

**COMMENT LETTERS TO US ARMY CORPS OF ENGINEERS REGARDING THE
PILOT PROGRAM FOR CANOEING/KAYAKING IN THE LOS ANGELES RIVER
WITHIN THE SEPULVEDA BASIN RECREATION AREA**

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Date: Tuesday, June 28, 2011, 5:03 PM

USACE:

In regards to the proposed pilot program for kayaking/canoeing in the Los Angeles River within the Sepulveda Basin, the San Fernando Valley Audubon Society has the following serious concerns.

1. The program is targeted to begin in early June while there is still significant nesting activity of Blue Grosbeak, Yellow Breasted Chat, Common Yellowthroat, Song Sparrow, Black Crowned Night Herons, Bullock's Oriole, et. al. in the riparian habitat immediately adjacent to this section of the River. If the project is approved, we recommend a start date no earlier than July 15 to prevent what would undoubtedly be a threat to their breeding success.
2. The activity at the put-in, take-out, and portage or midway stopping points would disturb the soil and vegetation at those areas and create easily accessible areas for non-program illegal and unsafe activities that are already a major problem in the Sepulveda Basin due to the lack of manpower for proper patrols.
3. This would set a highly visible precedent for boating in the River and would create the appearance that the public can now bring their own watercraft to recreate at will. Signs stating otherwise would be ignored and destroyed as they have been in the adjacent Wildlife Area where there has been absolutely no enforcement of posted regulations.
4. Inadequate attention has been given to parking, restrooms, and accessibility (all of which are non-existent or illegal) at the entry and exit points.
5. The Sepulveda Basin Wildlife Areas Steering Committee, the California Native Plant Society, and the San Fernando Valley Audubon Society, all of which have a 20-30+ year history of active public involvement with this section of the Los Angeles River, have not been consulted or advised of this proposal until the final week for comments when an article was noticed in the local paper.

Thank you for considering our concerns. We would appreciate being kept updated as to the status of this proposal.

Kris Ohlenkamp
Conservation Chair
San Fernando Valley Audubon Society
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Woodland Hills, CA 91364
(747) 444-9683

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Date: Friday, July 8, 2011, 10:21 AM

To: Lisa Sandoval USACE

Re: License for Pilot Non-Motorized Boating Program within the Los Angeles River, Sepulveda Basin

Thank you for the extension of time to provide comments on this proposal. It allowed us to perform a preliminary survey of breeding birds along the affected stretch of the Los Angeles River. On July 6, 2011 Steve Hartman & Kris Ohlenkamp walked from the Orange Line Busway crossing of the river to the Burbank Boulevard crossing of the river. Between 6:30 and 9:30 AM we observed 45 species of birds and positive evidence of current breeding on 23 of those. All of the breeding birds were observed between the concrete banks of the river. One is an endangered species - Bell's Vireo. Two are restricted to the water itself - Black Necked Stilt and Pied Billed Grebe. And several others are species of special concern. A complete list is at the end of this email.

In addition to the presence of these protected sensitive birds it was noted that the Mallards in the river have recently molted and have very limited flight capabilities at the moment. Even a single boat down the river at this time would constitute harassment.

In light of these findings and the significant impacts that would undoubtedly occur during this sensitive period of time, we request a complete halt to this project until a more thorough breeding bird study can be performed that will determine when it would be safe to proceed. With the current state of breeding and territorial establishment there will be sensitive young birds within the project area at least until late August.

Regarding the locations where participants enter and exit the river, and any portages, we are concerned about disturbing nesting sites. During our tour on July 8 with LACC and MRCA, we were shown two portage locations where participants would have to walk over boulders and rocks in the river and carry their conveyances to open water. We suggest that each of these specific locations be surveyed for nesting birds that might be disturbed by such activities.

We are in agreement with the goals of the project to introduce and educate the public about the river: it would be good for the public to see the incredible amounts of trash hanging from the trees and strewn on the banks, to question why there is foam on the river, and to learn the difference between native and non-native plants and why native plants are important for wildlife. We understand that one of the goals of the proposed river trip is for the participants to have a memorable and unique experience, but - please - not at the expense of the habitat that they are going there to enjoy.

Thank you,

Kris Ohlenkamp
Conservation Chair
San Fernando Valley Audubon Society

Steven Hartman
Chair
Sepulveda Basin Wildlife Areas Steering Committee

Bird List – July 6, 2011

Mallard - breed in neighborhood
Pied-Billed Grebe - recently fledged young in river
Double-crested Cormorant - breed in neighborhood
Great Blue Heron - rookery in eucalyptus with parents/young feeding in river
Snowy Egret - breed in neighborhood

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Green Heron - breed in neighborhood
Black-crowned Night-Heron - rookery in Pines with parents/young feeding in river, bird with twigs in beak
Turkey Vulture
Cooper's Hawk - immature seen adjacent to river
Red-shouldered Hawk - breed in neighborhood
Red-tailed Hawk - breed in neighborhood
American Coot - breed in river
Killdeer - breed in river
Black-necked Stilt - nest and young observed at river edge
Spotted Sandpiper
California Gull
Mourning Dove - fledglings observed in river channel
White-throated Swift
Black-chinned Hummingbird
Anna's Hummingbird - nest in neighborhood
Allen's Hummingbird - nest in neighborhood
Downy Woodpecker
Black Phoebe - young observed being fed in river channel
Western Kingbird - nest in neighborhood
Bell's Vireo - 2 nesting territories established in river channel
Northern Rough-winged Swallow
Cliff Swallow - nesting under busway bridge and Burbank Boulevard bridge
Barn Swallow
Bushtit - fledglings observed in river channel
Bewick's Wren - fledglings observed in river channel
Northern Mockingbird - fledglings observed in river channel
Orange-crowned Warbler
Yellow Warbler - at least 6 nesting pairs in river channel
Common Yellowthroat - at least 12 nesting pairs in river channel
Yellow-breasted Chat - 3 nesting territories in river channel
Spotted Towhee - nesting in river channel
California Towhee - nesting in river channel
Song Sparrow - nesting in river channel
Black-headed Grosbeak - 4 nesting territories in river channel
Red-winged Blackbird - nesting in neighborhood
Brown-headed Cowbird - lay eggs in river channel
Hooded Oriole - nest in river channel
Bullock's Oriole - nest in river channel
House Finch - nest in neighborhood
Lesser Goldfinch - nest in river channel
American Goldfinch - nest in river channel

This list may not be complete and is based solely upon our observations on this date. (The term "neighborhood" means within 1 mile of this section of river.)