

## **To All Concerned Regarding Darkwood Canyon and the Camino Del Sur Project**

San Diego Tracking Team Trackers, Barry Martin and John Richards conducted an examination of this area in two phases.

Phase one was an analysis of Darkwood Canyon in the area of and around the proposed road extension and tunnel site. We conducted a one time transect which covered the area from the main Darkwood Canyon trail east of the road/tunnel site, to the site, then west, south and finally north following established trails toward the vernal pool area.

Phase two was an analysis of the area where Darkwood Canyon intersects Park Village Road. Park Village Road runs east and west and Darkwood Canyon is oriented north and south. Gypsum track traps were set up on established trails on either side of Park Village Road. These trails intersect the sidewalk of Park Village Road from the south (Penasquitos Canyon) and from the north (Darkwood Canyon). The purpose of this analysis was to establish whether or not animals move across Park Village Road between Penasquitos Canyon and Darkwood Canyon. We also interviewed the resident who lives adjacent to this location.

Also included is data from our transect in Penasquitos Canyon which shows wildlife activity south of Park Village Road immediately adjacent to the area in question. This in combination with data from our quarterly transect that runs through Darkwood Canyon (submitted to Helix previously) will provide a good overview of the wildlife movement occurring in the entire area.

### **Methodology and Results**

#### **Phase One**

On September 30, 2005 at 9:45 am we began our examination of the area starting in Darkwood Canyon on the main trail southeast of the proposed road/tunnel site searching for tracks and sign. This was a one time transect done at a relatively quick pace. Dry warm conditions, temperature in the low to mid 80's and calm wind were the conditions at the start time. Thunderstorms occurred in the area 10 days prior to this transect date.

We divided the area into sections; #1 From the main trail to the approximate tunnel site, #2 The tunnel area in the small finger canyon just north of where the present road ends, #3 West of the tunnel area, #4 Trails to vernal pools heading generally northwest of tunnel site.

We took a GPS reading with each observation of key species noting presence or absence of skunks, cottontails, squirrels and small rodents with each. Key species on our list include coyote, mule deer, bobcat, gray fox, raccoon, opossum, wood rat, badger, black-tailed jackrabbit, cougar, spotted skunk, long-tailed weasel, ringtail and roadrunner.

Type of evidence is noted i.e. tracks, scat, browse, etc

Age of the evidence, tracking conditions (excellent, good or poor), topography and habitat are noted with each observation.

Copies of the raw data sheets are available by request to project principals. The following is a summary of our findings by section.

#### **Section 1;**

A mostly flat section, gently sloping down to the creek and riparian area to the west from the Darkwood Canyon main trail.

Tracking conditions were classified as "good" in this section. Scrub oak and chamise chaparral are dominant.

Cottontails and small rodent sign were apparent on all observations in this section.

Key Species Observations;

Coyote Scat; 4 fresh, 5 historic

Coyote Tracks; 1 fresh

Mule Deer Tracks; 3 fresh, 1 historic

Mule Deer Scat; 2 fresh

Mule Deer Browse; 1 fresh

Bobcat Scat; 1 fresh

Wood rat Houses; 10 documented

Wood rat Scat; 5 middens

## **Section 2;**

Flat to moderate slopes in and around the proposed tunnel location, scrub oak chaparral dominant and a wash running through the finger canyon. Water just east in the Darkwood Canyon creek/riparian zone.

Tracking conditions were "good" through here.

We had sign of skunks, cottontails and small rodents concurrent with each key species observation.

Key Species Observations;

Mule Deer Tracks; 4 fresh, 5 historic

Mule Deer Scat; 4 fresh, 4 historic

Wood Rat Scat; 4 fresh middens

Wood Rat Houses; 9

Gray Fox Tracks; 1 fresh

## **Section 3;**

West of tunnel site in dry wash moderate to steep sloping terrain, scrub oak chaparral dominant.

Tracking conditions were classified "good" in this section.

Skunks, cottontails, squirrels and small rodents are abundant in this section.

