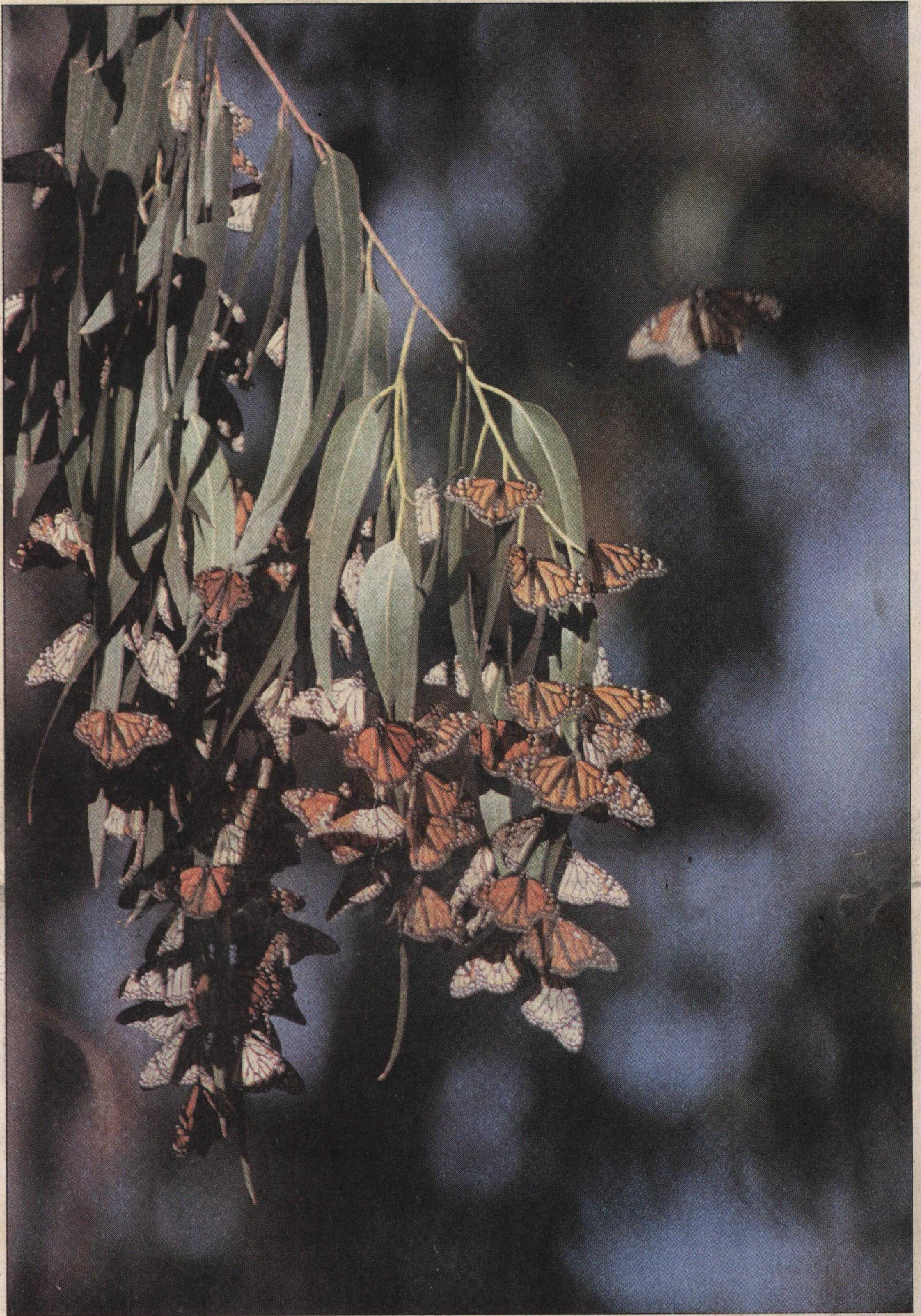


# MAN vs. MONARCH

## Moran Lake neighbors hope to preserve shrinking habitat



Bill Lovejoy/Sentinel

Butterflies wintering on Moran Lake, the county's third-largest nesting habitat for the butterflies, stir in the afternoon sun.

Butterflies

By JONDI GUMZ

Sentinel staff writer

### LIVE OAK

At the end of the trail along Moran Lake is a secluded spot discovered by the monarch butterfly.

The butterflies float and dip high overhead, then rest in the eucalyptus grove, their black-tipped orange wings glowing in the sunlight.

It's a spot that Mike Guth and his neighbors believe is worth protecting.

"A lot of us are willing to work with the county to preserve what's left of the habitat," said Guth, a former aerospace engineer who is now attending law school. "We've been taking this resource for granted for so long."

County Supervisor Jan Beautz agrees it's time for the county to take a closer look at the

situation.

"Legally, you have to protect the monarchs," Beautz said.

In actuality, though, people have been chipping away at the Moran Lake butterfly habitat even though the area is defined by the California Coastal Act as environmentally sensitive.

