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Successful advocacy campaign has Kern County crying "spam"

Submitted 4 days ago by Jason Z. [probably 10-05-09]

The Salsa-using Center for Biological Diversity ran an action in its newsletter last week asking its members to take an online action to protect the California condor by messaging the Kern County, Calif., county supervisors in opposition to a development that would encroach condor habitat.

Evidently, it hit its mark. Kern County Supervisors' electronic mail accounts exploded with more 1,200 form e-mails Thursday as a nationwide digital campaign launched its opposition to the Tejon Mountain Village project.

A nice bit of earned media ... followed by a familiar refrain of the put-upon public official compelled to endure public input to their public mail addresses: it's spaaaaaaaaaam!

County computer technicians scrambled to lock down the source of the e-mails, which they characterized as an assault, and divert them away from supervisors' flooded accounts ... "Mailboxes were being inundated by a flood of spam e-mails," said Bill Fawns of the county Information Technology Services Division.

County Clerk Kathleen Krause said ... "All the e-mails are the same except for the 'from' field, (which) is populated with valid e-mail addresses but it isn't actually (from) that person."

That's an outrageous falsehood, of course. People taking sincere online action will still stick to the suggested text of a message 90% of the time. And why not? The webform action's purpose is to allow a person to participate in a public debate, conveniently amid the hurly-burly of a day already too short on hours.

That this is treated as illegitimate for reasons of ignorance or political expediency does not make it so.

The Center for Biological Diversity at least gets a word in edgewise here:

"We have nothing to do with any spam attack ... If 1,200 people have written letters -- that's democracy."