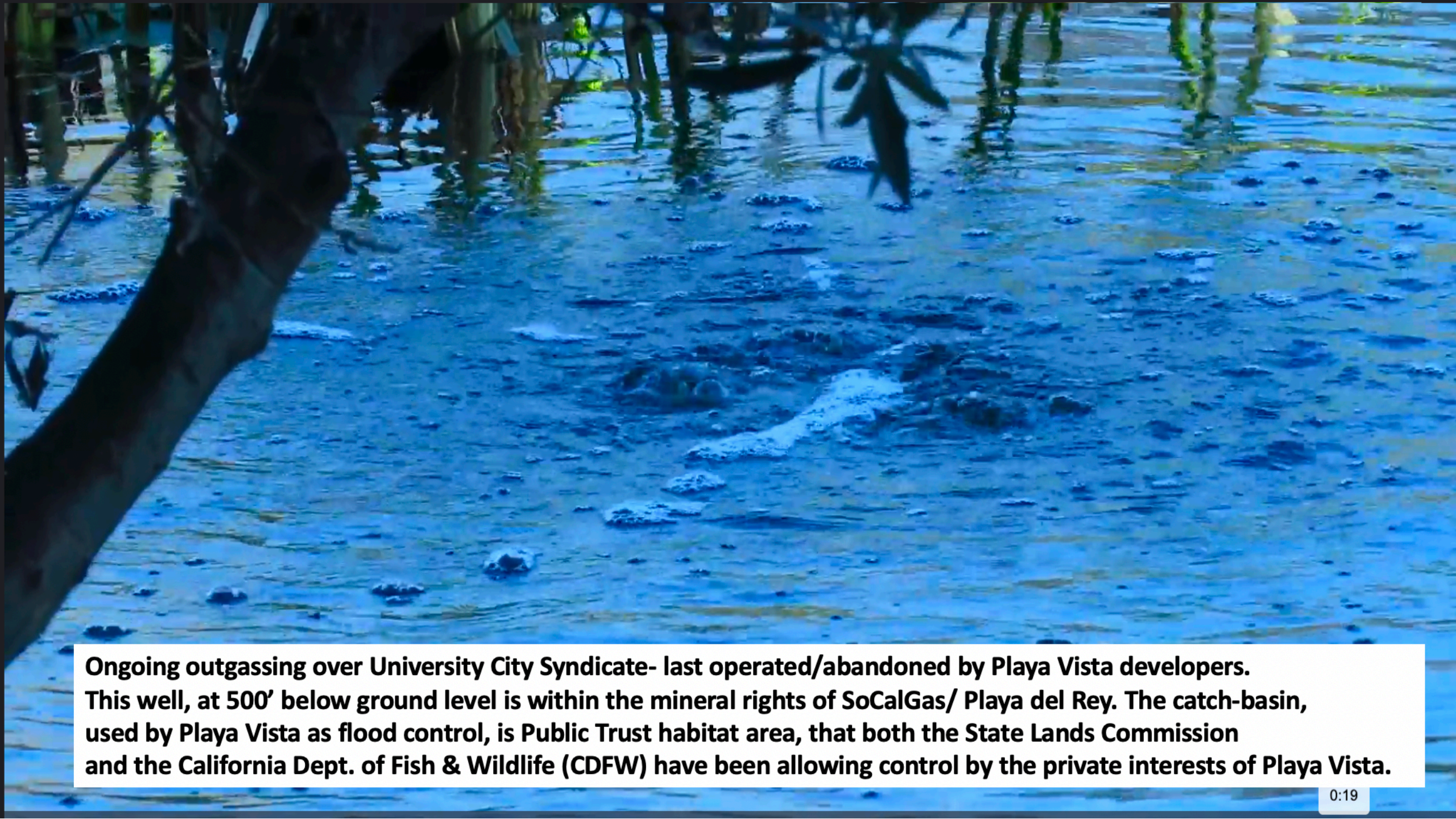


In 2001, University-City Syndicate was reabandoned due to low level outgassing studied by LA's gas expert, Exploration Technologies Inc. (ETI). Now, in 2020, ETI and colleagues express the need for reabandonment

again, due to the potential hazards of the ongoing leakage.

