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**De Anza College Wildlife Corridor Stwedarship Team comments on the Coyote Valley Specific Plan's DEIR**

by Julie Phillips (Morgan Family Chair in Environmental Studies, Tul[illegible]), Pat Cornely (Executive Director, Kirsch Center for Environmental Studies), Tanya Diamond, Lead Field Studies Instructor, Badger Biologist,
Henry Coletto Field Consultant, Former Game Warden Santa Clara County,
Christine Klinkowski, Wildlife Biologist, Data Anayses Consultant
Field Studies Interns: Veronica Davis, Melissa Dekoven, John Fosnaugh, Jessica Gonzalez, Josh Goodwin, Lakhena Howey, Rick Malupo, Alan Smith, Alice Quan

To establish the presence of wildlife species and wildlife corridors, a corridor analyses based on data collection must be preformed (Beier 1992, 1993, Clevenger 2001, 2005, Federal Highway Administration 200a, Gloyne 2001, Noss 1987, Penrod, 2001). The Coyote Valley Specific Plan DEIR made many false assumptions about wildlife presence and connectivity because there was no data collection or analyses performed.

De Anza College's Environmental Stewardship Program began a ten year project in 2005 researching movement corridors along the 37th parallel for connectivity between the outer (Santa Cruz Mountains) and inner coastal range (Diablo Range) in California. Since January 2007, an ongoing data collection effort has been conducted by the Stewardship team at De Anza College.

**Methods:**

Our methods to determine wildlife presence and movement patterns consisted of formal tracking (scats, tracks, and visible observation), digital field cameras located at Highway 101 culverts, and observational data from different agencies (Halfpenny , 1996). Field data was collected weekly along a transect encompassing the northern and southern sections of Coyote Valley. For each data point, the field interns GPSed the location, classified the habitat type, activity, sample age, proximity to human activity, and other information. Each data point was measured, photographed, and recorded onto data sheets. All data points were downloaded weekly and then mapped into an orthopohto (1m resolution 2005 USGS) and habitat layers consisting of vegetation, riparian corridors, wetlands, soil type, slope, roads, and urban layers using a GIS program (ArcMap ERSI 9.1).

**Results:**

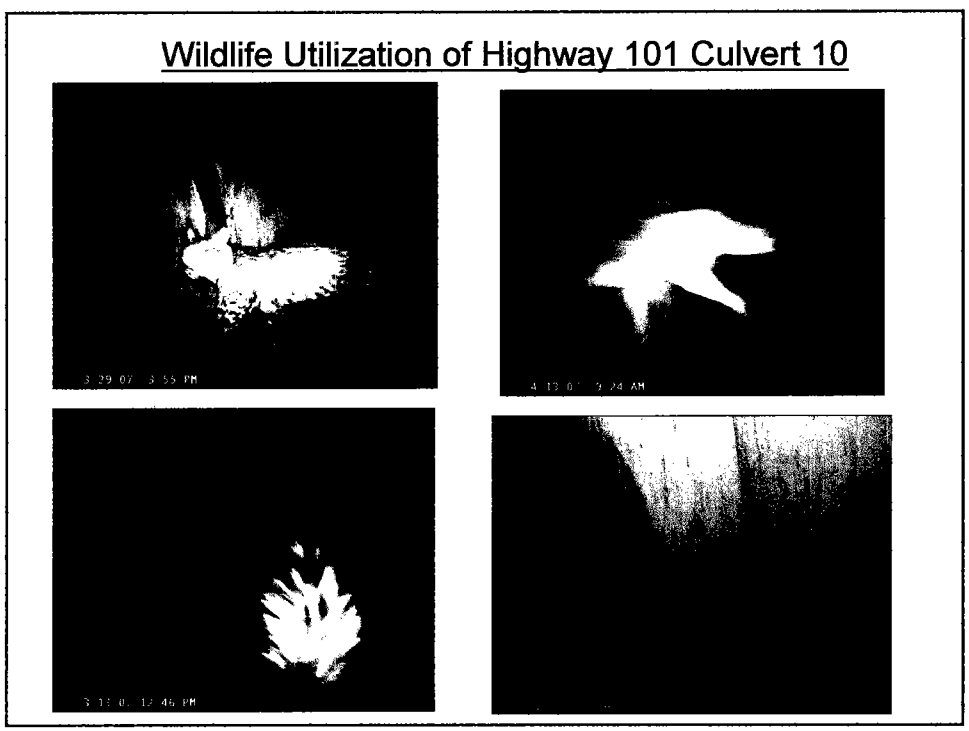
Over a 5 month period we collected over 400 data points. These data points were then utilized to develop a preliminary connectivity map for the Highway 101 corridor. This preliminary connectivity map demonstrates that many wildlife species are utilizing the Highway 101 culverts to move from east to west and west to east. These culverts allow wildlife to travel from the east hills, such as Coyote Ridge, and including the Mount. Hamilton region of the Diablo Range, under Highway 101 to access the Coyote Creek County Park and then disperse into Coyote Valley and surrounding hills, including

the Santa Cruz Mountains. The data also demonstrates that Coyote Creek County Park appears to be the core area of this corridor. High use

Data maps will be made available to DIER staff upon request.

