East of the Coachella Valley is a 5,000+ acre area along Pinkham Wash bounded by Joshua Tree National Park on the north and the Mecca Hills Wilderness on the south. For desert tortoise and wildlife moving back and forth between the National Park and the Wilderness, it’s a bit of desert paradise, especially with the huge area of desert dry wash woodland along Pinkham Wash and on down into Box Canyon. It’s a wonderful area, but there’s trouble in paradise.

Glorious Land Company (GLC) proposes to build a “new town” on the site and has submitted a Specific Plan proposal to Riverside County for 8,500 residential units, over 1.3 million square feet of commercial office, retail, hotels, light industrial and public facilities, flood control channels, and so on. GLC calls its proposed project Paradise Valley and there’s the trouble. If we’re going to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, stop despoiling our fragile desert lands, and come to grips with drought, it won’t be through leapfrog development like this, miles from nowhere.

This project:
- Is inconsistent with the Coachella Valley Multiple Species Habitat Conservation Plan (MSHCP), a regional conservation plan that took 12 years to prepare and get approved, and which has been in effect since 2008. In defiance of the MSHCP, the County has not had the required Joint Project Review (JPR) prepared to determine if the project would be consistent with the MSHCP’s Conservation Objectives. Instead, the County proposes to have JPRs prepared for individual future phases of the project, after it has been approved. If this approach is allowed to proceed, the MSHCP will have been fatally subverted and all the regional conservation benefits of the MSHCP will be discarded. Paradise will be paved.
- Would sever the connectivity between Joshua Tree National Park and the Mecca Hills Wilderness for wildlife movement and ecological processes.
- It’s 17.5 miles from downtown Indio and over 30 miles from Costco in the middle of the Coachella Valley. Realistically, the “new town” residents would be constantly traveling to and from the “old towns,” commuting to work, shopping, playing, visiting friends, etc. Far more miles would be driven because the development would be nowhere near the existing cities of the Coachella Valley. That’s not smart sustainable development.

Save Paradise!
Submitted by Bill Havert

WHAT YOU CAN DO TO HELP:
- Write to the Riverside County Planning Commission expressing your opposition to the Paradise Valley Specific Plan project. Comments may be emailed to the County Planner for the project, Russell Brady, at rbrady@RIVCO.ORG

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growth as claimed by GLC. It’s old-fashioned leapfrog development with unnecessary impacts on air quality and climate change through heavy reliance on fossil fuels for those excessive miles.

- Requires new infrastructure rather than efficiently extending existing infrastructure in or adjacent to a city. While it is certainly new growth, it is neither smart nor sustainable when there is no infrastructure and no services. The project has to annex into a water district and obtain water through a combination of groundwater and water rights obtained from drought-stricken Kern County. In other words, the water isn’t here.

- Is currently over five thousand acres of undisturbed desert habitat, and it should stay that way. The proposed development doesn’t just destroy the acres directly affected by the mass grading and construction; it also impacts the residual open space on the site as well as thousands of adjacent acres in the National Park and the Mecca Hills Wilderness in well-documented ways. These “edge” effects include the introduction of invasive species and new predators; disruption of ecological processes and wildlife movement corridors; urban runoff of fertilizers, pesticides, and pollutants; lighting; noise; and trespass. Development of this site would severely damage the ecological integrity of thousands, if not tens of thousands, of acres of fragile desert.

The project site is in the MSHCP’s Desert Tortoise and Linkage Conservation Area; it should be purchased by the Coachella Valley Conservation Commission (CVCC) as part of its implementation of the MSHCP. GLC prefers to develop the site, but if their project is denied by the County Board of Supervisors, then perhaps they will agree to sell to the CVCC.

The Sierra Club, the Center for Biological Diversity, and an array of other conservation and environmental/social justice groups have been opposing the project and seeking to compel the County to comply with the MSHCP. The County currently has a fourth Planning Commission hearing scheduled for May 15th in Palm Desert.

Introducing Our New Chapter Political Chair, Bhavin Jindal

Hello Sierra Club Family. I am excited and humbled to serve as your chapter political chair for the 2019-2020 elections. These will be an impactful two years and our goal is to join with our allies and make new ones to protect our world for our friends, family, and neighbors.