5:01 / 7:21     



A photograph of a mangrove wetland. The water is a deep blue color, and there are many small, white, foamy bubbles rising from the surface, indicating gas being released from the water. The background shows the trunks and branches of mangrove trees, some of which are reflected in the water. The lighting is bright, suggesting a sunny day.

**Ongoing outgassing over University City Syndicate- last operated/abandoned by Playa Vista developers. This well, at 500' below ground level is within the mineral rights of SoCalGas/ Playa del Rey. The catch-basin, used by Playa Vista as flood control, is Public Trust habitat area, that both the State Lands Commission and the California Dept. of Fish & Wildlife (CDFW) have been allowing control by the private interests of Playa Vista.**



## Timeline – August 13, 2004



MEMO

August 13, 2004

TO: Chuck Raysbrook, South Coast Regional Manager  
Terri Stewart, Lands Manager  
California Department of Fish and Game

CC: Pam Griggs, Staff Counsel and Project Manager, State Lands Commission

FR: Marc Beyeler, Southern California Regional Manager  
Mary Small, Senior Project Manager, Ballona Wetlands Restoration Planning Project  
State Coastal Conservancy

RE: Ballona Wetland Restoration Planning, Proposed Approach

“Restoration planning is expected to take three years and cost up to two million dollars.”

## Timeline - WRDA Request Effect Statement

“Our HQ reached out to us to comment on proposed language for WRDA2020 regarding Ballona Creek. I wanted to check with you to see if LACDPW has any knowledge about it. We need to draft an ‘effects Statement’ which is basically an analysis of what the proposed language would do.” USACE to LACDPW, October 21

“We had no previous knowledge of this and do not have any recommended input with this short notice . . . we will support the higher discharge capacity for Ballona Creek as documented in your 1979 H&H study report.” – LACDPW internal and to USACE, October 21 - 22

“If the channel conveyance capacity is reduced from its current condition down to the design discharge of 46,000 cfs, then flood risk would increase for storm events larger than 46,000 cfs and flood damages may be induced.” – WRDA Effect Statement

## Timeline - April 20, 2017

“we would not go back and design for the original design discharge of 46,000 [*cubic feet per second*] with the same authorization of [*standard project flood*] design, knowing and being approved for the updated SPF of 68,000 cfs” – US Army Corp of Engineers to Coastal Conservancy

**Problem:** the project team already had designed for the original discharge of 46,000 cfs.

## Timeline

August 13, 2004 – Initial timeline and budget = 3 years and up to \$2 million

January 19, 2012 - \$6.25 million allocated for engineering studies

February 29, 2012 – ESA predicts full 408 permit submittal by December 2013

May 8, 2013 – ESA submits hydrology analysis based on 46,000 cfs flood capacity

March 2014 – SMBRC Ballona coordinator (TBF) removed for lack of progress

August 18, 2014 – ICFI terminated as lead consultant, paid \$1 million+

**April 20, 2017 – Corp establishes 68,000 cfs as standard project flood (SPF)**

September 2017 – Draft EIR/EIS published, sidesteps flood discrepancy issue

October 2019 – Coastal Conservancy requests congressional approval for change

October 22, 2019 – US Army Corp and LA County DPW oppose change

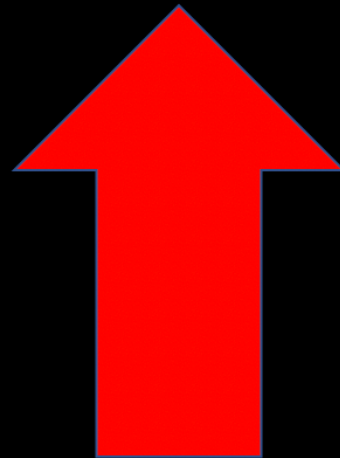
November 18, 2019 – Public first learns of discrepancy via public records request

