

Tejon Rancho

by Martin Murie

(Swans - February 23, 2009) In 1852, the Tejon rancho was a big part of "Indian country." Today it is the biggest privately owned ranch in the nation: 270,000 acres of wilderness encompassing a junction of four different ecoregions: southern Sierra Nevada mountains, Central Valley, southern forests, and Mojave Desert.

Back in the nineteenth century that vast landholding of Mexican or Spanish origin was considered not fit for white people, but ideal for a big Indian Reservation that would "solve" the Indian problem. Just as in Arizona and other places across the burgeoning "White Man's Dream," Indian Nations were granted lands that the whites considered worthless.

We have been permitted to examine the report of B. D. Wilson, Esq., Indian Commissioner for the Southern District of California, upon the condition of the Indians coming particularly under his supervision. Besides the statistical and other valuable information contained in the report, it suggests a plan for the future government of the Indians, strictly philanthropic, and which, if carried out, cannot fail to benefit a people once more than half civilized (sic) but now exhibiting such sins of retrogression and decay as must be deplored by every humane heart. . . .

(Mr. Wilson proposes) that the lands within the following boundaries be reserved for the use of the different Indian tribes now inhabiting these regions. A line drawn from the eastern boundary of Santa Isabel direct to the N. E. corner of the Laguna rancho (thereby including Temecula and Agua Caliente) thence along the northern boundary of the Laguna rancho so as to include the San Jacinto rancho and the tract commonly known as San Gorgonio -- the whole distance, say 100 miles, thence in a direct course to the Tejon (including the rancho of that name) thence 100 miles to the Four Creeks, the remainder of the boundary to be completed by running a line due south, say 40 miles, from Santa Isabel to the boundary between Mexico and the United States. (B. D. Wilson, *The Indians Of Southern California In 1852*, University of Nebraska Press, Lincoln. Excerpt from *The Los Angeles Star*, 1853.)

Today the Tejon overlaps land set aside for preservation of condors, a species that has been hanging on for decades, on the verge of extinction. The habitat plans created by the Fish and Wildlife Service --being one of the last-minute blows against species and climate change and thus, ultimately, against survival of our own species -- are the result of compromise after compromise in favor of the Tejon Ranch Company.

. . . opposition from conservation groups, including the Center for Biological Diversity, determined to not see some of the condor's last best habitat paved over for just another sprawling mega development. (*Endangered Earth*, Summer 2008.)

In 2006, the company entered into talks with the groups to trade preservation of parts of the ranch for the environmental communities' blessing to proceed with development of other parts. The [Center](#) pulled out of those talks in 2007 when Tejon made clear its unwillingness to pull back from its current development plans adequately to provide sufficient protection of habitat for the condor and the ranch's other sensitive plants and animals.

The report goes on to outline outrageous components of the pact that was agreed to by the Sierra Club and California Audubon, two of the groups that gave a green light to the project. Those who signed on would be forever after prohibited from future opposition to moves by development forces. A "conservancy" will be set up to protect endangered species and habitats, but its funding

will depend on sales and leases on lands owned by the Tejon Ranch Company. These and other obstacles are giant concessions to the Company Store. It's a sell-out. Developers simply do not understand habitats. That's the job of biologists and ecologists in the employ of Fish and Wildlife. Where are these people when we need them?

There is an attitude of surrender and excessive compromise on the part of what seems, and might be, a majority of conservation and environmental organizations. Surrender is not the way to protect habitats. It is not the spirit that animated the first wave of conservationists. Their attitude was to conserve and share with *The Others*. Those days are gone. We have to reclaim that heritage. What we desperately need is a pervasive, confident, combative movement and, from where we are now, what would look like a revolutionary new spirit of opposition. What's in it for us? Survival, that's what.

This new approach to the earth is beautifully exemplified by a *Swans* contributor, Michael Barker, who provides an exhaustively documented tale of takeovers of national and international "environmental" organizations by extremely wealthy, corporate-connected people. (See ["When Environmentalists Legitimize Plunder,"](#) *Swans*, January 26, 2009.)

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THE COMPANION OF THINKING PEOPLE