1) The DEIR states that highway 101acts as the most significant barrier to wildlife movement on page 271.

We have found that this is not the case. Many different species utilize Highway 101 culverts to travel under the highway. The picture below is the same culvert with multi-species use within a 1 month surveillance period. This culvert was also utilized by a mountain lion. These data points of wildlife use of Highway 101 culverts were then mapped in GIS to develop a preliminary connectivity map for the Highway 101 corridor. This preliminary connectivity map demonstrates that many wildlife species are utilizing the Highway 101 culverts to move from east to west and west to east. These culverts allow wildlife to travel from the east hills, such as Coyote Ridge, and including the Mount Hamilton region of the Diablo Range, under Highway 101 to access the Coyote Creek County Park and then disperse into Coyote Valley and surrounding hills, including the Santa Cruz Mountains.



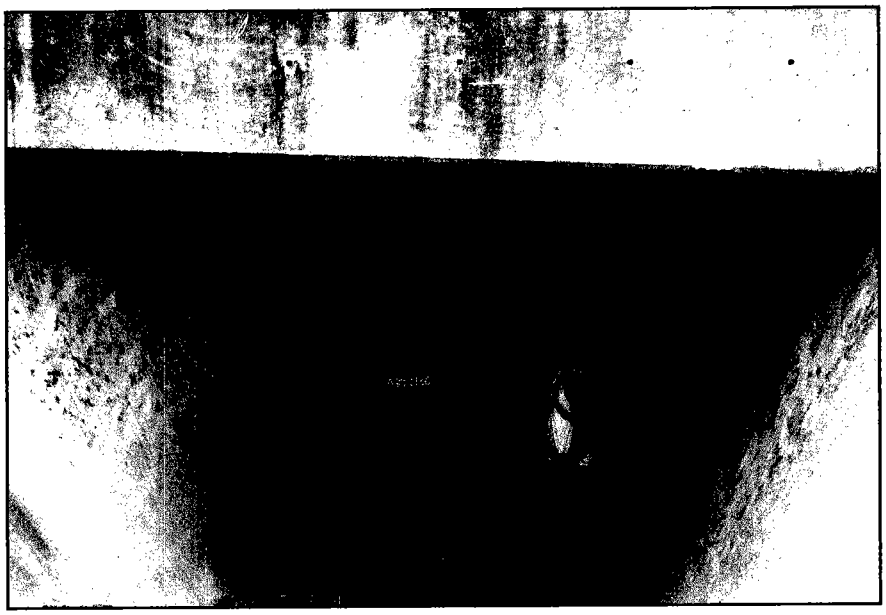
**Wildlife Utilization of Highway 101 Culverts: Raccoons**

2) The DEIR states, see below passage, that culverts big enough to allow for large mammal passage exist only in the southern section on page 271.

This statement is incorrect as there are 3 large culverts in the north section of Coyote Valley large enough to allow for large mammals such as mountain lions and deer to cross through. The picture below shows one culvert large enough for humans standing upright to pass through. This culvert is within Coyote Creek habitat and is located before the Bailey highway exit. There are three culverts large enough to allow for large mammals to travel through in the north section of Coyote Valley

**Coyote Valley Wildlife Corridor Internship Team**

Large Terrestrial Mammals Traveling through large Culvert in the North Section of Coyote Valley

