

Developer smiles on Monarchs

By DAVID LELAND
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SANTA CRUZ — A local developer has agreed to donate a conservation easement in the Branciforte Creek area of Santa Cruz to protect Monarch butterflies and Blue Herons.

In return, the city Zoning Board will consider his request to construct three condominiums on his adjoining property.

A ruling on the matter is due Thursday night, when the Zoning Board convenes at 7:30 p.m. in the council chamber at City Hall. It would be the result of nearly 10 months of proposals, environmental impact reports and arguments by both Aptos developer Travis Van Brash and conservationists from as far away as Portland, said Tim Reynolds of the city Planning Department.

The principal conservation opponents of Van Brash, who proposed an eight-unit project on Peck Terrace in June were the Monarch Project, a Portland-based conservation group, and the Big Sur Land Trust, a conservation group from Monterey County.

"Our scientists have been working with Mr. Van Brash for about eight months," said Melody Allen, Monarch Project director. "He is being a responsible developer. Santa Cruz is a crucial area in the migration of Monarch butterflies."

The impacted area, located between South Branciforte Drive and Pine Street on the San Lorenzo

River, has long been the habitat of both the Monarch butterfly and the Blue Heron, Allen said.

With its tall eucalyptus trees and lush underbrush, the quiet cul-de-sac provides an excellent atmosphere for viewing the butterflies in their yearly migration.

Under the proposed easement, structural development or destruction of eucalyptus trees and underbrush would be prohibited. Existing footpaths would also be maintained to permit public access to the creek area.

"I'm really pleased," said Allen, whose group plans to place plaques

on the trees in order to educate the public on Monarch butterflies. "This is a good way to combine development while preserving natural habitat."

The South Branciforte Creek area may have as many as 30,000 to 40,000 Monarchs some years, said UCSC scientist John Dayton.

"During the early part of the overwintering period, Monarchs take advantage of abundant nectar sources along the coast to build up their fat reserves for the coming winter," Dayton said. "During this time they form small clusters in many places around Santa Cruz County. South Branciforte Creek is one of those areas."

Allen said volunteer groups will be established to maintain the easement area.

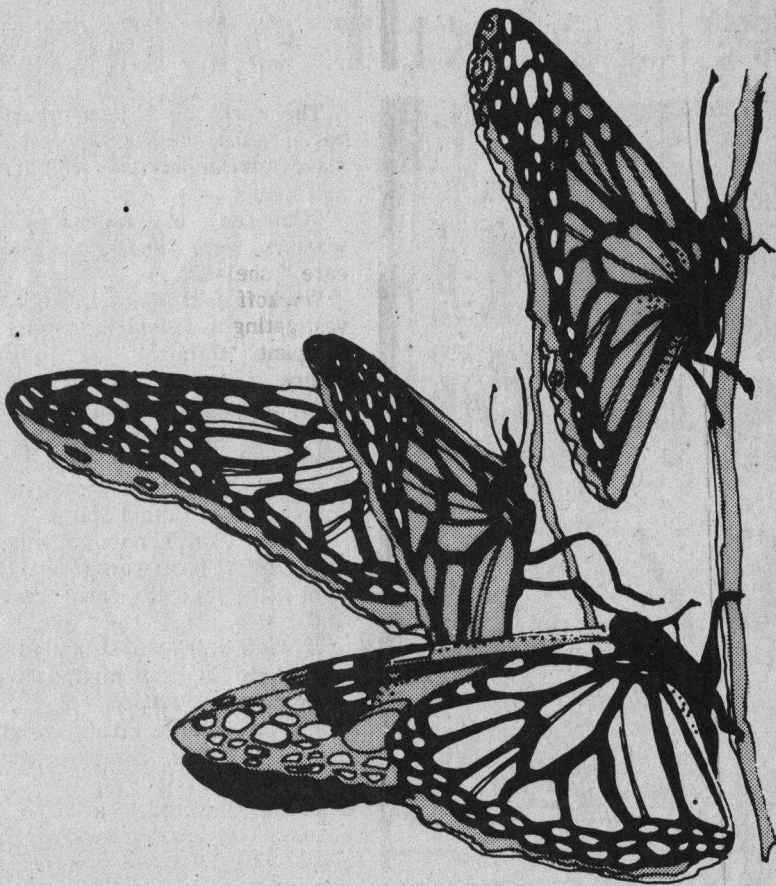
The butterfly's migration stretches 3,000 miles from Canada to Southern Mexico, averaging 44 miles per day in search of warm weather, Allen said.

While there is joint cooperative efforts between Canadian, American and Mexican organizations to preserve the food supply (milkweed) of the Monarchs, more work is needed to preserve the Monarch in the California Coastal areas, Allen said.

This involves keeping the milkweed abundant and the bivouacking sites the same, she said.

Allen sees the easement as a positive step towards this goal.

Even if the land involving the easement sold, the buyer must honor the terms of the easement, said Brian Steen, executive director of Big Sur Land Trust. "An easement is forever."



The Monarch butterfly



The Great Blue Heron

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