December 19, 2019 – Final EIR released, without final EIS or clarification of issue

January 2, 2020 – Conservancy withdraws request in response to public inquiry

## Flood Capacity Miscalculation

**Issue:** The detailed engineering plans and technical specifications in the Ballona EIR are based on the wrong flood capacity standard and will have to be done over at public expense. [SMBRC played a central role in coordinating the engineering plans.](#)



## Timeline - October 2019 – WRDA Request

“If you want language to make the corps permitting of Ballona easier, now is the time.” – Sam Schuchat, SCC October 4

“if we were to update the channel capacity number would you recommend going back to 46,000 as that is the actual capacity? We are considering trying to get a correction of the number through Congressional action, unfortunately there is a short turn around.”  
- Mary Small, SCC to ESA, October 7

“Note that 46,000 cfs is the original design discharge, I believe from the 1930s, not the channel capacity. We haven’t done an analysis to specifically estimate the capacity of the existing channel (or for periods in the past), but this is what we propose to do for Submittal B.”  
- ESA response

Excerpts- Walter Lamb, Ballona Wetlands Landtrust  
Presentation to SMBRC 2020



# JohnTommy Rosas, TATTN Tribal Administrator Speaker 2017

11/2017  
1950 2017



Recording... 00:00:03

Image © 2017 DigitalGlobe  
Image Landsat / Copernicus

Google Earth



# John Tommy Rosas, TATTN Tribal Administrator Speaker 2017

11/2017  
1950 2017

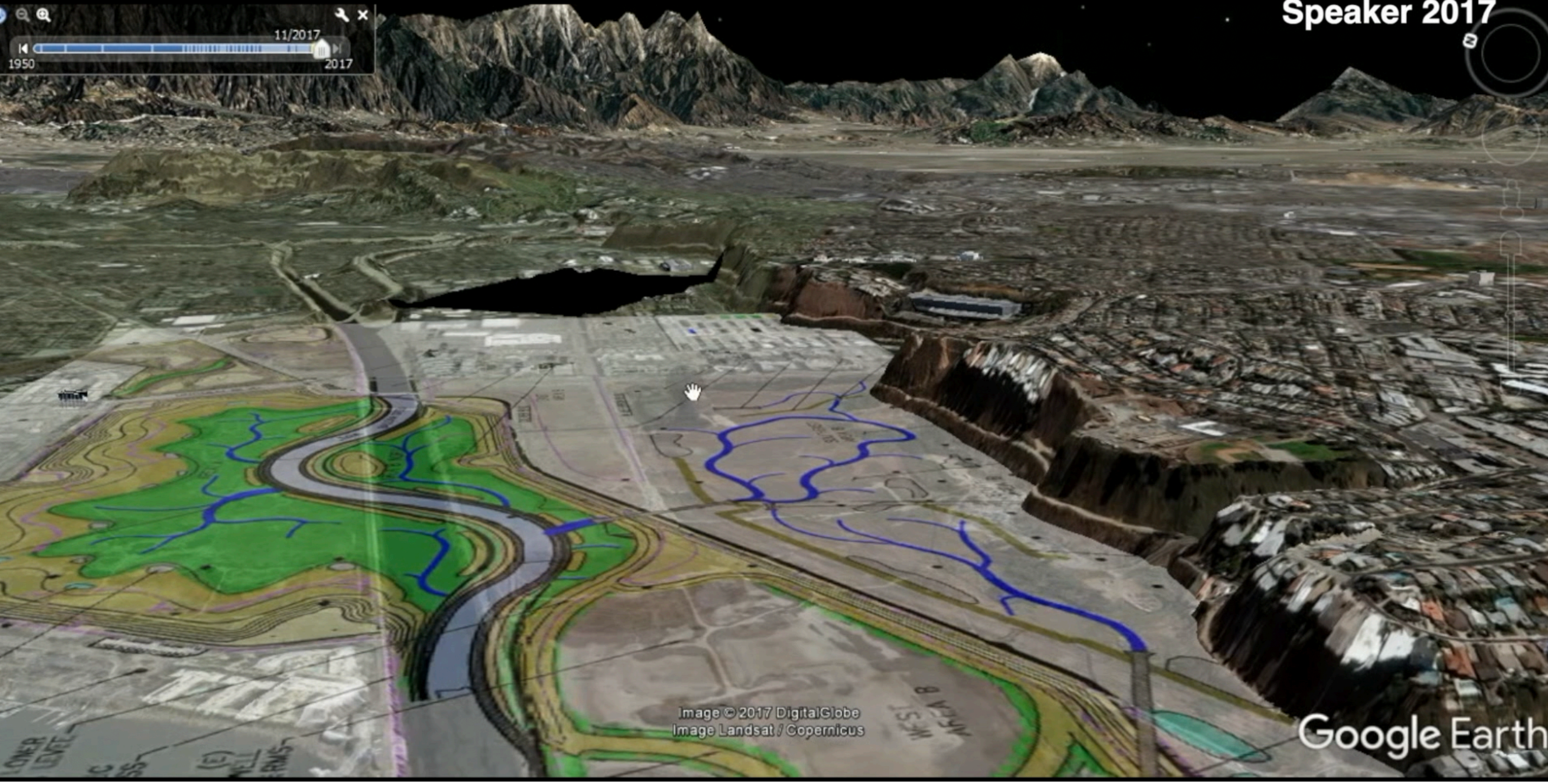


Image © 2017 DigitalGlobe  
Image Landsat / Copernicus

Google Earth



**The Concept of Truth, Just Disappears--**  
*Cover Image on Ballona's State- Final Environmental Impact Report*



\* Paraphrasing a Noam Chomsky quote re: President Trump



# THE BIG DIG—NOT WHAT THE PUBLIC PAID FOR.



LEVEE

LEVEE

LEVEE

**Levees** are 20-30' high & 200' wide; **Wildlife KILL Zones**  
per ARMY CORPS LEVEE REGULATIONS

Daily Ocean Tidal Flow Inundates &  
**Destroys Ballona's Diverse Habitat & WILDLIFE**

