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HABITAT PROJECT MOVING ALONG



Photos by HAYNE PALMOUR IV / STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

Above, Lake Calavera glistens in the sunlight on a spring day in Carlsbad. An environmental group lost its appeal of permits for a dam repair project, but its leader says she is pleased despite the decision. Below, Greg Gutierrez, his 7-year-old son, Grant, and their dog, Rory, walk across the dam while taking a hike at Lake Calavera last month.

Preserve Calavera says city's decision not all bad

Carlsbad officials set 90-day deadline for progress

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CARLSBAD — The leader of an environmental group that focuses on Carlsbad's Mount Calavera region has found something to cheer about even though the group lost its appeal of a recent city Planning Commission decision.

When the City Council denied the group's appeal in April on a repair project at Lake Calavera in northeastern Carlsbad, it also acknowledged that the city needs to do a better job in general on habitat management issues, said Preserve Calavera leader Diane Nygaard. That was important to Nygaard.



Preserve Calavera and other organizations have been pushing the city for months to speed up the pace of its Habitat Management Plan project. Part of a regional effort, the habitat document details what land in

Carlsbad will remain undeveloped and how it will be managed.

"(City officials admitted that) they're not living up to their end of the bargain —

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they're not doing what they said they would do," Nygaard said. The city's planning director, Marcela Escobar-Eck, agreed Tuesday that Carlsbad officials would like the project to move faster. "We're very anxious to get all of these pieces in place also," she said. "We're all working diligently toward the same goal."

The city now has committed to a 90-day time frame to get some aspects of the plan in effect, including the hiring of two consulting companies, she said.

One company will be responsible for managing some 600 acres of city-owned, native habitat. Carlsbad is in exclusive negotiations with the Fallbrook-based Center for Natural Lands Management for that contract, Escobar-Eck said.

Founded in 1990, the center already monitors environmental conditions on nearly 1,600 acres of privately owned land in the city limits, including many parcels of native habitat around the La Costa housing developments. The city's second environmental contract will be for a preserve steward consultant. That job is a "watchdog" function, Escobar-Eck said. The consultant will review management of all private and publicly owned habitat areas in the city, produce an annual report on the status of the habitat areas and assist city staff with biological questions, the planning director said.

The city has received six applications for that position. Salary rates for both jobs are still being negotiated, Escobar-Eck said. Once the preserve steward position is filled, work will begin on the first of what's planned to be an annual assessment of the condition of native habitat areas in town, Escobar-Eck said.

"We're going to get it done as soon as is humanly possible after we get this person on board," she said.

Carlsbad planners started working on the Habitat Management Plan more than a dozen years ago. State and federal wildlife officials signed off on the plan in 2004, and the City Council approved it in late 2005. The state's Coastal Commission is now reviewing portions of the document, and the city is working on related paperwork as well as hiring the consultants.