



## Defense of Place

October 2013

California Department of Fish and Wildlife  
State Wildlife Action Plan Update: Public Meeting

I speak today on behalf of Defense of Place, the California-based, national organization established as a project of the Resource Renewal Institute in 1997. The Institute's founder and president is Huey Johnson, founder of the Trust for Public Land and California Resource Agency secretary from 1978 to 1982.

We understand that the purpose of this and other meetings is to gather comments for the updating of the State Wildlife Action Plan. However, we believe that no genuine strategy to conserve species and habitat is possible until the Natural Resources Agency and its Fish and Wildlife Department make the inviolable commitment to honor the deeds, laws and native legacies enacted to protect California's lands, coastal areas and waterways.

We created Defense of Place to sustain parklands and open spaces nationwide whose safeguards are contravened for development or predatory changes in use. The settings and purposes vary, but inevitably the explanations for the breaches in protection carry coded words meant to mollify citizens when their public asset is bartered away. For instance, "Interpretive Centers" have become the Orwellian substitute for office buildings and administrative headquarters, and PowerPoint diagrams of facility footprints artfully mask the reality of the infrastructure and peripheral impacts on wildlife and fish habitat.

It dismays us that an egregious example of the bartering away of land held in the Public Trust occurred in California this past January with the signing of the MOU between Fish and Wildlife and the Annenberg Foundation for the development and repurposing of significant areas of the Ballona Wetlands. We cannot fathom how the Department can flout the deed restrictions that accompanied the Public's multi-million dollar bond measure to rescue the wetlands by now accepting the Foundation's \$50 million for a project whose brute size and intent ultimately abrogate Ballona's true nature.

**Defense of Place**  **A Project of Resource Renewal Institute**  
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The Annenberg Project’s proposal masks the reality of a development whose impact would thwart – even mock – the mission of these scoping meetings meant to “develop measures to conserve the state’s valuable natural resources.”

The challenges to update “SWAP” loom large. Indeed, the perplexing endorsement by Fish and Wildlife of the Annenberg Foundation’s project in the Ballona Wetlands is a case study of the social, economic, political and institutional pressures that can come to bear. However, as the steward for natural assets held in the Public Trust, California’s Natural Resources Agency should be transparent and accountable in its singular obligation to ensure the primacy of “the biology and ecology of the natural environment.”

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