LEVEE

LEVEE

LEVEE

30'—40'  
BERMS  
BURY  
HABITAT  
&  
Views to  
Ballona  
Are  
Gone

BERM

BERM

TOXINS & TRASH

BERM



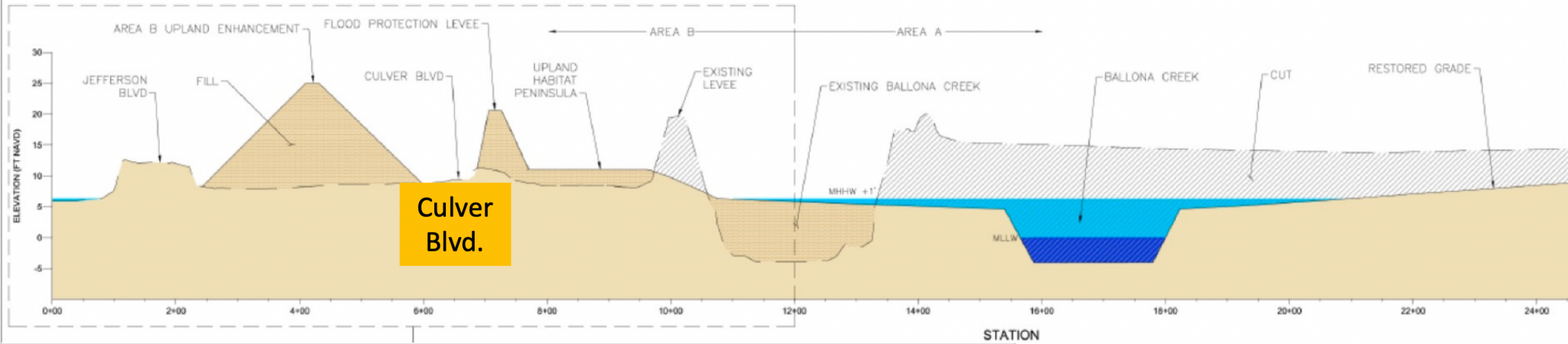




S

West

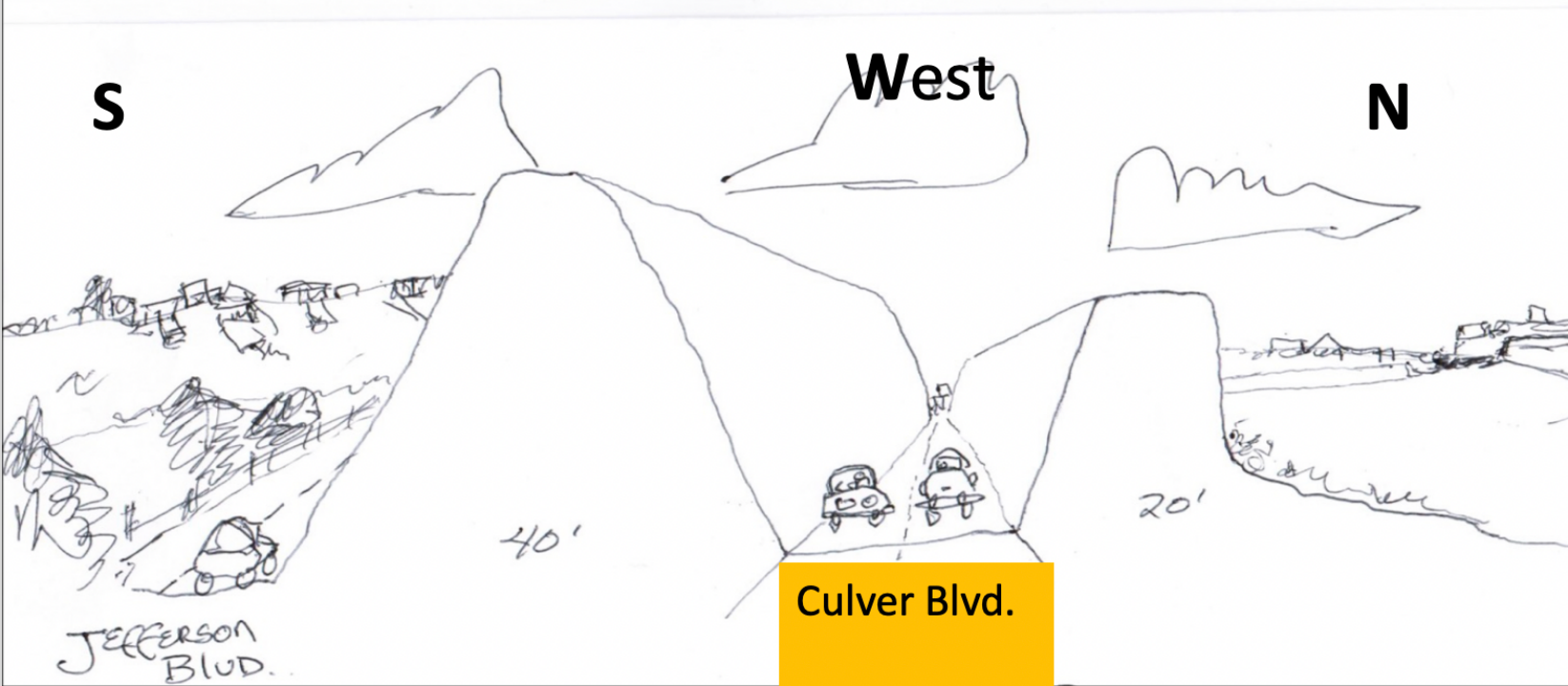
N



S

West

N



The drawing on the left depicts the loss of view to the wetlands that would occur with the State's Plan, shown in the schematic above.