About me:
I have lived most of my life in Southern California and have been in the Inland Empire since the first grade. Growing up in San Bernardino I have witnessed the open arm embrace of policies that disregard the wellbeing of our environment and those that depended on it. As a result, I’ve grown up with a desire to contribute my piece to creating a better place to live in.

I started college at Riverside Community College, and I graduated from Claremont McKenna with a dual degree in economics and government with an emphasis in public policy. In my free time I like to catch up on national and international events.

I usually go on a binge-watching spree once a month for existing shows and try to stay updated on the latest movies. When I was younger, I wanted to be an astronaut. Now I can be found gazing at our night sky and reading ancient legends and myths based on what our ancestors saw.

My Goals:
In recent years the number of environmentally conscious candidates has grown dramatically. I would like to see this growth accelerated. Our biggest cities still do not believe in the concept of sustainable development and allow the abuse of our resources with little oversight.

We want to be present and carefully consider every single election that takes place within the San Gorgonio region. One of our limitations in doing so has simply been resources and bandwidth. Much of the work this year will be to start the organizing process and strengthen the resources we must work with in order to have a wider reach in the upcoming elections. Second, it is important to build and strengthen allies that that share our views. We will be looking into ways that we may contribute to helping voters understand the viewpoints of our endorsed candidates and turn out to vote for them. Local policies are just as impactful as state and federal ones. Thus, it becomes just as important to focus on small local races as it is our large state and federal ones.
Chapter’s March Program Features a Timely Subject
With Judith Ashton Speaking on “Citizens’ Climate Lobby”

The March 5th chapter meeting will feature Judith Ashton, Group Leader of the Redlands Chapter of Citizens’ Climate Lobby (CCL). The meeting starts at 7:30 p.m. at the San Bernardino County Museum, 2024 Orange Tree Lane, Redlands.

Judith will focus on the “Energy Innovation and Carbon Dividend Act of 2019,” H.R.763, introduced in January. The bill encompasses the goals of the CCL, including a 40% reduction in carbon emissions in the first 12 years, creating over two million new jobs, and returning a dividend to American households. At press time, the bill has nine co-sponsors, four of them from California but none local.

The Citizens’ Climate Lobby is a grassroots environmental group advocating for a revenue-neutral carbon fee and dividend at the federal level. Founded in America in 2007, it has affiliates in 37 other countries and 400 local chapters worldwide. The CCL trains and supports volunteers to build relationships with their elected representatives to order to influence climate policy. Judith is a Sierra Club member but her main environment work is with the Citizens’ Climate Lobby. She is a member of the Redlands Human Relations Commission. She is retired from her previous jobs as Dean of Humanities and Social Science at Crafton Hills College and head of the English Department at San Bernardino Valley College.

Save This Date!
Wildlands Conservancy is Focus of Chapter’s April 2nd Program

Come learn about the Wildlands Conservancy’s preserves, which offer great opportunities for education and recreation. The conservancy protects these significant areas for their landscape and wildlife values, but they are also open to the public for enjoyment. Our speaker, John Trammell, is Project Manager for the conservancy, working out of their headquarters in Oak Glen.

Meet John Trammell as he shares an inside look at the visitor opportunities and conservation work at the conservancy’s Southern California preserves and grand statewide conservation projects. John has worked for Wildlands since 2014. He has worked as a Naturalist at Oak Glen Preserve, Ranger at Bluff Lake Reserve, Conservation Advocate and currently Project Manager at the Executive Headquarters.

Preserves in the San Gorgonio Chapter area total over 36,000 acres and include Bluff Lake Reserve in Big Bear Lake, Bearpaw Reserve in Forest Falls, Oak Glen Preserve in Oak Glen, Pioneertown Mountains Preserve in Pioneertown, Whitewater Preserve in Whitewater, and Mission Creek Preserve in Desert Hot Springs. These preserves are open to the public free of charge.