Moran Lake is the third largest wintering population in Santa Cruz County for the monarch, whose Latin name is *Danaus plexippus*. Biologists estimate 40,000 monarchs roost at Moran Lake during the winter. The two largest wintering spots are Natural Bridges and Lighthouse Field, state beaches that attract large numbers of visitors specifically to view the butterflies.

Biologists say the monarchs' long-distance migration is unique among insects.

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# Monarchs

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Monarchs in the Rockies fly to the California coast in October and November. They are picky about where they stay, seeking tree limbs in a mild climate, with filtered sunlight and shelter from the wind. They hibernate for several months and by early March, fly inland, seeking milkweed to deposit their eggs.

Although the monarch isn't considered an endangered species, its habitat has been shrinking because of urbanization.

The conflict between man and monarch seems inevitable.

There are examples of monarchs roosting in cypress or Monterey pines, but in Santa Cruz County, the groves that attract the butterfly are mostly blue-gum eucalyptus, a non-native species that is notorious for shallow roots and dropping limbs.

Only part of the Moran Lake property is a county park. Beyond the 9.2-acre park, the county Sanitation District owns a 4-acre eucalyptus grove. The 100-foot trees, which surround a pumping station, were planted prior to 1927, perhaps as a way of deodorizing smells, workers say.

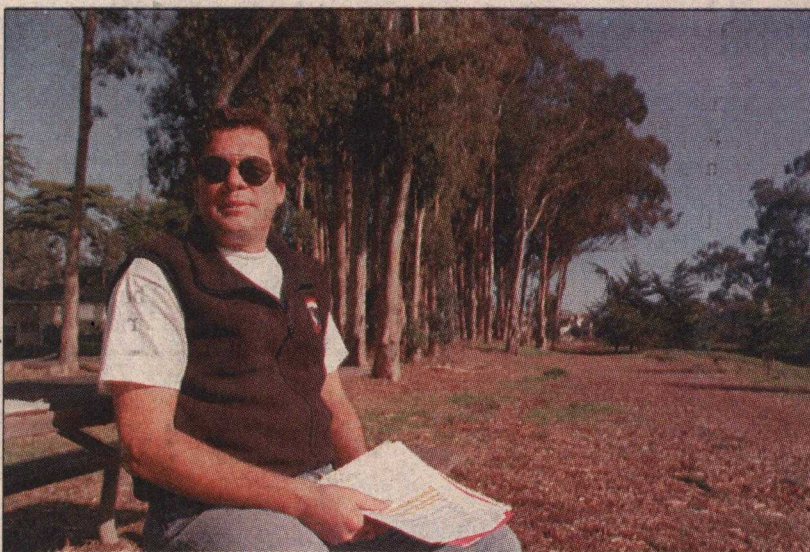
Between the lake-front picnic area and the eucalyptus grove sit more than two dozen homes, some of which used to have eucalyptus trees that have since been cut down either for safety or to improve views.

"It is a small piece of land impacted by many landowners, both public and private," said state park interpreter Julie Sidel. "To ensure protection for the butterflies would require careful planning and cooperation on the part of many parties."

That hasn't been the case.

Last year, at least 47 medium to large eucalyptus trees in the area were cut down, eliminating roosting sites and reducing the shade and wind protection that monarch butterflies find attractive. Some trees were taken down by county parks or county sanitation staff because homeowners had safety concerns.

The county Sanitation District wants to remove a row of eucalyptus that hang over the backyards of homeowners on Placer Street and replace



Bill Lovejoy/Sentinel

Mike Guth, a Moran Lake neighbor and an advocate for the monarchs that roost in eucalyptus groves, hopes to raise money to buy the last undeveloped parcel on East Cliff Drive for the county.

them with redwoods over the next decade. A biologist who reviewed the district's proposed master plan recommended that workers stop using a dirt road that leads to a storage area so as not to squish butterflies knocked to the ground during the rainy winter.

The subject is so sensitive that the master plan still isn't ready after three years of discussion.

Residents like Guth were dismayed to learn about plans to divide a lot on East Cliff Drive and replace the aging cottage on the parcel with three larger homes, which would have required cutting down some eucalyptus trees. Butterflies don't roost there, but Guth feared removing too many trees would allow more wind, leaving the remaining eucalyptus more vulnerable to gusts.

After talking with neighbors, Peter Rogers, who owns the property, withdrew the project in October and downsized it to two homes, which will save more trees.

"I live in the neighborhood," said Rogers. "I don't want to do anything detrimental to the surroundings."

Guth wants county supervisors to

acquire the last undeveloped parcel on East Cliff Drive, a scenic lot dotted with eucalyptus. He hopes to raise private funds to buy the land for the county at full market value.

Beautz said she is willing to pitch the idea to the other supervisors.

Beautz also pushed for \$50,000 in this year's budget to develop a master plan for the Moran Lake county park. A biologist has been hired to assess the butterfly habitat and determine how to maintain it. The first public meeting on the plan will be in late January.

Sidel, the state park interpreter, pointed out that the eastern monarch, which winters in Mexico, is threatened by logging that provides a meager living to people who live in extreme poverty.

"Here on the coast of California, we have the economic luxury to make good decisions for the monarchs that live among us," she said. "I hope that we can rise to the occasion."

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