

The Jacob Journal

A NEWSLETTER FROM SUPERVISOR DIANNE JACOB

MARCH 1999

Common Sense Restores Pristine Wilderness Area



It goes against conventional wisdom to say that building a road through a beautiful wildland area will help preserve it. But that's just what happened on Otay Mountain along the border in San Diego County.

To understand exactly why that strategy worked, one needs to go back a few years and look at the circumstances. Otay Mountain, which was at one time a pristine example of San Diego County's natural resources and a wilderness study area, became overrun with illegal immigrant traffic when Operation Gatekeeper began. The effort by the Border Patrol to stop illegal immigration in the most western parts of the border, near Imperial Beach, forced immigrants east - right over Otay Mountain.

Several things happened as a result. Because of the enormous influx of illegal immigrants and smugglers onto Otay Mountain, the number of wildfires increased dramatically - from only 24 in 1994 to more than 350 just two years later! In many cases, the fires migrants used to keep from freezing at night were not properly extinguished and raged out of control during the day. More than 22,000 acres were ravaged by fire in 1996 alone. In addition, hordes of trash were left behind on Otay Mountain, and new

"trails" were carved into previously undisturbed natural terrain.

Otay Mountain was literally trashed, trampled, and burned!

At the same time, the Border Patrol and the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection, did not have any way to access the remote canyons and high mountain peaks of Otay Mountain. They simply couldn't do their jobs! So, the smugglers continued to move masses of immigrants across the terrain and wildfires continued to flare.

Then, something happened.

In response to the increased fire dangers, Chief Ken Miller, of the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection, initiated the formation of a Border Agency Fire Council. Its membership includes representatives of state and federal wildlife agencies, the Border Patrol, and firefighting experts from around the region. I, too, am honored to be part of this cooperative effort finding solutions to the explosive fire problem, as well as solutions to other concerns along the border region.

When we put our heads together, it quickly became obvious what needed to be done. Each agency - firefighters, wildlife agency representatives, and Border Patrol agents- needed to be allowed to do its job. And, the only way for that to happen was to build access roads into remote areas of Otay Mountain.

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Initially, the notion didn't sit well with some of the members of the Border Agency Fire Council who feared that building access roads would further damage the environment. But, Ed Hastey, the Director of California's Bureau of Land Management, stepped up to the plate and agreed to build some dirt access roads on the mountain. Mr. Hastey deserves a tremendous amount of credit for his courage and foresight in doing the right thing - and pushing to get the job done!

Not long after construction began on the dirt roads - about a year and a half ago - Mr. Hastey and I joined Interior Secretary Bruce Babbitt for a tour. It seemed clear to me that the Secretary was troubled by the environmental damage that had occurred on Otay Mountain. He was hopeful that our somewhat unconventional, common sense approach would solve the problem and return the area to its natural condition.

Just about a month ago, Secretary Babbitt came to San Diego again for a visit and tour of Otay Mountain. Again, Ed Hastey and I joined him. We were all pleasantly surprised - to say the least!

Otay Mountain had healed. The smugglers' trails that had been cleaved into the wilderness were starting to regenerate. The trash that had littered the terrain was gone. Otay Mountain was vital again!

Now, 18,500 acres on Otay Mountain, which has long been recognized as a unique ecosystem, is primed to be designated as part of the National Wilderness Preservation System. Composed of rock with unusual properties that benefit plant growth, the mountain supports a large number of endangered and sensitive species and is also home to the world's largest stand of rare Tecate Cypress.

Congressman Brian Bilbray has introduced H.R. 15, the Otay Mountain Wilderness Act of 1999, and submitted it for Congressional consideration. And, on February 17, 1999, the Board of Supervisors, at my request, unanimously supported the designation. This designation would not only provide long-term protection of this beautiful natural resource, but continue to allow appropriate access by the U.S. Border Patrol and the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection to ensure public safety in the region as well as opportunities for public recreation.

Bilbray's Otay Mountain Wilderness Act of 1999 is working its way through Congressional committees in Washington D.C. When it is heard, so will San Diegans be heard...loud and clear with the message that Otay Mountain should be designated wilderness to be preserved in perpetuity for generations to come.

Upcoming Community Coffees with Dianne Jacob

March 11, 1999

Tyler's Great Taste of Texas
8099 Broadway, Lemon Grove
8:30 AM - 10:30 AM

March 26, 1999

Experience Coffee, Rancho San Diego
2963 Jamacha Rd., El Cajon
8:30 AM - 10:30 AM

Join me for coffee & conversation - No need to RSVP.
Just bring your questions, comments and concerns.

It's my job to make
County government work for YOU!

JACOB ANNOUNCES DATE FOR Y2K SUMMIT

March 11 Meeting Open To Public, Free

San Diego, CA -- Supervisor Dianne Jacob recently announced the date for a Y2K Summit she will host. The meeting, which will be held on **Thursday, March 11, 1999**, is open to the public free of charge. It will be held at the **County Administration Center, Third Floor, 1600 Pacific Highway, San Diego** from 2 pm to 4 pm.

"With the Year 2000 rapidly approaching, public attention has become increasingly focused on Y2K, and the so-called "Millennium Bug", said Jacob. "Undoubtedly, as more attention is focused on the issue, more questions will arise regarding how Y2K will affect the residents of San Diego County - consumers, seniors, small businesses, financial institutions, the local military community, and

municipal governments within the region. The goal of the Y2K Summit is to give individuals and businesses the tools they need to decide for themselves which steps should be taken to prepare for any risk posed by Y2K issues."



The Y2K Summit will include presentations on telephone service, banking, utilities, home preparedness, small business planning, and County government services. In addition, Y2K Residential and

Business Consumer Checklists are expected to be completed and available at the Y2K Summit.

If you have additional questions about the Y2K Summit, call (619) 531-5522.

Supervisor Dianne Jacob proudly serves
the communities of:

Agua Caliente Springs ♦ Allied Gardens ♦ Alpine ♦ Bankhead Springs ♦ Barrett ♦
Blossom Valley ♦ Bostonia ♦ Boulevard ♦ Campo ♦ Canebrake ♦ Casa de Oro
♦ Crest ♦ Cuyamaca ♦ Dehesa ♦ Del Cerro ♦ Descanso ♦ Dulzura ♦ El
Cajon ♦ Eucalyptus Hills ♦ Fernbrook ♦ Flinn Springs ♦ Granite Hills ♦ Guatay
♦ Harbison Canyon ♦ Jacumba ♦ Jamul ♦ Julian ♦ La Mesa ♦ Lake Morena ♦
Lakeside ♦ Lemon Grove ♦ Mt. Laguna ♦ Mt. Helix ♦ Pine Hills ♦ Pine Valley ♦
Potrero ♦ Poway ♦ Ramona ♦ Rancho San Diego ♦ Rolando ♦ San Carlos ♦
Santa Ysabel ♦ Santee ♦ Shelter Valley ♦ Spring Valley ♦ Tecate ♦ Tierra del Sol ♦
Vallecitos

...and the Indian reservations of:

Barona ♦ Campo ♦ Cosmit ♦ Cuyapaipe ♦ Inaja ♦ Jamul ♦ La Posta ♦
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