

SAVE OPEN-SPACE AND AGRICULTURAL RESOURCES

# NEWS & VIEWS

Winter 2009

www.soarusa.org

## SOAR Focuses County on Sustainable Community Strategies

**W**e need to engage people by the thousands, not hundreds!" was the message Ventura City Manager Rick Cole told the crowd of 200 who attended SOAR's Sustainable Community Strategies conference at Cal State Channel Islands in September.

We are a busy society and it's hard to get the time to get involved, and the issues of transit funding, land use decisions and greenhouse gas emissions are not easy to get people excited enough to do something about. But, says Cole, there is one thing we all share a personal stake in, and that is ensuring a quality future for our children and future generations. Becoming a sustainable community, as called for in Senate Bill 375, means preserving biodiversity, supporting locally grown produce, living near where you work, and walking, bicycling, and taking the bus or train instead of driving cars that emit a pound of pollution into the air for every mile driven.

The requirements of SB 375 call for the development of a plan called a Sustainable Community Strategy. The strategy must consider land use and transportation decisions together, with a goal of reducing tail pipe emissions. Regional agencies



in Ventura County have typically looked at these two issues separately. The Ventura County Transportation Commission (VCTC) funds roads, buses and trains, while the Ventura Council of Governments (VCOG)

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## Gathering SOAR's Strength

***Countywide strategy meetings and individual community meetings designed to grow SOAR's effectiveness.***

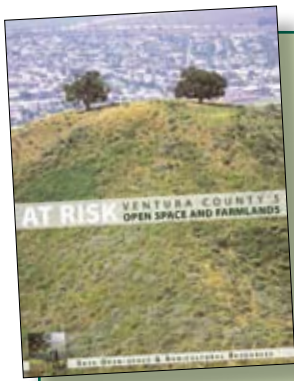
**F**ourteen years ago the first SOAR initiative was approved by the voters. Ten years from now most of the SOAR initiatives in Ventura County will expire. Gathering the tremendous strength we will need to successfully renew SOAR before it expires will take years of steady effort.

To that end SOAR is hosting an annual countywide SOAR strategy session as well as individual community meetings in each city in Ventura County. SOAR needs a core group of credible advocates in every community. We need people with a long-term buy-in who are committed

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## SOAR At Risk Report Reaches New Audiences

SOAR's At Risk report, released last fall, describes current and future challenges to open space and farmland in Ventura County along with key strategies for protecting these lands and moving our region toward a more sustainable future. The 30-page report has been well-received by SOAR

members and community leaders alike, and helped underscore SOAR's message at the September 24 Sustainable Community Strategies conference at CSUCI: SOAR is a vital part of a sustainable future for Ventura County, but SOAR alone will not guarantee that future. We need concerted, connected and collaborative efforts on transportation, energy, agricultural policy, and green community design to complement open space and farmland conservation strategies aren't undone by urban

## Sustainable Community

oversees the planned distribution of State mandated future housing. As conference speakers from the Attorney General's Office, VCOG and VCTC spoke about the requirements of SB 375 (also known as the Anti-Sprawl law), it became clear that our county's efforts to discourage sprawl can be furthered with a Sustainable Community Strategy.

Yet the first step towards the development of a Strategy may be the biggest. Our region has a choice to make by the end of November: VCTC and VCOG can look at transportation and land use together



Khadra, the Executive Director of SCAG who spoke at the conference, is willing to help our county and will gladly delegate the job to VCOG and VCTC, including some funding. It won't be enough however, the rest we'll need to do on our own and in so doing, hopefully citizens will be engaged in charting a better future for their children, and future generations.

Supervisor Linda Parks addresses SOAR Sustainability Conference.



## GATHERING SOAR'S STRENGTH cont. from page 1

to a sustainable, steadily growing effort to renew SOAR for the benefit of the next generations.

This past year, community meetings were held in Simi Valley, Moorpark, Oak Park, Camarillo, Santa Paula and Fillmore. Each meeting brought a group of dedicated SOAR supporters together to begin the important process of building strong SOAR support in each community.

The next community meeting will be in Oxnard and will also be our

ting  
community  
supporters  
with  
and  
needed to  
align to

day  
January 31st at The Courtyard by  
Marriott Hotel in Oxnard. We  
will start promptly at 2:00 and end  
promptly at 4:00.

We will start with a countywide session and discuss some of the key decision points for the renewal of SOAR.

