

“State can help in planning”

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-Touring legislator encourages county to seek funds.

Now is the right time for Riverside County to make a pitch for state funds to help pay for its plan to map out areas for homes, freeways and wildlife, a visiting state legislator said Thursday.

Assemblywoman Denise Ducheny, D-San Diego, received a literal overview of land-use planning in Riverside County as she toured the area by helicopter along with Assemblyman Rod Pacheco, R-Riverside, and county Supervisor Tom Mullen.

“Fortunately, this is a good year for this,” Ducheny said of Riverside County’s planning efforts.

State revenue is up, she said, and law makers are more willing to dole out funds on a one-time basis for planning grants or the purchase of wildlife preserves than to commit funds for ongoing projects.

“That kind of thing, I think, is what a lot of Sacramento is looking at right now,” Ducheny said.

Ducheny chairs the Assembly’s Budget Committee. She is also vice chair and co-chair of other budget-relocated committees and a member of Assembly committees on agriculture, environmental safety, housing, and community development, and water, parks and wildlife.

The county’s population is expected to double to 3 million in 15 to 20 years.

By planning for growth and at the same time creating safe places for 164 endangered or threatened plants and animals, Riverside County hopes to become a model for urban planning. The county is about a third of the way into the three-year process.

County officials would like to tap into state and federal money to help for the \$22 million mapping process.

Mullen said the helicopter ride was important to give Ducheny a feel for how large Riverside County really is.

“It’s extraordinary to have the chair of a standing committee come down,” he said.

Mullen said he is aware that other hands are reaching out for a share of state money.

“Clearly, she’s negotiating with 79 other assemblymen,” Mullen said, “and it’s a big state.”