Southern California desert protection closer to reality, as both houses of Congress weigh proposals to carve out land for off-roading, wilderness

Democrat and GOP politicians want to keep more wilderness wild forever
Republicans and Democrats disagree on a lot of issues, but protecting desert areas in Southern California doesn't seem to be one of them.

Legislation was introduced this month in both chambers of Congress, by members of both major parties, with the goal of protecting 716,000 acres of regional desert, adding a swath nearly as big as Rhode Island to regional land that's already under protection. New protected zones would include off-highway vehicle recreation areas and wilderness, and an expansion of several National Parks.

The identical bills, sponsored by Rep. Paul Cook, R-Yucca Valley, in the House of Representatives and California Sen. Dianne Feinstein, a Democrat, in the Senate, are the result of years of work with the off-roading community, conservationists and local governments. For different reasons, all of those interests want to see the protections in place.

Cook's bill has the support of Democrat Reps Pete Aguilar, D-Redlands, Juan Vargas, D-Imperial Valley and Raul Ruiz, D-La Quinta. Feinstein's bill is co-sponsored by fellow California Sen. Kamala Harris.

Cook and Feinstein introduced separate desert protection bills in 2017, but failed to gain approval in the Senate.

So, over the past couple of years, work was done to reconcile the bills. Now, supporters hope the matching language and bipartisan support will boost its chances of passing out of Congress and getting approval from President Donald Trump.

With the federal 35-day partial shutdown over — for now — Cook is hopeful a larger public lands package, of which the bills are a part, can move forward in the Senate, said Tim Intrye, legislative director for Cook, who represents the 8th Congressional District, which includes Mono and Inyo counties as well as part of San Bernardino County.
The fastest route to the desert bill becoming law, Itnyre said, would be for the Senate to take up and pass the lands package followed by the House taking it up. Introducing similar bills in both chambers also expedites the process of getting the legislation passed, he said.

“I think that despite the partisan conflicts in Washington, this looks like it's going to be an area where we're going to be able to have people on both sides come together and get a big win for all the people who live, recreate or care about the California desert,” Itnyre said.

Although the bills are supported by off-highway vehicle and many environmental groups, the Sierra Club continues to have concerns about the amount of land being set aside for off-road recreation.

Feinstein's bill also builds on her California Desert Protection Act of 1994, which was signed into law by President Bill Clinton. That bill established Death Valley, Joshua Tree and the Mojave national parks and officially protected more than 7.6 million acres of desert wilderness.

In an emailed statement, Feinstein said she promised off-roaders and environmental groups that her office would complete the long-term effort to better manage the desert, which is exactly what she expects this legislation would do.

“The beauty of California's desert is unmatched, and we have a responsibility to keep it pristine for future generations,” Feinstein said. “Unlike many deserts, ours is full of life — from desert tortoises to bighorn sheep, breathtaking wildflower blooms to Joshua trees — that define its unique beauty. The California desert deserves protection.”

Cook is confident Trump will sign a desert protection bill into law.

**More land for off roading**

The legislation on the table would designate six Off-Highway Vehicle Recreation Areas including: Johnson Valley, Sprangler Hills, El Mirage, Rasor, Dumont Dunes and Stoddard Valley.

This would be a win for off-highway vehicle users, as it would ensure permanent access to more than 300,000 acres in the desert for recreation. Currently, this protection applies to about 100,000 acres in Johnson Valley, a result of a 2013 [compromise between off-roaders and the Marine Corps](https://www.sbsun.com/2019/01/31/southern-california-desert-protection-closer-to-reality-as-both-houses-of-congress-weigh-proposals-to-carve-out-la...).
Plans to expand the Twentynine Palms Marine base were scaled back to allow off-
roaders to keep nearly 100,000 of the area’s 188,000 acres for recreational use. The
base expansion covered 88,130 acres once used for off-roading, while also
allowing the Marine Corps access to 56,000 acres up to twice a year for training.

“Everybody went along with it, but boy Cook really recognized, and Feinstein too,
that (off-highway vehicle use) took a huge hit,” said Randy Banis, an off-roading
enthusiast and member of the Bureau of Land Management’s Desert Advisory
Council.

