

(letter from Don Fong to Metro Santa Cruz, May 7, 1998)

Editors:

Bicyclists in Santa Cruz often cite the environment as their primary motivation. Yet recently the avowedly eco-bicyclist group People Power has been battling environmentalists who are usually their allies. At issue are plans to build a bike path thru the habitat of an endangered species.

In 1992, the city council commissioned a feasibility study for a bike/pedestrian connection from the eastern end of Broadway to the western end of Brommer St. In 1997, the city held public hearings on the various options. The most direct route would cut thru Arana Gulch. It would take two 400' bridges, cost millions of dollars, and require extensive

paving thru the habitat of a state-listed endangered species, the Santa Cruz Tarplant. It would also impact the habitat of the federally endangered Tidewater Goby and the federally threatened California Red-legged Frog.

The alternatives would be 1-2 minutes slower for bicycles.

The California Native Plant Society, Friends of Arana Gulch, and many conservation minded bicyclists spoke against cutting thru the Gulch. The CNPS warns that a path thru the Gulch would obstruct the optimal management regime for the tarplant (requiring fire and grazing), could alter the hydrology of the site in ways unfavorable to the tarplant, and doom the tarplant by introducing competing weeds.

Moreover, coastal terrace prairie is an endangered ecosystem

type, with only about 2000 acres remaining in the whole world.

Fragmenting what little we have left is the last thing we should be doing.

Nevertheless, People Power has come out solidly in favor of the direct option. They argue that the added safety and convenience of a direct path will encourage more people to ride bikes instead of driving, and that this effect will outweigh the ecological damage.

Have they become so focused on bicycling that they've lost sight of why we're doing it in the first place? It makes no sense to sacrifice endangered species habitat in order to promote bicycling. That's like cutting off your nose to save your face.

I don't think their position is representative of the bicycle community, nor even of the People Power membership at large. In my experience, most People Power members are the kind of folks who want to be models of environmental responsibility, who want to reduce their impact on the planet, who treasure biodiversity --- not the kind who'd want to pave over endangered species habitat just so they could get to Capitola Mall a little faster.

--- Don Fong (former People Power member)