# The Engineered Berms and Levees--- WHAT WILL WE SEE AT ROAD LEVEL?



...the grey lines are roughly the BERM height (30'-40') shown here, which would bury the wetlands and remove views to Ballona Wetlands

...Jefferson Boulevard - - -

Lincoln Boulevard - - - - -





200' wide, Levees are NOT wildlife friendly.

US Army Corps regulations require mowed grasses for 'Pest Control' .

CDFW Plan requires 3-5 miles of new -NON-HABITAT LEVEES..



LEVEE: Similarities Not Suitable for L.A.'s Ballona Wetlands?



**FILL ?**

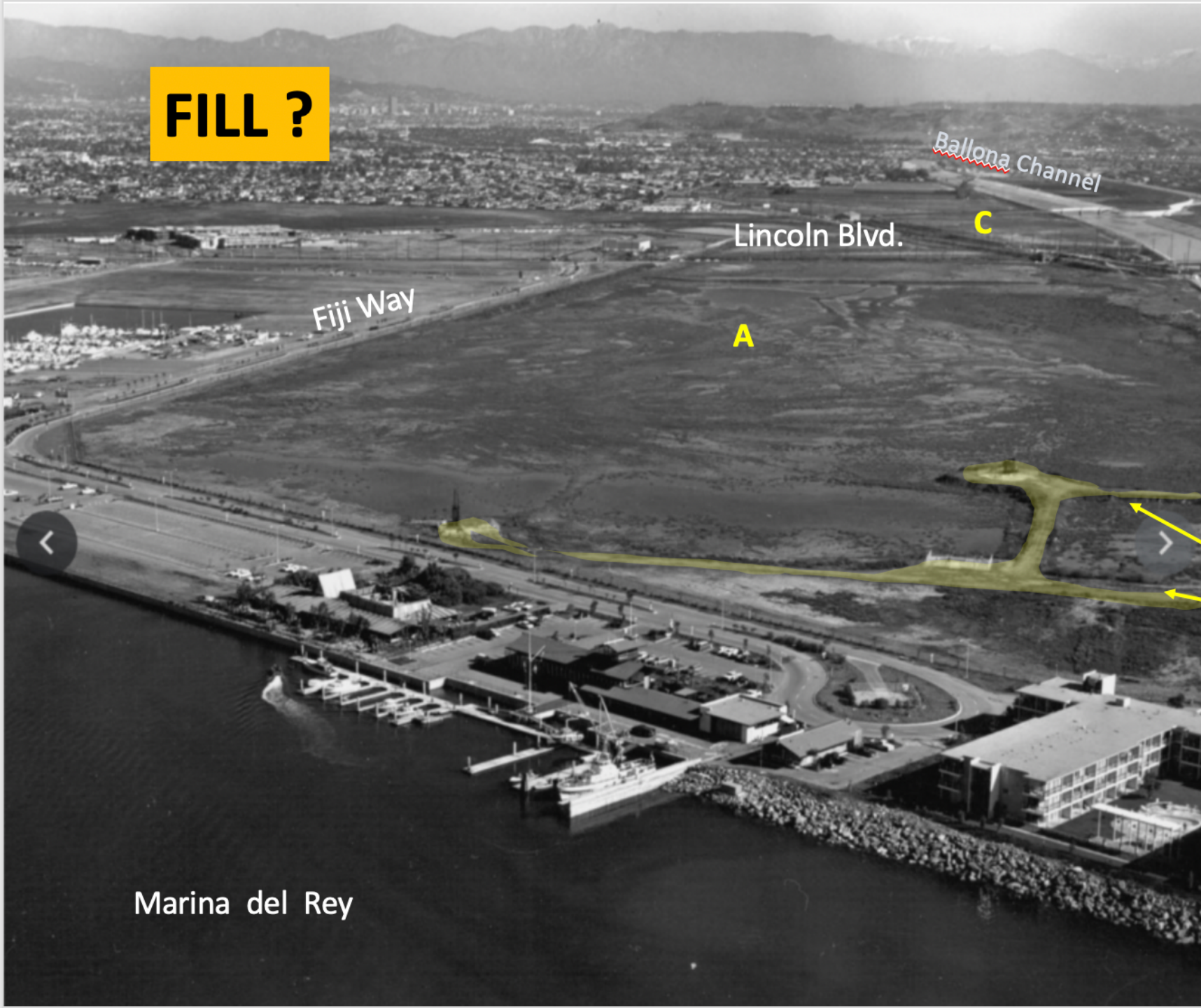


Photo above is circa 1980s, by Rob Kinslow

**Photo at left** is shortly after Marina del Rey was carved out from Ballona Wetlands. 1968

**The raised roadways** between the oil/gas wells that were built in the 1930's, are the **same roadways** in the **photo at left** and still service vehicular traffic to these wells today.

It is a myth that 10-20 feet of fill from the dredging of Marina del Rey was left upon Area A. The myth has been used to falsely promote and rationalize digging out this habitat, to turn it into a saltwater tidal bay.





Area A  
mid 1960s

Area A  
present

As can be viewed to left, The 'squared' raised roadways are the same in both photos, the **upper photo was taken during the creation of Marina del Rey (mid 1960s)**, and the lower is from the current timeframe. The raised roadways are about 6-10 feet higher than the surrounding land.

The levee area at the top of each photo is also similarly raised from the adjacent land.

There is both a bike/walk path outside the Area A fencing as well as an inner roadway that private guard trucks used until the land was sold to the public in 2004.





Los Angeles created a beach enhancement and expansion program.

Miles of beaches Both to the north and south of Ballona Channel were enhanced and broadened with sands, dredged out during the creation of Marina del Rey.

