

+PROPOSED REPLY DRAFT 3 11/15/20 mk

Dear Steve,

Thank you for your kind reply of November 13. We appreciate that you have stated, "We look forward to collaborating with your Arborist and community of Friends of Sepulveda Basin." Please confirm that what you are referring to is collaboration with the long recognized Sepulveda Basin Wildlife Areas Steering Committee, usually shortened to "Steering Committee." Although you did not directly confirm my understanding that the trees marked with orange in the Sepulveda Basin Wildlife Reserve are not in danger of being cut down immediately, may I assume from your reply that we do in fact have time for our arborist to inspect the trees and make our case for reducing the number of trees to be reduced to eight-foot snags or removed altogether? I also ask whether RAP will consider leaving any native trees that ultimately do have to be reduced to snags as ones taller than the eight-foot height that has been mentioned and that trees currently identified as exotic be confirmed to not be California natives.

As you know, the full Steering Committee's next meeting is November 24, 2020. The organizations supporting this request have expanded to include San Fernando Valley Audubon Society (SFVAS), California Native Plant Society (CNPS), Sierra Club, and Resource Conservation District of the Santa Monica Mountains (RCD). They and other organizations on the Steering Committee are extremely concerned that many of the 50 to 80 trees marked with orange x's to be cut down do not in fact pose a safety hazard and may not need to be cut down at all. In addition some of the trees that are marked could be saved and pruned and some could be left as snags taller than 8' to serve as nesting sites. We are hopeful that RAP as well as all other interested agencies and parties want to save as many trees as is safely possible, given the devastation caused by the September fire. We still have many unanswered questions and items that are necessary for any meaningful collaboration. Many of the following were set forth in my previous email to you, but have not yet been responded to:

1. Please confirm our understanding that no trees will be cut down immediately and that the decision to cut down, save, prune or reduce to eight foot or taller snags, trees that have been marked with orange x's will be made in collaboration with the Steering Committee and independent arborist's reports.
2. Please immediately furnish us with a copy of your certified arborist, Arthur Flores' report. This is the only way we can see what Mr. Flores intended with the trees marked with orange x's and why.
3. No trees will be cut down until an independent arborist has given an opinion on whether the trees marked with orange x's can be safely saved. We will move ahead to obtain a report from an independent certified arborist for presentation to all concerned parties and are delighted you look forward to seeing it.
4. If the arborists' opinions are not in agreement, we propose that the matter be resolved by discussion. If agreement is not then reached, we propose that the matter be resolved by appointment of a third certified arborist acceptable to all parties.
5. We further request a copy of any maps that show the location of trees proposed to be removed or reduced to snags and, if available, the species that those trees were identified as to the extent this information is not included in the arborist report.
6. We request that the ecological impacts of the proposed tree removal be documented, including the removal of Western Sycamores which are a protected species of tree. As well, SFVAS questions cutting all unsalvageable pines and eucalyptuses to the ground as we disagree with your allegation that their snags would not have wildlife value. We also question whether any

Comment [AK1]: This should go next to the request for the arborist report

marked trees were correctly identified as eucalyptus, as there are none in the Wildlife Reserve and we cannot find any marked eucalyptus in the lawn between the cricket field and reserve.

7. We request a copy of any necessary CEQA/NEPA review that has been made. Although immediate safety concerns would be regarded as a categorical exemption from CEQA/NEPA and would eliminate the need for such a review, the more than two-month delay since the fire on September 6 argues against your agency applying that exemption. Removing such a large number of trees, along with the destructive intrusion of heavy equipment, could be considered a "significant adverse impact." If, as may be the case, the city still plans to seek the categorical exemption, we would very much appreciate receiving a copy of the findings and documentation used to seek the exemption.
8. We also request clarification of what safety standard is being used in selecting what trees are to be removed or reduced to snags and why the snags would be only eight feet or less in height.
9. As noted above, we are concerned about the impact that the tree removal process will have on the Wildlife Reserve. To help us better understand that, could you provide us with a copy of formal scope of work to be undertaken identifying the specific separate tasks, the timing, the machinery to be used, the size and composition of the work crew, the instructions given to the work crew regarding minimizing the ecological impact of their operations, and a real-time onsite contact for our use if we see some critical problem? We note that some of that information would overlap the contents of request for a categorical exemption but we would appreciate the extra detail specified in this request.

We are hopeful that the Steering Committee, RAP, SFVAS, CNPS, Sierra Club, RCD, and all interested parties can work together on this very important issue to preserve as many trees as safely possible. The next Steering Committee meeting is scheduled to take place on November 24, 2020. I expect that the issue of the orange marked trees will be placed on the agenda.

Thank you very much for your cooperation. I and the Steering Committee look forward to working with you to collaboratively resolve this issue in the best interest of the City, all interested parties and the public.

Muriel S. Kotin
San Fernando Valley Audubon Representative
Sepulveda Basin Wildlife Areas Steering Committee

Comment [AK2]: Consider "cooperatively" or "collaboratively" as somewhat more pointed than "amicably"