Early sign-ups of those of you committed to this process will really help the planning of this event. Please RSVP by sending an email to Karen Schmidt at: [Karenschmidt@soarusa.org](mailto:Karenschmidt@soarusa.org)

**Next SOAR  
countywide gathering  
Sunday January 31<sup>st</sup>  
from 2:00 to 4:00  
The Courtyard Marriott, Oxnard**



# Lands at Risk Updates:

## OXNARD PROPOSES JONES RANCH EXPANSION

The City of Oxnard has a proposal to expand beyond its city limits to build over 1,000 more houses. Unfortunately, the Jones Ranch proposal would veer the City from its stated path of revitalization and growth within its boundaries. Keeping urban development growth within existing urban boundaries has achieved much needed renewal of older neighborhoods, redevelopment of blighted areas, transit oriented development, and walkable downtown areas.

The City Council and 70% of Oxnard voters supported SOAR's Measure K in 1998 that established a city urban restriction boundary (CURB) around the city. We urge the City of Oxnard to look within rather than areas outside the CURB line, which the Council and its citizens agreed would be off-limit for development until 2020. The case has not been made as to why the City cannot stay within its CURB lines and why, just eleven years after agreeing the lines were sufficient, farmland outside its city is now being pursued.

## SACRAMENTO DE-FUNDS FARMLAND CONSERVATION ACT

The budget crisis in Sacramento has led to cuts in State programs, including ending the State's



reimbursement to counties for a program that incentivizes farmers to preserve their agricultural land and not sell out to developers. The Land and Conservation Act, also known as the Williamson Act, provides a discounted property tax rate to farmers who sign long-term contracts with the government agreeing to keep their land in agricultural use. The lowered property tax rate is an incentive for landowners, but the recent elimination of State funding has left cash-strapped counties scrambling to replace the lost revenue, or begin a process of ending the program.

The County of Ventura is not as invested in the program as counties with significantly more agricultural land. However, the loss of the State's reimbursement (referred to as a "subvention") has resulted in a \$300,000 loss to the County in 2009. While the Board of Supervisors agreed to fund the program, they will be looking at whether to not accept new contracts, or phase out old ones, if State funding is not restored in the next fiscal year.

Statewide, the loss of Williamson Act funding can have a deleterious effect on the preservation of agriculture, which is already suffering from reduced water availability and high-costs to farmers.

## BOARD PUTS MORATORIUM ON PERMITS IN OPEN SPACE

The current moratorium on granting permits for "assembly uses" in the Open Space zone of the unincorporated county will expire in March, 2010. The moratorium was enacted after it was shown that



many more buildings could be built in the Open Space zone than ever contemplated. What brought the issue to light was a proposal by the Cornerstone Church to build a 3,000 seat amphitheater, warehouse facility, offices, 1,700 space parking lot, and church on land zoned Open Space in the Tierra Rejada Greenbelt.

The intent of the Open Space zone is to preserve agriculture, natural resources, and provide boundaries against sprawl. However, with the courts' interpretation of the RLUIPA law (Religious Land Use and Institutionalized Persons Act), it was found that churches cannot be excluded from zones that allow for other types of "assembly uses." The courts ruled that if a local government allows a building for people to assemble in one zone, such as the Reagan Library in the Open Space zone, then you have to allow religious buildings in that zone too. In response, Supervisors Bennett and Parks called for the moratorium to give the County time to craft language that will treat all assembly uses in the Open Space zone the same. The moratorium prohibits any new permits on buildings intended for gatherings of people, both secular and non-secular. This would include schools, churches, government buildings, etc.

The moratorium is an opportunity to give the Open Space zone the respect it deserves.