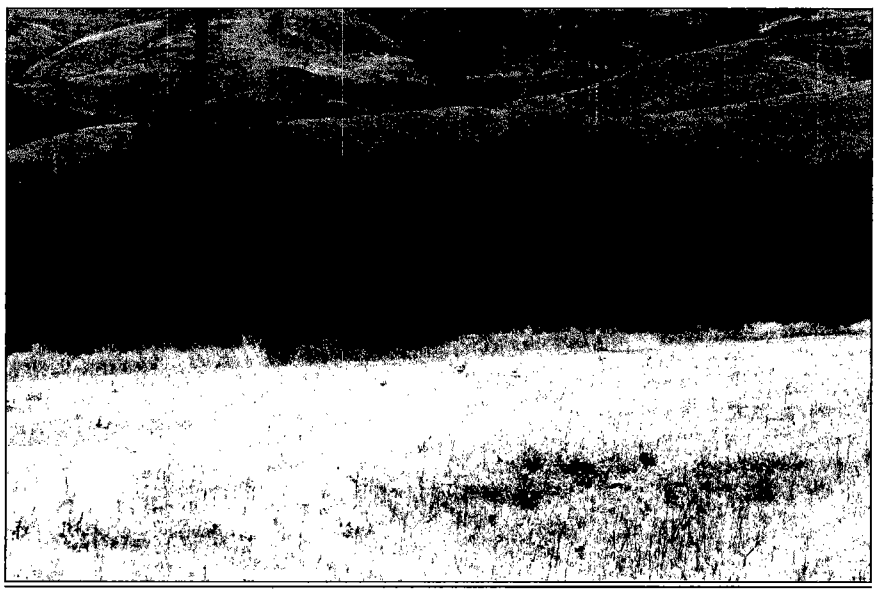


For larger wildlife species, such as deer and mountain lion, there are only three significant passages across Highway 101. The largest of these crossings is just outside the southern half of the Greenbelt, where Coyote Creek passes underneath Highway 101. This crossing offers the cover of the Coyote Creek riparian corridor and is not associated with developed areas. The other two crossings are at the Coyote Creek Golf Course in the Greenbelt: the Coyote Creek Golf Course Exit, which passes beneath Highway 101, and one golf cart crossing underneath Highway 101.

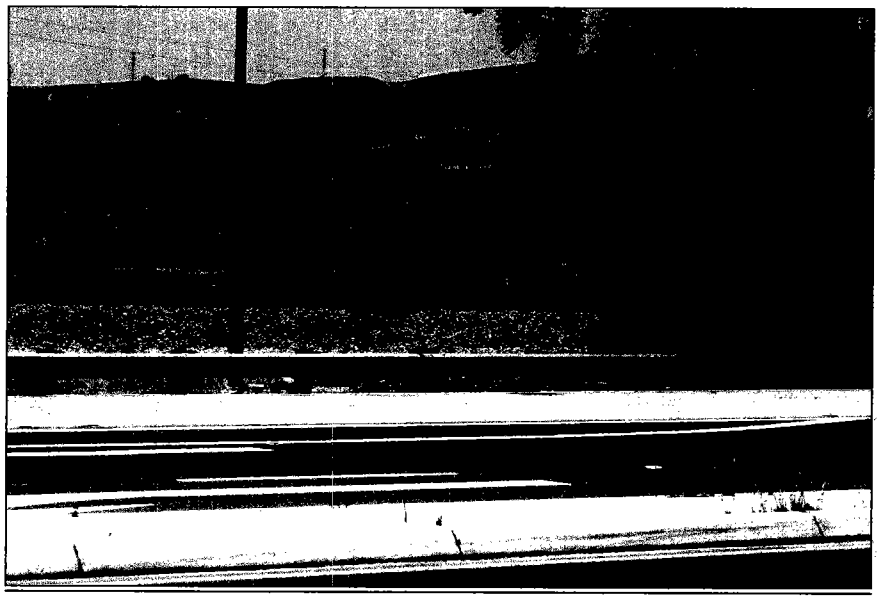
3) The DEIR makes the statement that there are no truly barrier free corridors that exist within the Coyote Valley region on page 272.

This statement is also false. These culverts located in the North section of Coyote Valley all have unrestricted access for wildlife to travel from the east hills to Coyote Creek habitat. In terms of a truly free barrier corridor, five surveyed culverts allow for wildlife to cross under Highway 101 into Coyote Creek habitat, in which wildlife can then travel through an orchard and hay field to Monterey Highway, in which the divider has not begun into Coyote Valley, then up into the hills. See pictures below of the orchard and hay field adjacent to Monterey Highway were there is no divider. The DEIR also states that Monterey Highway acts as a barrier to movement; this is also incorrect as you can see from the picture. This section of Monterey Highway is not part of the intersection but is adjacent to it to it.

