

Officials Begin Vetting Trancas Lagoon Project

By Jimmy Tallal / Special to The Malibu Times | Posted: Wednesday, June 25, 2014 5:30 pm

Where one lagoon project ends, another begins.

The first stakeholders meeting was held last week for a government project that's been on the official wish-list for years—the rebuilding of the long-gone Trancas Lagoon in western Malibu.

In addition, Caltrans announced \$8-million plans to replace the aging Pacific Coast Highway bridge over Trancas Creek. Both projects are expected to be completed by 2019.

Rosi Dagit, senior conservation biologist for the Resource Conservation District of the Santa Monica Mountains (RCDSMM) said, “The historic lagoon is buried [under landfill and cement], so we're not going for a historical recreation, we're working with what's there now. This will be a new lagoon, to make the best of what we've got.”

A cost estimate for the lagoon project has not been released.

The oldest known maps of the Trancas area, including a map from 1900, indicate the presence of a lagoon, but by 1947, aerial photos show it had disappeared.

Hearing about another lagoon project in Malibu raised a red flag for some, as the recent Malibu Lagoon Restoration Project was completed amid much hostility and controversy. But proponents of the Trancas Lagoon project say the two projects are completely different. The Malibu Lagoon project involved State Parks and Heal the Bay, whereas the Trancas Lagoon should mainly involve RCDSMM, National Park Service (NPS) and Caltrans.

“The proposed project is not a lagoon reconstruction or rehabilitation—which would only be possible if they tore down 10 houses on Broad Beach and took out the new Trancas Center,” activist and resident Hans Laetz wrote in an email to stakeholders. “There are no plans for parking lots, interpretive centers or any structures north of PCH.”

Variations on a theme of three proposed designs all show the new lagoon beginning with the current creek-bed near Vintage Grocers Market and expanding eastward into the old Trancas Riders & Ropers



Trancas Creek

Proponents of the Trancas Lagoon project want to rebuild a long-gone lagoon that would feed into nearby Zuma Beach. The bridge over the creek is also going to be replaced, according to Caltrans.

oval — meaning that a flat, land-filled field of mostly non-native plants will be under water in the future. On the ocean side of the PCH bridge, the lagoon would continue onto a portion of Zuma Beach.

In a saga that began in 2008, Trancas Country Market owner Dan Bercu agreed to dedicate the adjacent 7.6-acre vacant lot as permanent open space in return for concessions on his property remodel. Before the transfer was complete, the property was sold to Zuma Beach Properties, LLC, owned by Paige and Bo Dubbert (Paige Dubbert is an heir of the Wal-Mart family).

In a 2010 legal settlement with Laetz, the Dubberts agreed to Bercu's original offer to hand over the lot. But now, the couple is going through a divorce and lawsuit, so the title still has not been cleared to NPS.

In the meantime, NPS and RCDSMM conducted a feasibility study on the lagoon project, which included modifications to the existing bridge. They also worked on securing the rights to work on the creek-bed and flood control channels, and purchase the Latta property, a boomerang-shaped lot between NPS lands and the beach.

Experts believe coastal lagoons are an important wildlife habitat and sanctuary because they're protected from the ocean. Historically, the Trancas Lagoon was a spawning ground for steelhead trout and tidewater gobies; attracted seabirds and waterfowl for feeding, resting and breeding; and served as a stop for migratory birds traveling the Pacific flyway.

Caltrans to replace Trancas bridge for \$8 million

In a surprise announcement during last week's meeting, Ron Kosinski, deputy director of environmental planning for Caltrans, said the agency's 1925/1946 PCH bridge over Trancas Creek is "falling apart" and needs to be replaced. That project comes with an \$8-million price tag.

"The replacement would add bike lanes and bring it up to current safety standards," he said. "Eight million dollars is already being set aside, and we might have to consider widening it to accommodate the lagoon. "

Money for the bridge project is apparently not an issue.

"We have more money than projects right now [at Caltrans]," Kosinski said.

A timeline is already in place: January 2015 to September 2018 is set aside for design, permits and bids; bridge construction from June 2018 to October 2018, and lagoon construction from June 2019 to October 2019.

The 40 residents in attendance said they want a pedestrian path under the PCH bridge between Zuma Beach and Trancas market; and to maintain the existing dirt path between Morning View and Trancas market that students use to walk to school. Most also want an unpaved emergency road connecting

Malibu West to PCH or Morning View.

Laetz and Julie Eamer of the group A Safer PCH said the new PCH bridge must have railings tall enough to prevent people from falling over, unlike the current bridge, and be wide enough for a right turn lane, pedestrians and bicycles.

A second stakeholder meeting will be scheduled for September, focusing on work proposed for Trancas area flood control channels.