# Greenbelts

## AT RISK

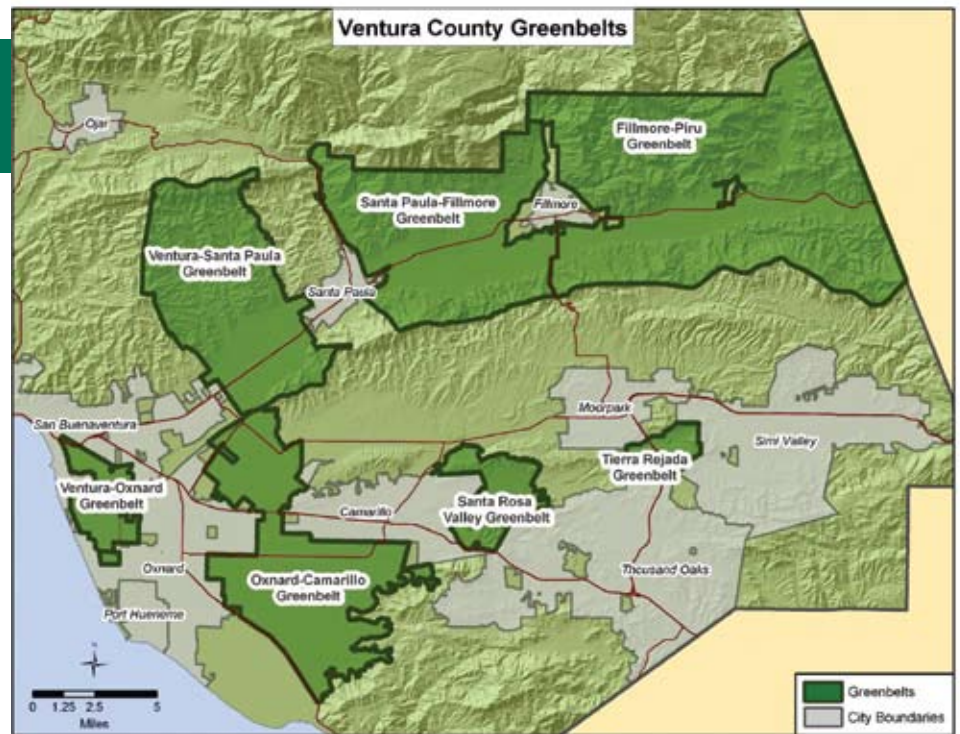
One billion more people are projected to inhabit the earth in 12 years, including tens of thousands more people in Ventura County. This means that farmland and natural open space lands will be under increasing threat of urbanization. Keeping the large greenbelts of farmland and open space as separators between Ventura County cities will keep our cities desirable places to live, while the rest of Southern California cities sprawl together.

Renewed efforts are needed to protect Ventura County's greenbelts. Currently, Thousand Oaks, Simi Valley and Oxnard have proposals to expand their city boundaries into adjacent open space and agricultural lands. Greenbelt agreements and greenbelt ordinances-- shared agreements between the county and the cities-- recognize the need to protect these areas. However, even with greenbelt agreements, annexations and development can still occur in these areas with a vote of a city council and LAFCo (the Local Agency Formation Commission made up of elected officials and public members). We encourage the cities and the County to do what they can to strengthen protections of greenbelts.

### REAGAN LIBRARY ANNEXATION

The City of Simi Valley has a proposal to annex part of the Tierra Rejada Greenbelt, the rural land that separates the cities of Moorpark, Thousand Oaks and Simi Valley. It is a reasonable request because the City already provides urban services to the Library and six adjoining residential lots. Greenbelts are to protect rural lands, not urban lands. However, Simi Valley's annexation proposal also includes taking into the City of Simi an additional 68-acre parcel to the east of the Reagan Library that does not receive any services and is undeveloped open space.

This 68-acre parcel is part of the open space lands the Tierra Rejada Greenbelt Agreement is intended to protect from urbanization. State law specifies that annexations are to be done for purposes of development. The City of Simi Valley states it has no development purposes for this land, so there is no need for the City to incorporate it into its city boundaries. Fortunately, the City of Simi Valley has stated it does not object to SOAR's proposal to keep the 68-acre open space parcel in the Tierra Rejada Greenbelt. Hopefully LAFCo will agree.



### FUNDING FOR WILDLIFE CORRIDORS IN VENTURA COUNTY ON STATE BALLOT

\$20 million will be set aside to acquire Ventura County lands for wildlife passage if the State Water Bond is approved by voters. The allocation in the Bond would be used to purchase critical wildlife corridors that are used by deer, bobcats, coyotes and other large mammals that traverse these lands that connect the Santa Monica Mountains with the Simi Hills and Los Padres Forest.





The 5<sup>th</sup> Annual SOAR 5K Run Through the Orchards on October 11th continued to provide an opportunity for both serious and recreational runners to enjoy the open spaces of the Tierra Rejada greenbelt while raising funds for SOAR. More than 200 people participated in the event, including families with children in strollers who enjoyed a leisurely walk or jog on the 3K course through walnut groves and pumpkin patches.



The annual fundraiser was sponsored by Patagonia, Inside Track of Ventura and Future Track of Agoura Hills. Prizes were awarded in 8 age categories each for men and women. Runner ages ranged from 7 to more than 70 years old. More than 30 Foundation Circle and other SOAR members sponsored the event.



After the run, several long-standing SOAR volunteers were recognized for their continued efforts to keep SOAR strong in our county.

The event, held each October, is run on one of the few all dirt 5K courses, and gave both the runners and all of the volunteers an opportunity to enjoy the open spaces we are working to protect.

