

AV News

Wetlands Donation Marks Endangered Species Day in AV

By Fran Paolinelli

PEARBLOSSOM – The sounds of a solitary Native American flute echoed through the mountains around Devil’s Punchbowl Friday morning celebrating the donation of an area of precious wetlands to the park.

The celebration, held on the Sixth Annual Endangered Species Day, marked the acquisition of 40 acres of wetlands for the animals and birds of natural area by Antelope Valley Conservancy.

“Endangered Species Day” was established in 2006 and across the region and across the nation hundreds of events and activities are being held this weekend,” said Wendy Reed, president and a founding director of the conservancy.

According to Reed, the newly acquired 40 acres are spring fed wetlands that provide year round resources for the animals and birds in the area.

Naturalists have long hoped to put this acreage under preservation, but lacked the funding with the county to do so. The Fish and Wildlife Service, Rivers and the Mountains Conservancy allowed reallocation of funds to acquire wetlands. Fortunately the landowner was willing to allow purchase and Northrop Grumman contributed toward initial annual cost, Reed said.

“The lands that are preserved in next 15 years will be the last lands put in to preservation on our planet. So it is critical that we expand preservation areas like this,” Reed said.

The president of the nearby Juniper Hills Town Council, Vance Pomeroy, agreed and added.

“It’s Important to realize that the desert is not wasteland. There are people, things, plants and animals up here that deserve your attention,” Pomeroy said.

“One problem is the “down below” sort of attitude that there is nothing up here, just wasteland. And that’s why there is so much dumping up here. People live here among the flora and fauna. People living here like the way it is here. People living here understand the fragility of the area,” he added.



Kate Gale, a poet and librettist was the guest speaker. Gale has published five collections of poetry and also is managing editor of Red Hen Press; a company that last year published a book entitled “The Devil Punchbowl”. It is a collection of essays on the living history of California.

“There are pieces on Tulare Lake, the Salton Sea, Dodger Stadium and even about a restaurant where the most drug deals go down.

“It’s near the Mexican border, if you want to visit it,” Gale said.

“I moved to California in the late 80s I fell in love with California - with the landscape, the excitement and the culture. When I think of California I always think the film “The Aviator”.

The history of California is tied up with the aerospace industry, oil and the film industry,” Gale said.

The film depicts how hard Howard Hughes worked on aerospace industry and how much it made a difference to California, Gale added.

“At same time, Hughes lost his mind. It’s a film about technology and what it does for us, but it’s about where we lose ourselves along the way and I think we lose ourselves when we lose connection with the earth,” Gale said.

The film ends with three sentences: “Think about the future. Think about the future. Think about the future.”

“That’s what Antelope Valley Conservancy is about. Not about preserving the past; it’s about the future,” Gale added.

She then related her connection to Antelope Valley.

“We came out here when our kids were four and six. We came out to the Antelope Valley a lot and when they were small they were convinced that the people of Palmdale and Lancaster painted the hills for them. I kept telling them they were flowers, but there were too many. They felt there just couldn’t be that many flowers,” Gale said.

We have to work at having this kind of space for kids. This space ...means that future kids can grow up coming to places like this...enjoying wetlands and enjoying places like the Devil’s Punchbowl, she said.

“There will be a future for those of us who don’t want to lose our minds and lose our way. I think that we all need this connection to remain human and remember who we are,” Gale said in conclusion.

Reed agreed but added, “It’s not only about places like this. We can preserve places like this but if the lizards aren’t running under our feet and the birds aren’t chirping then we don’t really have a place like this.”

Reed then introduced one of the most moving and emotional parts of the celebratory event – Bill Neal or “Elk Whistle”

The Tungva tribe, one the original people of Southern California gave Neal his name, which means, “He sings with his heart”.

Neal worked for ten years with the National Forest Service.

“He considers music a gift that strengthens our connection with Mother Earth and Father sky and the universal circle of life,” Reed said.

During his performance, one only had to look at the mountains surrounding the peaceful area, close their eyes and be taken back in time to when other Native Americans stood on the same ground and the beautiful and haunting melody filled the nearby mountains.

Reed also presented plaques, which Reed described as small tokens of appreciation, to those who collaborated in the gaining the wetlands. Plaques were presented to Carl Benz of the US Fish and Wildlife Service, Hayden Shom of the Los Angeles County Parks, Bart Kettlerling for Ketterling Family and Michelle Webb of Northrop Grumman.

A ribbon-cutting ceremony followed and then guests were invited to share in refreshments and visit the nearby Visitors Center.

The wetlands are currently closed to the public while studies are being conducted to ascertain what areas, if any, can be opened to the public and not disturb or destroy the natural habitat of animals and birds.

The Devil's Punchbowl County Park, which consists of 1,310 acres, was opened in 1963. The 40 acres where the nature center is located was once in private ownership and was purchased by the County of Los Angeles because of its unique features. Surrounding U.S. Forest Service lands were then added to enhance the park.

The Punchbowl is a deep canyon cut by the runoff of large quantities of water from the higher San Gabriel Mountains occurring over a long period of time. These mountain peaks above the park are 8,000 feet in elevation while the Nature Center is located at 4,740 feet above sea level. The Punchbowl Canyon is 300 feet deep at the vista point. The peculiar uptilted rock formations to be seen in the entire area are layers of sedimentary rocks that were formed long ago by the depositing of loose material in horizontal layers by water. Later they were squeezed into their present steeply-tilted form by the continuing action of uplift along the Punchbowl Fault to the south and Pinyon and San Andreas Faults to the north.

The park is located at 28000 Devil's Punchbowl Road in Pearblossom and is open from sunrise to sunset. Visitor Center hours are from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. Tuesday through Sunday. Parking, hiking and all programs are free. Donations for animal food and expanding the Visitor's Center exhibits are appreciated.

For more information about Devil's Punchbowl, call (661) 944-2743 or visit <http://www.devils-punchbowl.com>