

Sept. 20, 2010

Ms. Becky Miller
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Region 8
Wildlife and Sport Fish Restoration Program
2800 Cottage Way, Room W-1729
Sacramento, CA 95825

Dear Grants Review Committee:

The Santa Barbara Audubon Society (SBAS) has been instrumental in helping to protect breeding areas for the threatened Western Snowy Plover and endangered Least Tern at the mouth of Devereux Slough in conjunction with the managers of University of California's Coal Oil Point Reserve (COPR). Our work includes procuring grants, developing educational materials, training docents to educate the public and protect the plover, and assisting with volunteer coordination for the Snowy Plover Docent Program. In addition, SBAS has sponsored and directed restoration efforts in upland areas of COPR for many years. SBAS has long recognized the avian values of this region of the coast and upland areas and we share that enthusiasm with the community by conducting birding tours and field trips to the area.

Acquisition of the Ocean Meadows golf course will provide a very important and immediate opportunity to offer birding tours on one of the few sections of the Ellwood-Devereux Open Space with perennial fresh water. Under private ownership and active play, the 63-acre area is currently unavailable for wildlife field trips. The freshwater resources now occupied by the golf course would provide support for a unique suite of birds and mammals along the creek. Upstream, the riparian resources are enveloped within a eucalyptus woodland or cement channels, and downstream the water becomes saline within the tidally-influenced Devereux Slough. In addition to bird use by such species as Sora, Herons, Red-winged Blackbirds and raptors, the freshwater resources are extremely valuable for supporting bird and wildlife use of the adjacent 560 acres of protected upland areas within the Ellwood-Devereux Open Space. Removing active management of the lawn and regular disturbance by golfers will enhance these resources for people and wildlife.

SBAS is actively working with a team of local concerned biologists to research, protect and enhance wildlife linkages and corridors within Santa Barbara County. The Ocean Meadows property provides a key link between the Goleta Slough open space areas (over 1000 acres) and the Ellwood-Devereux Open Space (over 560 acres).

SBAS views the acquisition the Ocean Meadows golf course as an important ecological and educational opportunity that will serve the public for years into the future. The new natural area will provide important buffering from the impending impacts of global climate change including increased storm severity and flooding and the potential for sea level rise.

Sincerely,

Stephen J. Ferry
Conservation Chair
Santa Barbara Audubon Society