

MEMO

DATE: Friday, November 10, 2006
TO: SF Commission on the Environment, Policy Committee
FROM: Peter Brastow, Director, Nature in the City
RE: Specific Implementation ideas regarding Urban Environmental Accord #12

Urban Environmental Accord #12

"Pass legislation that protects critical habitat corridors and other key habitat characteristics (e.g. water features, food-bearing plants, shelter for wildlife, use of native species, etc.) from unsustainable development."

The following are some preliminary ideas for implementing Accord #12 as developed by members of the Nature in the City Steering Committee and conservation colleagues. They include:

1. ***Habitat Values Mapping and Habitat Goals Project***
2. ***Residential (Backyard) Habitat Conservation Program***
This concept will be presented in more detail by Josiah Clark.
3. ***Biodiversity Management Mandate for all City Departments***
4. ***Local Indigenous Biodiversity Public Education and Celebration Campaign***

1. ***Habitat Values Mapping and Habitat Goals Project.*** The overall goal would be to assemble baseline information, upon which to build citywide conservation and ecological restoration objectives and strategies for implementing the General Plan, the Sustainability Plan and the upcoming "Urban Forest" Plan. As a first step, legislation would allocate funding for a comprehensive mapping project to create a GIS inventory of all open spaces and potential wildlife/biodiversity corridors in San Francisco stratified by natural resource value. Units of inventory might include rare and endangered species, special/unique/rare habitat sites, ecological corridors, greenways, natural areas, private lands/backyards, and water resources. One method, for example, would be to score low value (dead weight) vs. high value (high biodiversity/carrying capacity) vegetation for every polygon. Criteria might include native biomass, food resources, invasive plants, feasibility etc.

The legislation could make it city policy to shift from low value, dead weight vegetation that currently dominates much of our green space, to high wildlife value, high carrying capacity plants. (e.g., a shift from eucs and acacia to oaks and toyons). The legislation could also mandate a policy analysis, which would frame the project and identify gaps in the City's conservation policy.

Results could include 1) a database of unprotected/threatened habitats and natural areas; and 2) a prioritized list of implementation projects. One possible project would be a native oak woodland regeneration project. Oaks are the single most productive tree for wildlife found in San Francisco. They provide nesting cavities and acorns for birds

and other wildlife. They harbor literally hundreds of invertebrate arthropod species. Oaks were the dominant tree in San Francisco's original "urban forest," and their widespread planting would not only restore valuable wildlife habitat and biodiversity, but also reestablish visual continuity of San Francisco's own natural landscape.

2. Residential (Backyard) Habitat Conservation Program. Legislation would establish a residential habitat conservation and certification program, similar to the Habitat Certification Program of the NWF: <http://www.nwf.org/backyard/>

It would encourage homeowners and renters to increase the habitat values of their rear yards, front yards or setbacks, roofs, and sidewalks. The program would have three main components:

a) Create a position within the Department of the Environment to manage a *Public education/outreach campaign* to teach residents how to improve the habitat values - for both resident and migratory species - of their properties. Information would be made available through a variety of ways including a website similar to that of the Metropolitan Water District: <http://www.bewaterwise.com/> but focusing more on wildlife value, with water conservation being an added benefit. The site would recommend ways to improve habitat (e.g., structural diversity, amount of cover, food, water and seed resources, downed wood, nesting cavities) and provide lists of recommended plants as well as case studies in backyard habitat enhancement sites - citizens would be encouraged to post their improvements/results. Other forms of assistance might include demonstration projects, hands-on workshops, etc. Another valuable resource might be to create an SF "Gaining Ground" program. This program would assist residents and landowners in the process of removing cement from their yards and sidewalks. This program may be supported by local agencies which would volunteer a certain number of hours each year (e.g. the Fire Department, police stations, Water Department).

b) *Increase the availability of appropriate vegetation.* Provide incentives (such as business tax deductions) for local nurseries to provide low-cost native (or other high-wildlife-value plants) and to stop selling SFWMA-listed invasive weeds. Also, consider a Backyard Native Propagation Program: Find local property owners with barren, unused backyards and have them donate the use of their space for the cause of propagating native plants. In particular, we need to encourage generalist natives that can repopulate themselves and contend with invasive weeds. This would be a low cost way to produce appropriate local native plants to fill the deficit in supply while building a the backyard stewardship network.

c) *Habitat improvement incentives.* An application process for certification, similar to the one used by NWF, could be used. The certificates could be issued by the SF Board of Supes. As an added incentive, participants in the program could be entered into a

lottery for a free “habitat audit” that would include providing an inventory that identifies bird and butterfly (and other) species found on the property.

3. *Biodiversity Management Mandate for all City Departments.* Legislation would require all City departments that manage land and water to integrate biodiversity conservation and natural resource management best practices into their operations and capital projects. Example provisions include:

- a) Real cost accounting for all development and capital projects.
- b) Regular City Gardener training in how (and why) to increase habitat values. (This might include a program/dialog with ecology students, neighborhood stewards and birders. Information exchange would occur in both directions whereby the public and management [and landscape architects ideally] would learn about issues of projects maintenance and the gardeners would learn more ecologically sustainable gardening practices. Volunteers could fill out a standardized form each month charting the ecological management progress [kind of a “nature scan”] of each site [not just where maintenance gardening is occurring but throughout the City system]. This will serve as a way to monitor what is taking place in green spaces around the city and a way to communicate habitat management priorities and best management practices site-by-site);
- c) target removal and cessation of planting of all priority invasive weeds based on SFWMA priority weed list;
- d) Development of wildlife habitat friendly plant and tree list for all City Departments.
- e) Incorporate biodiversity considerations into the Precautionary Principle.
- f) Add impacts on wildlife to the criteria for denying a variance that would shrink rear-yard open space
- g) Create a position in the Department of City Planning for a biologist who would inform decision makers and the public of the impacts on biodiversity due to any proposed sale or development or change in use of any city property.

4. *Local Indigenous Biodiversity Public Education and Celebration*

Campaign. Department of the Environment would be responsible for implementing a citywide biodiversity publicity campaign articulating the significance and wonder of our shared ecological heritage. Elements could include a diversity of weekly or monthly events focused on biodiversity conservation and habitat restoration; designation and celebration of certain areas as SF natural heritage sites; pursuit of San Francisco’s natural areas as National Natural Landmarks; create position of official City Naturalist.