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The Bay Foundation Helps Out on Phase 1 of Liberty Canyon Wildlife Crossing for Mountain Lions to Cross Freeways Safely

Los Angeles, CA (July 1, 2015) – Humans and animals instinctually know what they consider ‘appealing’, and move in that direction. With The Bay Foundation’s (TBF) help, creating that appeal is exactly what the Resource Conservation District of the Santa Monica Mountains (RCDSMM) hopes to do for mountain lions so they may cross the 101 Freeway safely and easily, meet new mates and avoid the plight of the famed P22.

Since Spring, TBF’s Senior Watershed Advisor Mark Abramson has been providing project management support to RCDSMM’s project architect Clark Stevens on Phase 1 of “Liberty Canyon Wildlife Passage Improvements Project”. The project is funded by a primary grant from the Wildlife Conservation Board, with additional support from Los Angeles County Supervisor District 3, Santa Monica Mountains Conservancy, and CalTrans. This is the first phase of a multi-phase crossing effort and would complement the ultimate goal of a highway spanning wildlife overpass at Liberty Canyon that is the focus of the current #SaveLACougars campaign.

Abramson is helping Stevens and RCDSMM’s Senior Conservation Biologist Rosi Dagit design the best landscape situation that would lead the mountain lions toward this crossing, and then encourage them to use that instead of trying to cross the open freeway. The crossing will utilize the lightly-traveled Liberty Canyon Road underpass, altering the topography and adding vegetation to attract these animals to safe passage.

Stevens, also the architect of the wildlife overpass, and Abramson are also doing significant restoration and wildlife cover in preparation for the overpass project, designs for which will be released by the RCDSMM and Caltrans later this month.

With people worldwide following the story of P22, and his predecessors, people are starting to understand that such safe corridors from one mountain range to another in Southern California, are critical to the mountain lions’ survival and genetic health. Without safe corridors, the males sometimes die in fights with the dominant male, both sexes are killed on roadways, while others inbreed, causing health problems in the population.

“The corridor is incredibly important so that these animals have an opportunity to mix,” states Stevens. “With our grant, the goal is to get the different groups of mountain lions to connect and mingle across different mountain ranges. And in order to do this, we need to put in place the right ‘approach landscape’ and eventually, to create a robust crossing zone with multiple passage options. The Bay Foundation and Mark Abramson are regular collaborators with the RCDSMM, and once again a perfect fit for implementing this critical habitat enhancement project.”



According to Abramson, the overall idea is to create cover from cars and traffic, highlight some views and negate others so they focus on surroundings—from vegetation to darkness to paths—they like that will guide them. Some possible improvements include:

- Adding dense vegetated cover south on both sides of the freeway and the adjacent Agoura Road to facilitate movement of the lions in/out of the foothills. This would improve habitat value overall, beyond encouraging wildlife passage.
- Create “wash” areas that resemble a riparian wash, reconnecting and simulating the historic creek corridor that existed at Liberty Canyon before construction of the freeway.
- Add three miles of fencing, in conjunction with Caltrans, to discourage the mountain lions from crossing at other, less protected and more dangerous spots along the freeway. A previously unknown and genetically perfect male lion, was killed in Oct. 2013 in this area. Genetic testing showed that he had originated in the San Gabriel Mountains, and so had successfully crossing three major freeways before being struck on the south shoulder of the 101 after crossing all 10 lanes from the north.

“As soon as I learned of this project, I committed myself and TBF to seeing its vision realized--an easy choice when working with such great partners,” states TBF Executive Director Tom Ford. “As the lions flow through this new crossing bypassing the 101, their genes flow with them. It’s been really encouraging seeing people show such a great interest and understanding of the importance in the preservation of these cats and our wilderness.”

There are many opportunities, as well, for the public to engage, volunteer and donate to this project. Please visit www.savelacougars.org for updates on the project and opportunities to get involved.

About The Bay Foundation (TBF)

The Bay Foundation (TBF) is a 501(c) 3 non-profit environmental group founded in 1991 to contribute to the restoration and enhancement of the Santa Monica Bay (LA-Ventura county line to the Palos Verdes Peninsula) and local coastal waters. TBF and the Santa Monica Bay Restoration Commission are partners in the Santa Monica Bay National Estuary Program (SMBNEP), one of 28 entities that comprise the National Estuary Program established pursuant to Section 320 of the Clean Water Act. TBF raises and expends funds for research, education, planning, cleanup efforts and other priorities identified in the SMBNEP’s *Bay Restoration Plan*. As advocates for the Bay, TBF works collaboratively with a broad group of stakeholders, including government agencies, industry, environmental groups, and scientists, to implement innovative policies and projects that clean up the waterways, create green spaces and natural habitats in the Los Angeles region. TBF conducts research and mentors student interns and volunteers through its Center for Santa Monica Bay Studies at Loyola Marymount University. (www.santamonica.org)