“Because of the cooperation (the off-roading community) showed on that, we sort
of had one coming to us. Hence the piece of the bill that will actually expand
some of these (off-roading) open areas.”

Johnson Valley would be expanded by 21,600 acres if the bill is signed into law.

The El Mirage Off-Highway Vehicle Recreation Area, which features a popular dry
lake bed on more than 24,000 acres near Adelanto, would be expanded by about
680 acres. Spangler Hills in Ridgecrest, which is more than 57,000 acres, would
expand by 41,000 acres.

Banis, who represents recreation interests on the Desert Advisory Council, has
been involved in the effort since the beginning and has high hopes for the current
legislation.

“To see this thing so close to passing, and with the expansions in place and the
protections in place, it really invigorated me and renewed by enthusiasm over this
whole thing,” Banis said.

While off-road enthusiasts and environmentalists have different ideas about how
to use the vast desert land, the relationship between the groups has improved
over the years as off-roaders have learned to stay on the designated trails, Banis
said.

“I believe that managing off-highway vehicle use is a progressive cause,” said
Banis, who describes himself as a New England Democrat. “It keeps people out of
the places that you want to protect and that you want to preserve.”

Still, Banis said, there are some in the off-roading community who are skeptical of
Feinstein's intentions, while some environmentalists remain unhappy with the
off-road protections.

Representatives of the Sierra Club, which did not support the previous bills, are
pleased with the wilderness protections and National Park expansions included in
the new legislation.
However, in a letter to Feinstein on Nov. 30, the organization's leaders said they remain unable to offer the organization’s full support.

“Our opposition is pretty much the same as before,” said Joan Taylor, vice chair of the Sierra Club’s California/Nevada Desert Committee. “It’s a qualified support, you can say, but there are certain sections of the bill we simply cannot support.”

In the letter, the Sierra Club said some of the bill’s proposed off-road expansion would saddle future land managers with “a designation that often causes great damage to the landscape.” The group also isn't pleased with the Cady Mountains being released as a wilderness study area, which could leave it at risk of new utility corridors and motorized vehicle routes. And, according to the letter, the group doesn't like the idea that incentives are offered for developing renewable energy on public land instead of private land.

“We feel that is a mistake,” Taylor said. “It's an incentive to do the wrong thing.”

More wilderness protections

In addition to the off-road areas, the bills aim to protect more than 375,500 acres of wilderness area. This includes 280,360 acres that would be protected by the creation of eight new Bureau of Land Management wilderness areas in the region. Death Valley National Park Wilderness would grow by 88,000 acres, while the San Gorgonio Wilderness in the San Bernardino National Forest would gain 7,141 acres.

The areas are home to bighorn sheep, desert tortoises and some endangered species, and they include Native American cultural sites.

“These areas would be for hiking and backpacking and non-motorized recreation, so that's the part that we're most excited about,” said Ryan Henson, policy director for the California Wilderness Coalition, which has helped craft the legislation.

The bills also would require the Bureau of Land Management to develop a plan for maintaining wildlife corridors, Henson said.

The wilderness protections would prevent future presidential administrations, BLM management, and U.S. Forest Service management from opening the areas for mining, off-highway vehicle use or other kinds of development, Henson said.

“It will be protected in perpetuity for the American people to enjoy and also for the plants and wildlife that's there,” he said.

Protections for Vinagre Wash
The Vinagre Wash Special Management Area would be formed to protect 81,800 acres of public land in Imperial County. The wash area, near the part of the Colorado River that borders Arizona, is home to a large microphyll woodland and attracts migratory songbirds, endangered species and species that seldom come into California, such as the Gila Woodpecker.

Henson said the area also is part of the Sonoran Desert, where the iconic Saguaro Cactus is an indigenous plant.

“Folks plant (Saguaro Cactus) in their yards,” he said. “But where they naturally occur is in this part of California, down near the Vinagre Wash and a little north there.”

The bill also includes provisions that would protect Native American and other cultural resources along the Colorado River, Henson said.

While the California Wilderness Coalition is supportive of the protections in the bill, Henson said all sides had to make some compromises, a process that might explain the length of time it took for the plan to take shape.