# SOAR THANKS OUR FOUNDATION CIRCLE DONORS

This summer SOAR identified the need for 50 donors to step up to become SOAR Foundation Circle members by donating \$500 or more to keep the SOAR organization going strong in 2010. So far, in spite of tough economic times, already, 36 SOAR members have responded to the call, and many more have sent in smaller but no less heartfelt contributions.

## SOAR *Foundation Circle* —————

Al and Marilyn Adam	Gil Michaels
Patricia Feiner Arkin and Edward Arkin	Roseann Mikos
John and Catherine Baker	Lowell Novy, DVM
George Berg and Gail Topping	Sherry and Bob O'Hollaren
Steve Bennett and Leslie Ogden	Joseph O'Neill
Wolf Breiman and Debbie Diamond	Larry and Nancy Older
Brian Brennan	Linda Parks
BuenaVentura Blending, Inc.	Virginia Pollack
Barbara Burden	Tom Ritch and Janice Davis
Mark and Penny Burley	Brian Rocheleau
Chapala Cafe	Fred and Gail Rosenmund
Gary Cramer and Marjorie Herring	Lisa Cordova Schwarz and Craig Schwarz
Bill and Kate Faulkner	Daniel Silver, MD
Eric and Donna Johanson	Hank and Sue Stoutz
Edward and Diane Keay	Chuck Thomas
Robert and Janet Liberman	Jane Tolmach
Paul and Christine Magie	Tom and Kerry Weisel
Manuel Marquez	

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*Whether it's weak greenbelt agreements, loss of Williamson Act contracts for farmland, or threats of selling off State Parks, SOAR has been there to provide a critical layer of protection when government cannot, or will not, halt the conversion of land set aside for open space and agriculture.*

## SOAR - THE MEASURE THAT KEEPS ON GIVING!



# You can Join SOAR'S Foundation Circle



To those of you who have already contributed this year, and most especially to our new Foundation Circle donors, we say THANK YOU!!!

If you haven't renewed your SOAR membership this year, we hope you will do so now and will consider joining at the Foundation Circle level. If you cannot, we hope you will join SOAR at the level that you are able.

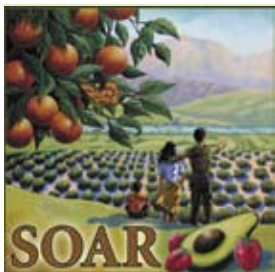
Foundation Circle Benefits include a listing in all SOAR publications throughout 2010 and a special reception with SOAR Board Members in 2010.

*Please use the enclosed SOAR envelope for your 2010 Foundation Circle or Membership Renewal.*



The primary role of the countywide SOAR organization is to stop urban sprawl by defending the SOAR growth boundaries around each city. This requires a strong organization that can quickly mobilize money, volunteers and campaign expertise when developers launch their high-priced campaigns on an isolated community. We encourage you to invest in your future quality of life by investing in keeping SOAR healthy.

***A strong SOAR organization is insurance for your family's quality of life. Invest in your future – invest in SOAR!***



**SAVE OPEN-SPACE AND  
AGRICULTURAL RESOURCES**

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Ventura, California 93006

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## **NEXT SOAR COUNTYWIDE GATHERING**

**Sunday January 31<sup>st</sup> from 2:00 to 4:00**  
Courtyard by Marriott Hotel, Oxnard  
600 Esplanade Drive

### *Our Mission*

*SOAR's mission is to make Ventura County a better place to live by limiting urban sprawl, protecting open space and agricultural lands, and promoting livable and sustainable communities in the county and surrounding regions.*

## **It's Easy to Join SOAR's Rapid Response Team**

SOAR has thousands of supporters throughout Ventura County and recently we have seen the tremendous impact grassroots contact has on decision makers. While money from the development industry influences development decisions, so can many people speaking out via emails, phone calls, and in particular, showing up at the meeting where elected officials decide the fate of open space land.

The concept behind SOAR's Rapid Response Team is alerting SOAR members of decisions about to be made on core issues related to open space protection so they can quickly respond and speak out. Becoming a member of the Rapid Response Team with a willingness to send an occasional email, or make a call, or better yet, show up at a critical meeting, is based on neighbor helping neighbor and communities helping communities to keep our county from becoming another Los Angeles or Orange County.

To become a member of SOAR's Rapid Response Team, make sure SOAR has your contact information, especially your email address by emailing us at [rapidresponse@soarusa.org](mailto:rapidresponse@soarusa.org).

Join the Rapid Response Team and you will see how you and other SOAR members can make a difference.