PRESS RELEASE FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Grassroots Coalition and Ballona Ecosystem Education Project (BEEP) Press Release

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LAWSUIT FILED TO CHALLENGE THE BALLONA WETLANDS “RESTORATION” PROJECT

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On Thursday, January 28, 2021, two environmental groups, Grassroots Coalition and Ballona Ecosystem Education Project (BEEP) filed a lawsuit challenging California Department of Fish and Wildlife’s “restoration” project at the Ballona Wetlands. The lawsuit challenges the EIR prepared for the project and seeks to force CDFW to rescind all approvals for the project.

The environmental groups allege that the project is “euphemistically” called the Ballona Wetlands Restoration Project, because it is not restoration at all. “CDFW wants to create a full tidal bay at the Ballona Wetlands Ecological Reserve, when the coastal marsh has historically been a mix of seasonal freshwater and brackish wetland habitat for the last 4,000 years. The sand dune on the western edge of Ballona could break through to the ocean during heavy rain events, but the natural dune would close back up pretty quickly”, noted Patricia McPherson, Grassroots Coalition’s president, referencing the historical studies done on Ballona.

The groups’ attorney, Todd T. Cardiff, is confident that the lawsuit will be successful. “The EIR is a mess, and CDFW’s findings supporting the project are even worse. CDFW apparently expects that a judge will believe that scooping out 2.5 million cubic yards of wetland habitat, and building massive 20 foot plus berms and levees will have no significant impact. And that is just one of the many problems with the EIR. Comments from USFWS biologists provided a laundry list of harm to endangered and protected species. Not even the Army Corp of Engineers is buying what CDFW is selling”.

However, Mr. Cardiff, moderated his tone. “My clients would support a project that actually falls within the definition of restoration. This project is not restoration, will destroy precious coastal and wetland views, and cause significant harm to wildlife that currently depends on the Ballona Wetlands Ecological Reserve for survival.”

Rex Frankel of Ballona Ecosystem Education Project (BEEP) further noted, “There are more than a dozen endangered and protected wildlife and plant species that will be adversely impacted by the project. ‘

Jonathan Coffin said, “The White-tailed Kite which is a fully protected and rare species is visiting the Ballona Wetlands grasslands today, there are four of them here presently, and they are here because Ballona is providing the grassland habitat with the small mammal prey the Kite depends on to live. The engineered earth moving project which is not a "restoration" will diminish the grassland habitat by design with a preference for open salt water over the special grasslands with the existing small mammal prey the Kite demands.”

Jeanette Vosburg, a board member of Grassroots Coalition, stated, “I understand the impacts to marine fisheries caused by destruction of coastal wetlands over the past 150 years, but the remedy is not to irrevocably destroy one of the few remaining seasonal freshwater/brackish wetland habitats in coastal Southern California .”

Attorney Cardiff explained the need to challenge the project now, instead of at the Coastal Commission, or Army Corp of Engineers during the anticipated EIS process. “If the EIR was not challenged, other agencies could rely on the faulty analysis and conclusions of the EIR. We absolutely will be challenging this project under NEPA and the Coastal Act if and when the time comes. But, it is imperative that the court’s strike down the EIR as deficient under CEQA.”

Attached hereto:

Press Release

Copy of the Petition for Writ of Mandamus Under CEQA

Photo of a pair of White-tail Kites in Ballona Wetlands by Photographer Jonathan Coffin

STONE BIRD LINK -- TO VIEW BALLONA WETLANDS ECOLOGICAL RESERVE GO TO https://www.flickr.com/photos/stonebird/