



**Friends
of the
Swainson's
HAWK**
915 L Street #C425
Sacramento, Ca. 95814
916-447-4956
www.swainsonshawk.org



ECOS
ENVIRONMENTAL
* COUNCIL *
OF SACRAMENTO
909 12th St., 100
Sacramento, Ca. 95814
916-420-4829
www.ecosacramento.net



**SIERRA
CLUB**
FOUNDED 1892
1414 K Street, 500
Sacramento, Ca. 95814
916-557-1100, x 108
www.motherlode.sierraclub.org



SOS Cranes
PO Box 22192
Sacramento, CA 95822
www.soscranes.org



Natomas Community Association
5010 Sorento Road
Sacramento, CA 95835
www.natomascommunity.org

October 18, 2006

Mayor Heather Fargo and Members of Council
City Hall, 915 I Street
Sacramento, CA 95814

Re: Greenbriar Project, Environmental Impacts

Dear Mayor Fargo and Members of Council,

We recently reviewed the draft Environmental Impact Report for Greenbriar and found that the EIR identifies **very severe unavoidable and significant impacts**. Local nonprofit organizations and state and federal agency letters detail problems with the project. You can view a number of the comment letters at www.swainsonshawk.org/greenbriar.html. This includes comments by state agencies and other independent experts. Attached is a fact sheet describing the most visible of the project's environmental problems, and a list of the letters submitted.

LAFCO staff reported on October 4 to the Commission that the EIR would have to be re-circulated for at least three elements and would not be back before the commission during this calendar year. The strategy to fast track this project is failing.

There is no reason to put this project in front of the General Plan update and in front of the fixing of the North Natomas levees. Any rationale for expediency based on light rail funding/planning/construction to the airport is woefully insufficient rationale to merit continuing this expedited process. We urge you to fold this proposed project into the City General Plan alternatives analysis process and not continue the fast track, preferential treatment further.

Sincerely,

Graham Brownstein, ECOS

Janis Heple, Sierra Club Sacramento Group

Mike Savino and Tara Hansen, Save Our Sandhill Cranes

Barbara Graichen and Tom Reavey, Natomas Community Association

Judith Lamare and Kevin McRae, Friends of the Swainson's Hawk

Review Environmental Problems with the Greenbriar Project, October 2006

The **Environmental Council of Sacramento (ECOS), Friends of the Swainson's Hawk, the Sierra Club and other environmental and community groups have commented on the draft environmental impact report for Greenbriar.** Please review the fact sheet below to understand the key environmental problems of this ill-advised project. These are problems that will have countywide impacts if the project is approved. We are requesting the Mayor and City Council of Sacramento to drop consideration of this proposal to expand the City of Sacramento to the northwest.

The Proposed Greenbriar Project and its Effects on the Community and the Environment

- This 577 acre, 3,700 housing unit project *is not in the City's General Plan* and has been given preferential treatment to **be processed for annexation at LAFCO before the City's General Plan is complete.** It is prime farmland currently zoned agricultural and is outside the City limit and the county's urban services boundary (USB). If the project were included in the General Plan, impacts of the project on other development proposals within the city, and on the city's infill policies and infill infrastructure would be addressed. These questions have been bypassed in environmental review. If approved, **Greenbriar will drain resources away from infill development and redevelopment of commercial corridors, which is desperately needed in several City neighborhoods outside of the Central City..**
- Greenbriar is located at the intersection of I-5 and 99/70, north of the City of Sacramento. Proponents describe the project as infill but it is bounded by freeway on two sides, undeveloped commercial property on the west and agricultural area to the north. It is *the leading edge of development proposals to break the urban limit line* and expand further into the floodprone Natomas Basin.
- The *Natomas Community Association has asked for a moratorium on any new annexations to the Community until the levees have been upgraded and certified.* The US Army Corps of Engineers issued a letter July 20, 2006 stating that it had withdrawn its previous opinion (1998) that the levees for the Natomas Basin meet the hundred year protection standard. **Exhaustive engineering studies by the Corps and SAFCA have shown that the levees protecting Natomas Basin are seriously deficient, and in need of extensive repairs** to protect against dangerous underseepage which have not been funded. Nonetheless, the DEIR, p. 6.10-20, Impact 6.10-3, states that the project would result in less than significant flooding impacts because FEMA's outdated Flood Insurance Rate Map (FIRM) still shows it as being outside the 100-year floodplain **The DEIR's ridiculous conclusion that the project would have "less than significant flooding impacts" is contrary to all current engineering analyses and evidence.**
- Greenbriar, in combination with other new development already approved in the Basin, will have significant and unavoidable impacts on traffic congestion on I-5 and 99/70. *These traffic impacts will affect all those who use the Airport*, including the freight industry, and will affect all those who commute to downtown from the north. Though the freeways must be widened to accommodate additional traffic generated by the project, no one knows how this can be done since the land is not available for widening. CalTrans has requested land on the project site for additional lanes for I-5 and Hwy 99 (not included in the project). The DEIR fails to deal with cumulative impacts from other projects planned for western Placer County, Sutter and Yuba Counties, and does not provide for funding of transit services for the area prior to service by light rail.