In addition to creating a preserve system, Wildlands has worked on many statewide and nationally significant conservation projects that has resulted in protecting 2.1 million acres of California’s heroic landscapes.
Island Hopping in Channel Islands National Park
April 7-9   May 5-7   June 9-11   July 14-16   August 18-20,   September 22-24,   October 20-22

Join us for a 3-day, 3-island, live-aboard tour of the enchanting Channel Islands. Hike wild, windswept trails bordered with blazing wildflowers. Kayak rugged coastlines. Marvel at pristine waters teeming with frolicking seals and sea lions. Train your binoculars on unusual sea and land birds—and an occasional whale. Watch for the endangered island fox. Look for reminders of the Chumash people who lived on these islands for thousands of years. Or, just relax at sea. This cruise departs from Santa Barbara. The cost, $730, includes an assigned bunk and all meals, snacks, and beverages. Kayaking will be overseen by our concessionaire; all hikes will be on trails, class 1 terrain. This trip is a fundraiser to support the Sierra Club political program in California. To reserve space send a $200 check, written to California Sierra Club PAC to Joan Jones Holtz, 11826 The Wye St., El Monte, CA 91732.

For more information contact leaders:
Joan Jones Holtz: jholtzhln@aol.com; 626-443-0706

12th Annual Walk on Blue Mountain

Join your friends on the 12th Annual Walk on Blue Mountain on Sunday, March 3rd, at 8:00 a.m. Originally sponsored by the Sierra Club, Friends of Blue Mountain and Foundation of Grand Terrace, this year the City of Grand Terrace will organize the event.

This annual walk originated as an effort to promote the development of a park on Blue Mountain in the City of Grand Terrace and a hiking trail to the top of the mountain. Since last year’s walk, Grand Terrace received a $220,000 grant from the State of California to develop the park/trail. The city is providing matching funds and hoping to open the park in 2020. The walk starts at the intersection of Palm Ave. and Honey Hill Drive in Grand Terrace. Plan on a start time of 8:00 a.m. with the latest departing time of 2:00 PM. The 3-mile hike includes a gain of 1,092 feet if you go all the way to the top. Wear sturdy footwear and bring water and sun/wind protection.

Friendly dogs on leashes are allowed. Plenty of free on-street parking and parking at Grand Terrace City Hall is available.

For more information contact Jessi Smith at j.smith@grandterrace-ca.gov or 909-824-6621 Ext 259. It’s time to celebrate the upcoming success of this multi-year effort!

— Keller Peak Ski Hut —
Celebrating an 80 Year Legacy

Keller Peak Ski Hut was built by the Ski Mountaineers in 1938 and is managed for the use of all Sierra Club members by the Keller Hut Committee, staffed by volunteers from several club chapters, sections, and groups. The hut is located at an elevation of 6800’ between Running Springs and Big Bear Lake in the San Bernardino Mountains, conveniently located across the street from Snow Valley Ski Area. Chains required when snow falls.

Overnight Capacity: 30 (Overnight: Inside 20 sleeping pads - Outside space for tent, hammock, or sleep in vehicle).
Facilities: Two rustic living/dining rooms, two dormitory lofts (separate men and women on open weekends) with 10 sleeping pads each. Fully equipped kitchen with cookware, dishes, and utensils. Furnish your own food, sleeping bag or bedding, flashlight, personal items, and hand towels. In cold winter months please contribute firewood for the pot-belly stove and fireplace. Reservations: Open to Sierra Club members and their guests.

Weekend Rates: $15.00 each for Sierra Club members and their family, $20.00 each for non-members and their family, $10.00 each for children under 12 years of age.

Day use Rates: $5.00 each for Sierra Club members and their family, $10.00 each for non-members and their family, $5.00 for children under 12 years of age.

Upcoming: March 9-10 - Open Weekend. For more information contact Brian Decker at scubaairpig@yahoo.com. April 27 - Spring Hut Host Training (Some restrictions apply) Contact: kellerskihutouting@gmail.com for more information. May 11-12 – Grand Re-Opening Party. Contact Mike Adams at adamsfreerange@aol.com

Join us today!
But first need more info?
• Contact us at: chair@sangorgonio.sierraclub.org, or call our office at 951-684-6203.

Ready to help Change the World? Check out our volunteer opportunities here at Volunteer Connection: https://clubvolunteer.org

Our Executive Committee meets the fourth Tuesday of each month at 7:00 pm via conference call. If you are interested in joining call email or call for conference information: chair@sangorgonio.sierraclub.org or call 951-684-6203