

# Judge Stops Plan to Bulldoze LA's Ballona Wetlands Ecological Reserve

*Judge sides with opponents of controversial bulldozing plan that would wipe out species habitat and increase flood risk to the Los Angeles public.*

LOS ANGELES, CALIFORNIA, USA, May 22, 2023 /EINPresswire.com/ -- Cheers and tears of joy are flowing as animal lovers and environmentalists across Southern California celebrate a huge victory for an estimated one million wild animals, members of 1,700 species, including threatened and endangered species. Their home - The [Ballona Wetlands](#) Ecological Reserve in Playa del Rey - has been threatened by a highly controversial bulldozing plan.

Now, a California Superior Court Judge has ruled in favor of the wildlife, siding with Protect Ballona Wetlands and Defend Ballona Wetlands, two community groups formed to advocate for this land that is an oasis for imperiled wildlife, including migratory birds, being LA's last coastal wetlands.

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*Marcia Hanscom, Defend Ballona Wetlands*

In a detailed 67-page ruling, regarding case number 21STCP00240, Los Angeles County Judge James C. Chalfant essentially told the California Department of Fish & Wildlife that their so-called “restoration” is a no-go and implied they give up the decade-long, 250-million-dollar industrial land overhaul entirely or start over to correct dangerous flood risk calculation errors they used to design their project in a densely populated region of LA on the edge of the Pacific Ocean! The public can access the entire ruling

here: <https://drive.google.com/file/d/12qiMPyofWzkMOzT0d6rIYRF2egLjikeq/view>.

Judge Chalfant made it clear that the State could not use flood risk standards unacceptable to



Owl living in LA's Ballona Wetlands. Photo courtesy Jonathan Coffin

the US Army Corps of Engineers.

"Here, the FEIR [Final Environmental Impact Report] is based on flood control design criteria that currently are infeasible under the Corps' requirements and cannot be built."

"As the Court recognized, and standing out like a sore thumb is the revelation that engineers who were paid handsomely to design this project used incorrect flood risk standards, which are very important to get right, especially given concerns about sea level rise on the coast," explained public interest lawyer Jamie T. Hall. Ballona's approximately 640 acres have been owned by the public since 2003 and are a treasured resource throughout Los Angeles County and beyond.

"As an integral member of the environmental coalition Defend Ballona Wetlands, we're thrilled with this key court victory," said Lisa Levinson, Campaigns Director for In Defense of Animals. "Now, greedy developers will have to start the approval process all over again, likely costing them millions of dollars. We urge them to do the right thing for the many thousands of animals who call Ballona Wetlands home and drop this destructive, phony restoration project!"

Another bulldozing opponent, Academy-award nominated actor [James Cromwell](#), recently declared "We will win" as he spoke to hundreds of animal lovers, environmentalists and community leaders who had gathered in Venice to oppose the plan. His rallying cry proved prophetic. Cromwell declared he would stick with activists who have been astonished that California Governor Gavin Newsom's administration would try to send bulldozers into the Ballona Wetlands Ecological Reserve, a significant coastal ecosystem on the Pacific migratory flyway, when he talks about the importance of "nature-based solutions" to protect our planet.



Egrets in LA's Ballona Wetlands. Photo courtesy Jonathan Coffin



Succession Actor James Cromwell denounced bulldozing plan for Ballona Wetlands.

Jane Velez-Mitchell of [UnchainedTV](#) interviewed attorney Hall and environmental lawyer Bryan Pease for a live-streamed interview the morning after the ruling was posted so they could explain their victory and what they expect to happen next.

“The Court ruled that the California Department of Fish & Wildlife improperly certified this destructive project that would have involved bulldozing some of the state’s most important and fragile wildlife habitats,” said environmental attorney Bryan Pease.

Independent scientists have lamented that the California Department of Fish & Wildlife has not kept up with the science, ignoring species that have returned to Ballona during the last 20 years. They also have ignored the habitat needs of those species, with recent research concluding that many plants and animals at Ballona have evolved with a sandbar across the river’s mouth. These plants and animals (e.g., Pacific Chorus Frog) would die if more high salinity saltwater was brought to the ecological reserve.

“The State has spent more than twelve million dollars planning an experiment that would wipe out this beautiful mosaic of habitats. Experiments can be done in a laboratory, but should not be done where there are fragile habitats not easily duplicated,” explained environmental scientist Robert J. “Roy” van de Hoek.

Community organizer Marcia Hanscom, an advocate for Ballona Wetlands since 1995, agreed the public money spigot should be turned off, continuing with a plea to the Governor.

“We are urging Governor Newsom to immediately withdraw this deeply flawed project and stop spending public money on it,” Hanscom said. Defend Ballona Wetlands has a 20-point Gentle Restoration Plan that they say will achieve all the legitimate goals of restoration, without bulldozing and without wiping out the wildlife that make this area of Los Angeles so special.

UnchainedTV founder Jane Velez-Mitchell, who lives near the Ballona Wetlands, says she is speaking up for the animals she sees on her daily walks. "I saw two dozen pelicans playing in the water near the mouth of the Ballona Wetlands. I looked at them and vowed to do everything I can to make sure they and their offspring always have a home, a home that Angelinos can already access to experience real nature, not some faraway Disneyfied park. We already have a Disneyland. We don't need another one. What's here now is already priceless. Nature is the ultimate healer and doing a better job of restoration than any bulldozer could ever do."

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