



May 28, 2013

Ms. Holly Costa
US Army Corps of Engineers
1455 Market Street
San Francisco, CA 94103

Mr. Scott Wilson
Acting Regional Manager
Bay Delta Region
California Department of Fish and Wildlife
7329 Silverado Trail
Napa, CA 94558

Ms. Kim Squires
Senior Fish and Wildlife Biologist
Endangered Species Program
US Fish and Wildlife Service
2800 Cottage Way, Room W-2605
Sacramento, CA 95825

Mr. Ryan Olah
Endangered Species Program
US Fish and Wildlife Service
2800 Cottage Way, Room W-2605
Sacramento, CA 95825

Re: Knowland Park Development

Dear Ms. Costa, Mr. Wilson, Ms. Squires, and Mr. Olah:

The Center for Biological Diversity is writing to comment on the application of the Oakland Zoo for "take" permits for the Alameda whipsnake under the state and federal Endangered Species Acts for its proposed California Trails exhibit in Knowland Park, in Alameda County. We urge you to deny permits for this project in its current form.

We have reviewed the report by Dr. Shawn Smallwood submitted by the California Native Plant Society, analyzing the zoo's revised Biological Assessment regarding the Alameda whipsnake. The Center concurs with Dr. Smallwood's conclusions regarding threats to the continued survival and recovery of the whipsnake due to direct impacts to snakes and impacts to their habitat posed by the project. Further, we concur with the CNPS conclusion and the recommendation by the California Department of Fish and Wildlife that the project be moved away from the current environmentally sensitive site in order to avoid impacts to whipsnakes and rare maritime chaparral habitat.

We oppose the siting of this project on high quality whipsnake habitat--there are far better alternatives. We dispute the zoo's conclusion that the Knowland Park population of Alameda whipsnake may not be viable; there is absolutely no evidence to support this conclusion.

The Center has worked throughout the East Bay to ensure that Alameda whipsnakes aren't eliminated from their few remaining refuges. The Alameda whipsnake range is severely restricted, and has been especially threatened by development on the west side of the East Bay hills. Recent peer-reviewed research on the genetics of Alameda whipsnakes has revealed the importance of populations in western Alameda County, which may hold the key to the genetic diversity of the subspecies (Richmond et al., 2011: *Quantitative assessment of population genetic structure and historical phylogeography of the Alameda Whipsnake, Masticophis lateralis euryxanthus*). This report concludes that "land managers may want to focus their efforts on conserving the habitat in these particular places."

The zoo's proposed project at Knowland Park would result in whipsnake habitat reduction and degradation. Knowland Park's rare chaparral, native prairie, oak woodlands, coastal scrub and rocky outcrops support important local biodiversity and should be protected.

We urge the zoo to locate its California Trails exhibit to a less environmentally sensitive site and make good on its promise to bring the story of extinction to the public in a manner befitting an organization interested in conservation. Until then, we urge the regulatory agencies to continue to protect the Alameda whipsnake and the natural heritage of Knowland Park by withholding permits from this project.

Sincerely,

Jeff Miller
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