

Battle for the butterflies

Environmentalists: More oversight of development on San Bruno Mountain

By Edward Carpenter
Staff Writer

SAN BRUNO — The Parks and Recreation Department will investigate a potential conflict in oversight for work on butterfly habit restoration on San Bruno Mountain, following a complaint by a local environmental group.

The complaint came at the supervisors' meeting Tuesday, just before they voted unanimously to approved a \$171,000 contract extension for Palo Alto-based Thomas Reid Associates through December 2007.

The extension — which could pave the way for the development of about 300 single-family homes on prime habitat for one of three endangered butterflies on the mountain — was approved in spite of a 2004 peer review that calls the company's data collection into question.

Oversight of the restoration has been left entirely to Thomas Reid, the same company that manages the plan, according to Philip Batchelder of San Bruno Mountain Watch. "The same company created the Habitat Conservation Plan implemented it and is the only organization that

regularly reports on the outcomes," Batchelder said. Thomas Reid has been the only company involved since it created the plan in 1982, Batchelder said.

What's more, because of the "haphazard" nature of the data collected by Thomas Reid from 1982-2000, it is impossible to determine whether progress is being made toward saving the Mission Blue, Elfin and Callippe silverspot butterflies, according to a report prepared in

2004 by Travis Longcore, science director of The Urban Wildlands Group, a nonprofit dedicated to preserving and restoring species.

"In my opinion, that really wasn't a good methodology, if your objective was to go back after 20 years to say we have increased the number of butterflies, or we have increased the area of the butterflies," Longcore said.

Since that report, Thomas Reid has changed its data-collection method, but to what result isn't clear, said Longcore, who emphasized that too little funding hamstrings the company to a

substantial degree.

Nonetheless, supervisors have asked Parks and Recreation to look into the matter and report back to them. Board of Supervisors President Jerry Hill and Supervisor Adrienne Tissier, who represents the area, weren't aware of the Longcore report.

"We want [Parks and Recreation] to be able to verify and oversee the contract and make sure that the work is being done in an appropriate manner," Hill said.

Thomas Reid, of Thomas Reid Associates, said his company is working to improve its data collec-

tion and has already made some changes. "I think the [butterfly] populations [on San Bruno Mountain] are robust and stable," he said, while acknowledging that the grasslands the butterflies depend on for feeding and mating are withering away.

San Bruno Mountain watch isn't just trying to save the butterflies for the sake of the butterflies, but because they are an indication of the overall health of the ecosystem, Batchelder said. "The bottom line is that the habitat is in major decline; Thomas Reid Associates hasn't performed," he said.

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26. GROVELAND AREA (TUOLUMNE CO., CA) 18,600 square feet. STARTING BID \$7500	79. BOULDER CREEK AREA (SANTA CRUZ CO., CA) 9,700 square feet. STARTING BID \$2500	168. BEND AREA (DESCHUTES CO., OR) 10 acres. *STARTING BID \$100
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52. SAND CITY AREA (MONTEREY CO., CA) 25' x 75'. STARTING BID \$2500	114. CITY OF EUREKA (HUMBOLDT CO., CA) 1 lot. STARTING BID \$2000	
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