Hay field with access into Coyote Creek County Park



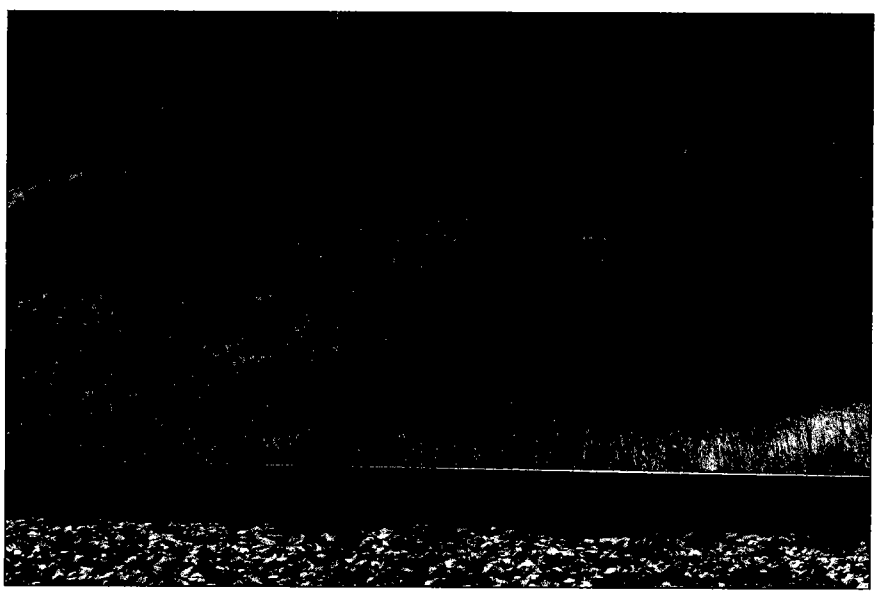
Orchard with access into Coyote Creek County Park



Monterey Highway north of Bailey Ave. without divider and access into Coyote Valley

4) The DEIR states that there is a retaining wall at the Metcalf intersection which would restrict wildlife movement to Tulare Hill on page 271.

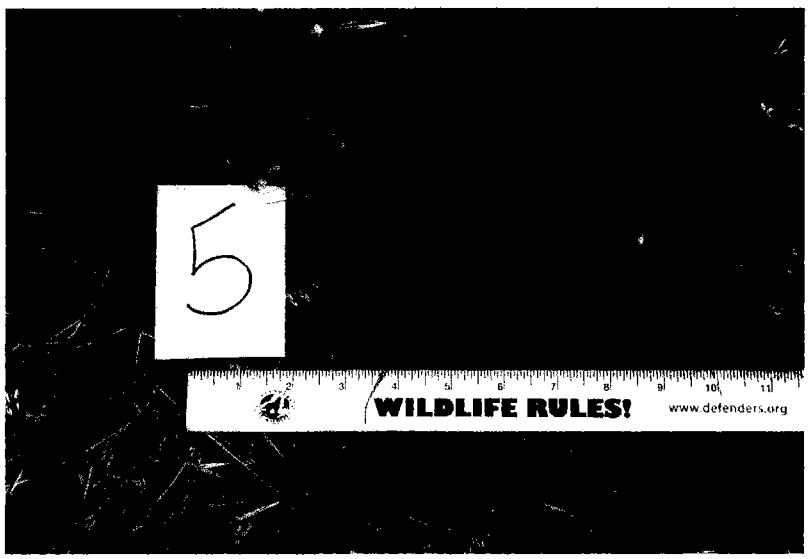
This is a false statement. Another access point, which is barrier free for wildlife to travel from Highway 101 culverts, through the Coyote Creek to Tulare Hill is adjacent to Metcalf Road, see picture below. There are also game trails from the railroad tracks leading up to the hill.



Tulare Hill was also found be a high use area by species such as coyote, fox, badger, and many prey species which would attract predators to come up to hunt.

Coyote Creek consists of highly suitable habitat for many wildlife species. From our data collection, we have found consistent high use of the habitat by wildlife. We have also found that along the bike trail, when it is exposed to Highway 101's noise and light from the automobile traffic, species tend to avoid those areas of the bike trails. At some locations we have found that game trails become mutli-species use in avoidance of the highway. The pictures below are of a bobcat scat, coyote scat, and deer track at the same location. This indicates that increased traffic and light from the proposed development will negatively impact wildlife use of the some sections of the corridor.

**Coyote Valley Wildlife Corridor Internship Team Data Collection**




In summary, our data collection has shown that the statement made in the DEIR on pg. 271, that there are only limited access points for wildlife to cross from east to west, in false. Also, that there are few limited areas for large mammals to cross from east to west in the north section of Coyote Valley is false. Also, our research shows that Coyote

Creek County Park and the Highway 101 culverts play a critical role in maintaining connectivity from the Diablo Range to the Santa Cruz Mts.

Poor planning will lead to costly problems and damage which could be avoided if the plan is modified in a manner that is based on the best available science, data collection, and expertise, which is all readily available to your staff if you make the effort to work with us.

Will this wildlife corridor, which has been identified as a critical connectivity region by corridor experts, be cut off by the development plans or will there be discussions with DEIR staff for plans on how keep the wildlife corridor intact (Thorne et al 2002) ?

