



## President's Message



We had hoped that this year would be a quieter one, but it seems that the wheels of government just cannot stop finding creative ways to phase out the horses and riders in Los Angeles County. Our backyard boarding operations are still in limbo, but the County has been able to figure out how to get to us another way. The new County General Plan and its wholesale SEA designations will severely limit use of our own land. The water quality experts still push their "junk science" beliefs that horses are responsible for all the ocean and river pollution in most of California.

On the positive side, it would appear that the Governor's Blue Ribbon Task Force on last year's devastating California wildfires will be recommending that property owners be allowed to do proper brush clearance without government intervention. There is slow, but steady, progress on the establishment of the first ever, equestrian campground in the Santa Monica Mountains National Recreation Area. Nationally, there is a move to keep our Right To Ride on federal lands. Our REC membership is growing, and our affiliations are expanding across county lines. As you enjoy this latest newsletter, encourage your friends to join and support our education and advocacy activities.

Ruth

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## County Boarding Update

Since our last report not much has happened on the proposed ordinance changes pending in the Department of Regional Planning, DRP. A "working draft" is being completed and circulated only for internal staff review. It is anticipated that a "public review draft" will be available in late spring. Community meetings will be held to solicit comments on the draft, and a public hearing before the DRP Commission is expected in the fall. The good news is that the County is not issuing zoning violation notices to homeowners boarding horses in backyards. However, they could do so at any time without our proposed amendments. We will soon need your participation in community meetings, writing letters (email, snail & fax), and being seen at public hearings to promote our "equestrian friendly" amendments to the ordinance. Wouldn't it be great to have an ordinance that was in favor of horse activities? If you have email, please make sure that we have it so we can inform you quickly if things happen fast. Stay tuned for further news and dates to save.

## **SEAs and the New County General Plan**

After more than four years of fussing around with how to dramatically expand the Significant Ecological Area (SEA) designations throughout the County, the planners have hit on a novel way to slip them in by introducing them as one component of a new Countywide General Plan update. The current plan was adopted in the early 80's. Recall that several years ago the County tried to designate almost all of the undeveloped land in the County as SEA and met with unrelenting resistance from landowners, cities, developers and outdoor enthusiasts. Now, they apparently believe the idea will be more palatable if it is baked in the much larger cake of a new General Plan.

Every property owner in the unincorporated area should go to the website at <http://planning.co.la.ca.us> and check out the land use and SEA maps under the General Plan Update section. There are more workshops planned throughout the County for March 29, 31, and April 20 and 22. This issue is a "hot button" matter for equestrians until we receive absolute guarantees that the SEA designation will not apply to any equestrian activities. If you find unacceptable provisions in the General Plan Draft, please pass your concerns to REC for inclusion in our comment letters.

This matter is expected to go to the Planning Commission for their review in winter of 2005. We will be watching very, very closely. Comments about the plan will be on our website, [www.gotorec.org](http://www.gotorec.org).

## **Draft General Plan for Malibu Creek State Park**

In late January, REC submitted comments on the Draft General Plan and EIR for Malibu Creek State Park. REC has encouraged the expansion of visitor serving facilities including more trails, campgrounds and access points with adequate parking. Unfortunately, it has become too frequent in outdoor planning that there is less and less public access. This new plan calls for reduced visitor impacts to portions of the park and sets aside large areas where public access will be limited or non-existent. It is critical that equestrians, hikers, mountain bikers and all recreation enthusiasts make their voices heard. We must protect our right to access and use this land – land which we taxpayers purchased for now and for future generations. More information on the plan is at [www.parks.ca.gov](http://www.parks.ca.gov).

## **Equestrian Campground Advances**

With steady pressure from Corral 63 in Equestrian Trails Inc. (ETI), and supported by REC and other equestrian groups, the decades long dream of having an equestrian campground in the Santa Monica Mountains is inching toward reality. The site is located in Malibu Creek State Park at the Reagan Ranch area. Concept plans have been drawn and the details are being discussed. The campground is included in the new Draft General Plan. The agreement for this facility was that I guaranteed to raise the funds for the facility and its improvements; otherwise, it could be another 25 years! State Parks has finally given a commitment to make it happen. In fact, they are excited that there will be a new campground in the Park. If anyone would like to join our committee (we can use your help), please contact me at 818-991-1236.

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## GUEST EDITORIAL - Ed Khmara

*(Ed Khmara is a writer and avid equestrian living in the Santa Monica Mountains)*

For many years I have been hearing about water quality in our mountains, especially as it effects the Santa Monica Bay. Traditionally, these concerns revolved around the issue of sewage spills, septic system malfunctions, etc. But now I'm hearing the question of water quality discussed in terms of water from the horses kept on the few rural areas still existing in the Santa Monica Mountains. Nobody wants to say it directly, but the implication is "the fewer the horses, the better the water quality." Well, I'm no expert on water pollution and its causes, but I think we should all consider the following:


There is less livestock living in the Santa Monica Mountains today than there has been for probably four hundred years. Look at the place names around us (especially the housing developments). Almost all of them are punctuated by the word "ranch." Think of North Ranch, Ahmanson Ranch, Morrison Ranch, Lang Ranch, etc. Even in my youth, what we now call Westlake was called the Russell Ranch. And that's what it was, a working cattle ranch. Drive along Las Virgenes Road and visit the old ranch house that's now a place to show children what life used to be like out here. This whole area was once a vast grazing land for cattle, horses, goats and sheep. So ask yourself this question: Do you think the water quality two hundred years ago, or one hundred years ago or even fifty years ago was worse than it is today?

If in fact the water quality was less polluted then than now, if the bacteria counts were lower then than now, if the quality of water in Santa Monica Bay was better then than now, then simple logic tells us that it isn't our horses that are causing the problem, because there were a lot more of them around then than now.


Maybe it's overflows of human sewage, or the run-off from the fertilizing of countless lawns, or maybe the spewing residue of thousands and thousands of cars, or the decaying mountains of organic and synthetic rubbish in the landfills, or... Well, it might be a lot of things. But unless the water quality is a lot better now than two hundred years ago, it isn't horses.

**Ruth Gerson, President (818) 991-1236**

**Please refer to our website [www.gotorec.com](http://www.gotorec.com) for more information on important issues.**

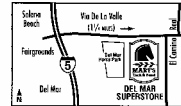


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REC

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## **Right-To-Ride Legislation - HR2966**

Congressman George Radanovich, Fresno, has introduced legislation to preserve the use of saddle and pack stock animals on public lands including wilderness. This legislation is in response to efforts throughout the nation to curtail saddle/pack horse operations in National Parks and Forests. His bill is scheduled for "mark-up" in committee sometime in April. For more information, please go to the Congressman's web page at [www.house.gov/radanovich](http://www.house.gov/radanovich). Click on "legislative office" and go to bills sponsored by Radanovich. A quick e-mail of encouragement to the Congressman, and to other legislators, would be helpful in moving this important piece of legislation toward reality.