

OUR VIEW

A habitat plan for people, too

In the end, Riverside County supervisors had only to dot the i's and cross the t's to finish writing themselves into the history books. They did that Tuesday with their expected, unanimous vote to approve a sweeping habitat conservation plan.

Mary Nichols, secretary of the state Resources Agency, came to watch and attest that this commitment to preservation puts Riverside County in the forefront of California counties, and even among counties nationwide.

The county's habitat plan aims to amass preserves totalling more than 150,000 acres. That's 234 square miles — an area half the size of the City of Los Angeles. Millions of dollars are already invested in this process. Millions more in local, state and federal funds will be needed.

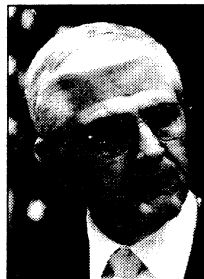
But what makes this plan a national model is that it's not just about planning for endangered species. It's the lead element of grand, comprehensive plans for roads and new communities. Considered together — and that's the proper perspective — this is about planning for people: for those who live here now, for those yet to come, and for a lasting quality of life that leaves some undeveloped vistas for people, flora and fauna alike.

If all of this makes this plan a leap of faith, it is a leap that works because so many

have made it together. Praise was shared among many Tuesday: Former supervisor Tom Mullen, the architect of this approach; current chair John Tavaglione and the rest of the board, and county staff.

The less-noticed heroes are the 120-odd "stakeholders" — builders, property owners, farmers, environmentalists, community leaders — who have dedicated countless hours, weekly and for years, to debating, planning and compromising toward success. One big reason this plan stands to succeed is that the state and federal officials who must approve it have been given a role in shaping it from the first. Another is that the plan is written to be adaptable. But a larger reason is this: The creation of this plan has been a remarkable, sustained work of grassroots political activism. Participants have spent so long working together that they've grown a real appreciation for other views and common goals.

There will be a lot of bumps, and probably big ones, along the way. What gives this plan a real hope of long-term success is the living activist tradition that has been created along with it.



Tom Mullen



John Tavaglione



Mary Nichols