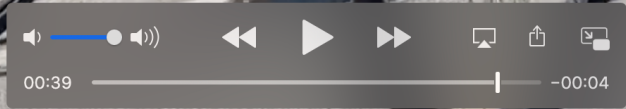


# ACCESS

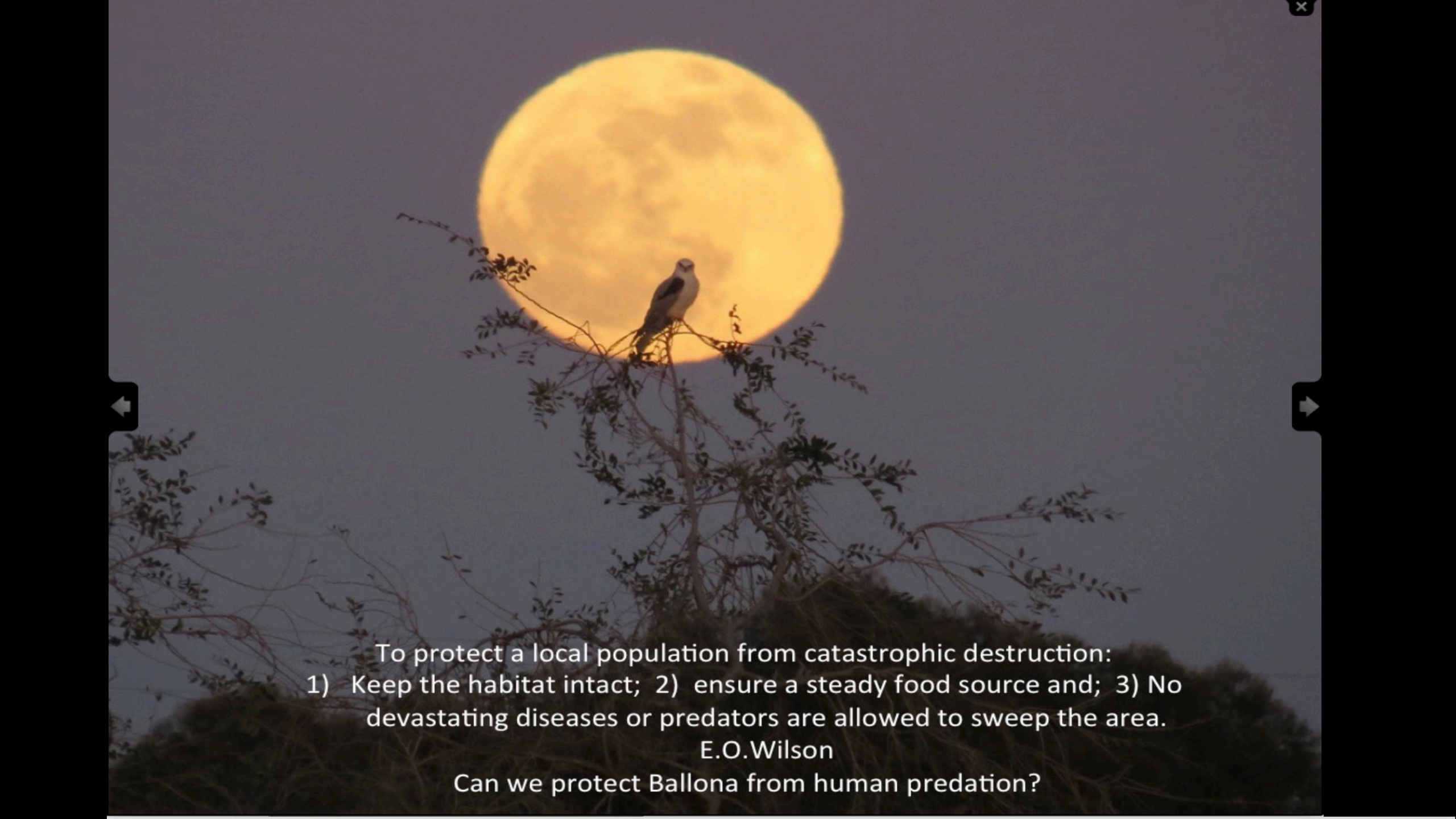
- \* Ballona Wetlands has existing access areas along the Ballona Channel that connect to beach bike/ walk/ jog pathways.
- \* Numerous areas inside Ballona provide viewing/ walk areas, utilizing raised roadways and paths for wildlife sensitive tours.
- \* The Ballona Channel is utilized by wildlife at low to high tides and is used by people for rowing events.











To protect a local population from catastrophic destruction:  
1) Keep the habitat intact; 2) ensure a steady food source and; 3) No devastating diseases or predators are allowed to sweep the area.

E.O.Wilson

Can we protect Ballona from human predation?



GRASSROOTS COALITION'S WEBSITE OFFERS A RIGHT - HAND MAST OF TITLES THAT CAN BE CLICKED TO LINK.

-Also, one can use the SEARCH BOX at top right of page to type in key words to find materials on the website.

Recommended Links include:

- [Stop Drying Out Ballona...](#)

This letter is responsive to the LA Regional Water Quality Control Board pertaining to Playa Vista's comments on numerous matters pertaining to [Ballona](#) and SoCalGas and the Settlement Agreement (1990) between Playa Vista leadership and the California Coastal Commission, CD 11, Friends of [Ballona](#), USACE and the Ca. State Lands Commission and others.

- [California Coastal Commission History of Ballona](#)—How what occurred in 1990 affects [Ballona](#) now.

- [How Hazardous Is Too Hazardous](#)—SOCALGAS, current issues and internal SCG documentation of reservoir leakage.

- [How to Drain a Wetlands and Get Away With It; The Betrayal of the Public's Trust](#)

- [SIERRA CLUB- AIRPORT MARINA GROUP website](#)

- [Southern Sierra News – \[CDFW: Ballona Betrayal of Public Trust\]\(#\)](#)

- [Jill Stewart's Presentation on Carbon Sequestration](#)

- [Margot Griswold's Presentation on Restoration of \[Ballona\]\(#\) Wetlands Ecological Reserve](#)

- Numerous videos of agency hearings pertaining to [Ballona](#) Wetlands.