Key Species Observations;

Mule Deer Tracks; 7 fresh, more than 10 historic (our protocol has a limit of 10 per section)

Mule Deer Browse; More than 10 areas of fresh browse

Wood Rat Houses; 7

Wood Rat Scat; 5 fresh middens

Coyote Tracks; 4 fresh

## **Section 4;**

Trail system heading northwesterly toward vernal pool area from the tunnel site.

Tracking conditions classified "good" in this section.

Steep terrain, scrub oak, chamise and mixed chaparral typical.

Skunk, cottontail and small rodent sign plentiful here.

#### Key Species Observations;

Coyote Tracks; 3 fresh

Coyote Scat; 1 fresh

Mule Deer Tracks; more than 10 fresh, more than 10 historic

Mule Deer Scat; 3 fresh

Mule Deer Lay; 2 fresh

Wood Rat House; 3

Wood Rat Scat; 4 fresh middens

Wood Rat Tracks; 1 fresh

### Phase Two

On 9/30/05 after completing the transect described above we set up the gypsum track traps on both sides of Park Village Road where Darkwood Canyon is cut by Park Village Road. There are several well-used trails on both sides of the road oriented north and south indicating the possibility of wildlife crossing the road heading north or south as they move between Penasquitos Canyon to the south and Darkwood Canyon to the north. Seven stations were established and checked everyday for six days. Each evening the gypsum was cleared of the previous day's tracks and the next morning the stations were checked. One of the neighbors was interviewed and we also documented deer tracks indicating that it had crossed Park Village Road from the south on the morning of 9/20/05. It had rained the previous evening and tracking team member John Richards spotted the tracks in the soft wet dirt the morning of the 20<sup>th</sup> noting this in his tracking journal. These tracks are still visible as of this writing since they made deep impressions in the wet substrate.

During the course of the six-day period we found coyote, raccoon, mule deer, gray fox, along with presence of cottontails, ground squirrels and small rodents.

There is a group of at least 4 deer regularly approaching the road from the south and going into the park across the street from the school to browse on the lawn. We also found evidence of deer crossing the road as well as walking along the sidewalk. Coyotes and raccoons are the most frequent species to travel through these stations with fox making regular appearances. We found clear evidence of raccoons crossing the road from the south since the gypsum was tracked into the street and a similar situation with the coyote and fox, on occasion tracking gypsum from the stations onto the sidewalk and into the road, both north and south sides.

In interviews with the resident at the corner of Darkwood and Park Village, we were told of a deer that had been killed trying to cross Park Village on 9/21/05. She also has witnessed coyotes crossing quite frequently from Camino Del Sur to the west and beyond Darkwood Road to the east as she walks her dogs early each morning, relating how she recently watched a coyote walk across the road from the park south of the road headed north into the school parking lot with a rabbit in it's mouth.

### General Comments and Summary

Upon entry to Darkwood Canyon we found and trailed three sets of deer tracks from the Park Village Road entrance to Darkwood Canyon heading north on the main trail to where they veered off the trail heading toward the riparian area adjacent to the proposed tunnel site. As we progressed through the transect we found that this area supports a very active deer population as well as a variety of key species.

We found a healthy, diverse habitat with a good ratio of predators to prey apparent from the tracks and sign we observed however the wood rat population was higher than we typically see. There is an obvious and surprisingly significant (by count) movement pattern of mule deer and coyotes between the Darkwood Canyon Riparian area and the vernal pool complex as well as between Penasquitos Canyon to the south and Darkwood Canyon to the north across Park Village Road.

There is a resident bobcat as well as a fox working the area.

In addition to the tracks and sign documented we were aware of a very active and diverse bird population including red-shouldered hawk, coopers hawk, red –tailed hawk, scrub jays, wren-tit, house wren, goldfinch, thrasher, spotted towhee, California towhee and quail to name a few.

In combination with the key species a vigorous population of rodents and rabbits exists making for a dynamic ecosystem complete with the full range of predator prey interactions you would expect. All in all this area was found to be quite healthy and vibrant with excellent diversity.

Barry Martin, President of the San Diego Tracking Team, submits this report. Please address all inquires regarding this report to [barrymartin@san.rr.com](mailto:barrymartin@san.rr.com) or by calling 619-892-7620 or Karen Larson-Gordon, SDTT Executive Director at the SDTT number, 760-715-4102.