- Greenbriar is promoted by its advocates as necessary to create the population needed to justify federal funding for the Downtown/Natomas Light Rail line. ***The approval of Greenbriar in no way assures federal funding for light rail to the airport.*** Instead, a much more likely scenario is that the Greenbriar project will be built and light rail will not be built. The light rail project has been stalled because it is far too expensive (\$650,000,000, if built today) for the transit value added. Also, RT lacks the operating funds to operate light rail to the airport. Operating fund availability is a precondition of state and federal grants for construction. Yet the Greenbriar EIR traffic analysis assumes that light rail will absorb 11 percent of the trips generated by the project in 2025 and estimates 1200 transit rides a day from the project. This estimate is likely exaggerated and the basis for that estimate is not stated in the DEIR. Only the southern end of the project is designed as a transit oriented project. City policy requires transit service to newly developing areas, yet the funding for transit services to Greenbriar is not identified in the DEIR.

- Seventy-five percent of the ***Greenbriar project is located within the Sacramento International Airport's safety overflight zone***, which is used by low-flying military aircraft in training exercises. This causes conflicts between residential communities and airport operations. In other communities, conflicts between residential uses and airport operations have led to restrictions on airport operations. The DEIR doesn't address Greenbriar's incompatibility with the airport operations.

- The project site is essential habitat for Giant Garter Snake and Swainson's Hawk, protected under the state and federal law. It is ***outside the Permit Areas of the Natomas Basin Habitat Conservation Plan, whose mitigation plan, and approval by the Federal and State wildlife agencies, expressly relied on the assumption that most of the Basin outside of the NBHCP Permit Areas would remain undeveloped and agricultural for the 50-year Permit Term.*** The NBHCP requires that the City obtain permits for any new development outside the permit area to rezoning. However, the Greenbriar DEIR fails to recognize this requirement, and legal counsel representing the City incorrectly argued at LAFCO that City does not need to obtain Permits from the wildlife agencies until immediately before approval of final subdivision maps. It also presents a proposed mitigation program that has not been approved by wildlife agencies and is grossly inadequate. These regulatory agencies have not agreed to issue a permit. The on-site mitigation program is a minimal effort without due regard for wildlife needs.

- Greenbriar DEIR shows the project has **significant unavoidable impacts on air quality**. The project consistency with the current air quality plan, the North Natomas Community Plan air quality policies and current air district policies is not established. Feasible mitigation measures implemented in other air districts are not considered. New air quality plans are due to be adopted next year. **Consideration of Greenbriar should be delayed until the new air quality plans are adopted so that all feasible mitigation measures can be identified and included.**

- See this web site, www.swainsonshawk.org/greenbriar.html for copies of the following letters:

James P. Pacht on behalf of ECOS, Sierra Club, Friends of the Swainson's Hawk and Audubon Society
Save Our Sandhill Cranes
Natomas Community Association
Swainson's Hawk Technical Advisory Committee
Sacramento International Airport/Sac County Dept. of Airports
State Board of Reclamation
US Fish and Wildlife and State Fish and Game
Caltrans