The DEIR states that highways, such as 101is a barrier to wildlife movement. We have found through placing digital field cameras at Highway 101 culverts that many wildlife species are utilizing the Highway 101 culverts to move from east to west and west to east. These culverts enable wildlife to travel from the east hills, such as Coyote Ridge under Highway 101 to access the Coyote Creek County Park and then disperse into Coyote Valley to access the east hills and County Park such as Santa Teresa and Calero County Park. Below is a map of the data collected so far in terms of Highway 101 not being acting as a barrier to wildlife movement into Coyote valley.

As you can see, many wildlife species are even utilizing the same culverts to travel through. This data collection is ongoing. We have not monitored all the culverts, which are colored in white. This does not mean wildlife are not using these culverts, data has not yet been collected.

Conclusion:
According to several wildlife corridor/connectivity experts, Coyote Valley is a critical wildlife corridor and habitat for many species (Thorne *et al* 2002, 2006,). This was also stated in the DEIR on page 32 of the Biological Resources section. At the Sierra Azul Wildlife Connectivity Decision Makers Workshop, hosted by the Elkhorn Slough Coastal Training Program, on January 29, 2007, a presentation on a Wildlife Corridor Analyses for North American Badger (*Taxidea taxus*) within the Coyote Valley region by Tanya Diamond, graduate student at San Jose State University. In attendance were WRA environmental consultants writing the DEIR for Coyote Valley This presentation included several corridor analyses showing that Coyote Valley consists of both critical core habitat and a corridor for badgers, which are a Species of Special Concern (Dept. of Fish & Game, 1986). Please see attachment of corridor analyses.

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This data collection effort was spurned by the concern the wildlife species such as Tule elk, badgers, mountain lions, bobcat, deer, foxes, coyotes, and many other species would lose a critical habitat that serves as important connectivity. It has been demonstrated that corridors can facilitate the movement of species through habitat patches by providing connectivity (Hilty *et al* 2006, Soule and Gilpin 1991).

Connectivity between habitat patches is critical to maintain genetic viability and maintain viable populations of wildlife (Noss, 1987, Buza et al 2000). Wildlife corridors facilitate the movement for wildlife species to find mates, resources, and for juveniles to disperse out of their parental home range (Beier 1983). This is a very important concern for badgers as they exist in small populations and low densities because of their large home ranges. Further efforts will be made to see if badgers should be federally listed. Genetic isolation of badgers due to fragmentation from the Coyote Valley Specific Plan could result in badgers becoming a listed species which results in very costly future management efforts for developers, the City of San Jose, and resource agencies. Please see Tanya Diamond's comments on the DEIR for further information about North American badger populations and connectivity issues within the region.

Questions assembled by Stewardship Research team to Coyote Valley Specific Plan DEIR staff and leadership:

Why was this analyses or any mention of wildlife corridor for badgers left out of the DEIR? Especially when great efforts on many people's part and time were made to get this information to the DEIR staff while they were writing the DEIR?

Why weren't these methods which are used to establish wildlife presence and corridors not conducted by the DEIR staff?

Why was this analyses or any mention of wildlife corridor for badgers left out of the DEIR?

Knowing that a scientific evaluation consisting of data collection should have been conducted by the methods we have been utilizing, why did the DEIR staff not conduct their own analysis and data collection effort? Because of the fact that Coyote Valley has been identified as a critical wildlife corridor and the fact that it is one of the first places for wildlife to cross from the Hamilton Region of the Diablo Range to the Santa Cruz Mountains, this should have been a high priority for in-depth research.

Following is a list of comparison of the data we have collected with examples in comparisons to the DEIR statements.

The DEIR states that highways, such as 101 is a barrier to wildlife movement. We have found through placing digital field cameras at Highway 101 culverts that many wildlife species are utilizing the Highway 101 culverts to move from east to west and west to east. These culverts enable wildlife to travel from the east hills, such as Coyote Ridge under Highway 101 to access the Coyote Creek County Park and then disperse into Coyote Valley to access the east hills and County Park such as Santa Teresa and Calero County Park. Below is a map of the data collected so far in terms of Highway 101 not being acting as a barrier to wildlife movement into Coyote valley.

As wildlife biologists, who specialize in corridor design, we ask why wasn't this type of data collection of wildlife use of highway culverts conducted by the DEIR consultants? Also, the assumptions made in the EIR about high roads acting as a barrier have been proven false. Will decision makers such as the City Council be altered to the fact that the EIR have made some gravely false assumptions about wildlife movement in the Coyote Valley region?