

“Lessons learned the hard way”

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If planning were as easy as wishing, vision statements about regional growth would be all we would ever need. We could say, let there be vistas of open space, but let there also be room for all who want to live here. Who doesn't make out well in the warm, fuzzy version?

But of course, real planning isn't that easy. In a particularly hostile environment, a vision statement might not be worth the paper it's printed on.

Riverside County knows quite a bit on that score, having fought a regular barroom brawl in the 80's and early 90's over designated preserves for the Stephens' kangaroo rat.

But perhaps extra credit is earned for learning something the hard way. With the county moving purposefully into the process of long-range planning, something like that seems to be apparent. Witness the vision statement for that work, approved by Riverside County supervisors last month.

This statement runs to high hopes and some might dismiss it as bureaucratic boilerplate. But the key thing here is not what's being said; it's who's saying it.

This vision statement has been synthesized by a steering committee representing property owners and builders, environmentalists and community leaders. These are the interests and in many cases, the very individuals that fought the late kangaroo rat wars and were drawn to the common realization that there had to be a better way. This time, they are making an effort to work together.

In fact, they've been doing that for months. They have met as this steering committee; and for much longer as an advisory committee to the multiple species planning effort. They have learned where lies common ground, and where the brambles are, and they have done that in a civil fashion that builds common trust. Most of the work on Riverside County's integrated plan – open space, transportation corridors, endangered species – is to be done much sooner than most people appreciate, by May 2001. That pace is possible only because there is already a tremendous personal investment, on many fronts, in making this effort succeed.

A vision statement that grows out of a process like this is one of the most promising kind. It expresses a spirit that's already animating real work.