

kDecember 20, 2008

To whom it may concern:

We, Paul Beier and Reed Noss, are writing to endorse the efforts of the faculty and students in the Environmental Studies Department of De Anza College to delineate and protect a viable wildlife corridor across Coyote Valley in Santa Clara County, California. We were asked by the Environmental Studies faculty to provide an independent review of their wildlife research in Coyote Valley and to evaluate their proposal for a linkage (or linkages) across the valley to connect the Diablo Range with the Santa Cruz Mountains. We were invited to provide our advice because we are known internationally as experts in wildlife corridors and conservation planning, we have conducted wildlife research in California, and we have been involved as independent science advisors for numerous HCPs/NCCPs and other conservation efforts in this state.

In our opinion, protecting and restoring functional wildlife movement corridors between the Diablo Range and Santa Cruz Mountains is a high priority locally, regionally, and statewide. The Coyote Valley provides the best opportunity to connect these two high-biodiversity ranges and also has inherent value as wildlife habitat, especially for raptors. The Santa Cruz and Diablo ranges are important core areas for wide-ranging wildlife in the Central Coast region of California, including black-tailed deer, tule elk, mountain lion, bobcat, coyote, badger, and (in the case of the Diablo Range), pronghorn, and other species (such as reptiles and amphibians) yet to be studied here. Importantly, if connectivity for wildlife is lost due to development, roads, and other habitat fragmentation in Coyote Valley, the Santa Cruz Mountains will become functionally isolated from other wildland core areas. Species with large area requirements, especially the mountain lion, will not be able to maintain viable populations within the Santa Cruz Mountains, if they are isolated. Sooner or later, the mountain lion population is highly likely to go extinct unless rescued by connectivity to other large wildlands. The potential to conserve or restore a connection between the Santa Cruz Mountains and the Gabilan Range does not remove the urgent need to conserve this connection between the Diablo Range and the Santa Cruz Mountains.

The primary corridor across Coyote Valley identified by the Environmental Studies faculty and students is, in our opinion, the optimal corridor. Please see the attached map. We recommend that this corridor be at least 2 km wide, on average, and that choke points (especially culverts under highways) need to be replaced by wide structures (underpasses and/or land bridges) that are designed specifically for the focal species studied here. An early draft of the HCP/NCCP, under the assumption that Coyote Valley would be converted to urban use, identified Metcalf Canyon as the best feasible corridor. However, Metcalf Canyon suffers from being inherently narrow and having night lighting and noise, which restrict wildlife movement. In our opinion, the proposed Metcalf Canyon corridor is unlikely to serve the movement needs of animals, but the proposed Coyote Valley corridor is likely to do so.

We are impressed that, compared to other linkages that we have evaluated within urbanizing landscapes in California and elsewhere, the Coyote Valley corridor is highly feasible. Although buying land, securing conservation easements, restoring a portion of agricultural land to native vegetation, and constructing proper wildlife crossings under or above roads will be expensive, it will not be exorbitant compared to many other conservation projects. By protecting this crucial linkage, the public is protecting its investments in conservation areas in the Santa Cruz and Diablo ranges, because without connectivity, the wildlife in these ranges will decline and some species will very likely be lost.

In conclusion, we recommend that the Santa Clara Valley HCP/NCCP planning process take full advantage of the data collected by the Environmental Studies Department at De Anza College. Furthermore, we suggest that the HCP/NCCP consultants enlist the Environmental Studies Department to help conduct further research on the wildlife of this area and delineate wildlife corridors. The HCP/NCCP could be the key to protecting and restoring the Coyote Valley and other important areas for biodiversity within the planning area.

Please do not hesitate to contact us if you have any questions about our evaluation of this area.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Reed F. Noss".

Reed F. Noss, Ph.D.
Davis-Shine Professor of Conservation Biology
University of Central Florida

Paul Beier, Ph.D.
Professor of Conservation Biology and Wildlife Ecology
Northern Arizona University