

ORANGE COUNTY PERSPECTIVE



A Wild—and Wise—Idea

State is right to preserve habitat along Riverside Freeway

For years, wildlife experts have warned that building housing tracts on what had been scrub or forest was driving mountain lions out of Orange County and threatening other wildlife as well. But there are encouraging signs that some open space necessary to the survival of wildlife will remain open.

Last month, Gov. Pete Wilson and state lawmakers approved a provision in the state budget to spend \$1 million to help buy nearly 700 acres of mountain lion habitat in Coal Canyon.

That's just a small part of the estimated \$10 million to \$14 million the property is expected to cost. But as Assemblyman Fred Aguiar (R-Chino) noted, "It is the first million that is the hardest to get." It sends a needed message to developers that there is interest in preserving the canyon for the public good, while not trampling on anyone's property rights.

Coal Canyon stretches on both sides of the Riverside Freeway in Anaheim and Yorba Linda. To the south is the 472,000-acre Cleveland National Forest; to the north is the 12,000-acre Chino Hills State Park.

Mountain lions, bobcats, coyotes, deer and other wildlife cross that territory, usually at night. A number of them are killed on the freeway when they are unable to find the small number of crossings beneath the road. Devel-

opment of the canyon, which the Anaheim City Council approved several years ago, would make it likely that more mountain lions and other animals would be killed, biologists say. Depriving animals of their habitat dooms them.

The state paid \$4 million for a chunk of canyon land several years ago and turned it into a reserve. That parcel contains one of the last Tecate cypress forests in the western United States.

Open space and the continued presence of wildlife are some of the attractions of Southern California. The willingness of individuals and groups to lobby legislators for money to preserve forests and leave land undeveloped, and of legislators to respond favorably, is encouraging.

The planned opening of all the trails in Ronald W. Caspers Regional Park in south Orange County is also a good idea. Two rare mountain lion attacks on children in the park a decade ago led to lawsuits and the closing of all the park to children. Later a limited portion was open to minors.

There are dangers in the wilderness, and that includes wilderness parks. But learning to anticipate them and take proper precautions opens the gate to the relaxation and education that hours wandering through the wilderness provide.