“Sen. Feinstein was quite adamant about keeping all the parties at the table, and trying to make people accept a compromise,” he said.

“It ended up being a finely balanced Swiss watch of various compromises.”

One of those compromises, Henson said, is the release of the Cady Mountains as a wilderness study area.

Lands considered wilderness study areas can be officially designated later as wilderness by Congress, or they can have their wilderness study status lifted and be opened to other uses.

The Coalition, like the Sierra Club, initially did not support the release of Cady Mountains, but the organization is hopeful that the land's location, within the Mojave Trail National Monument, keeps it protected from future development and off-roading.

“We’re not anti-off-road vehicles,” Henson said. “We just believe they should stay out of certain places.”

**Land for National Parks; protections in Inyo**
Under the proposed bills, Joshua Tree National Park would gain 4,518 acres, plus the privately established Joshua Tree Visitor Center. Death Valley National Park would grow by 35,292 acres, including 1,600 acres donated by the Mojave Desert Land Trust.

The legislation also would designate 18,610 acres of BLM land in Inyo County as the Alabama Hills National Scenic Area. The area has been a popular filming location, and can be seen in Iron Man, Django Unchained, Tremors, westerns and more. An old mining area on the site is also popular among recreational prospectors and the land has been enjoyed for other activities such as hiking, mountain biking, rock climbing, hunting fish and authorized motorized vehicle use, Itnyre said.

The designation would prevent large scale projects, like renewable energy generation, which has been a big concern among locals, he said. Filming and recreational uses, however, would continue, he said.

The legislation would also:

- Prohibit the development of renewable energy facilities on about 28,000 acres of BLM land near Juniper Flats.

- Convey 934 acres of BLM land to the state to be added to Anza-Borrego Desert State Park.

- Direct the Secretary of Interior to negotiate with the California State Lands Commission on land swaps involving state school properties within the California Desert Conservation Area.

- Establish a Desert Tortoise Conservation Center near the California-Nevada border.

- Designate 77 miles of wild, scenic and recreation rivers in the San Bernardino Mountains, near Death Valley.

Tags: congress, politics, Top Stories IVDB, Top Stories PE, Top Stories RDF, Top Stories Sun
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Sandra Emerson
Sandra Emerson covers the cities of Ontario, Rancho Cucamonga, Upland, Montclair, Chino and Chino Hills for the Inland Valley Daily Bulletin.

Follow Sandra Emerson @ReporterSandraE
This Redlands church offers homeless women a safe, warm place after cold weather shelter closure

Volunteers are needed to help keep the facility open through the winter.

The Center for Spiritual Living, seen here on Jan. 30, 2019, in Redlands opened its doors to homeless women this winter when the city’s only cold weather shelter was closed due to code violations earlier this month. Organizers hope to keep it open through March 31. (Jennifer Iyer, Redlands Daily Facts/SCNG)

By JENNIFER IYER | jiyer@scng.com | Redlands Daily Facts

PUBLISHED: January 30, 2019 at 3:08 pm | UPDATED: January 30, 2019 at 3:16 pm
About 10 homeless women won’t have to spend frigid, dangerous nights on the streets this winter in Redlands after the cold weather shelter closed due to code violations.

After the facility at Set Free Church shut down in the rain on Jan. 16, advocates scrambled to find solutions. A shelter, for the women at least, has since been established at the Center for Spiritual Living, but this one, too, could close, if not enough volunteers step forward.

“If I don’t have a female per shift, then it won’t open,” said Rick Ferguson, the cold weather shelter program manager for the Redlands Charitable Resources Coalition.

Nights are broken into two shifts, 7 p.m. to 1 a.m. and 1 a.m. to 7 a.m.

It’s the early morning shift that is hardest to fill, Ferguson said, “because people work, and people aren’t used to staying awake for that period. It’s one that we struggle with getting people, but so far we’re holding.”

There is also usually a male volunteer on duty for each shift.

Those interested in volunteering at the shelter may contact Ferguson at 909-362-2819 by voice or text or email rickkellief@verizon.net, and should provide a cell phone number and email address.

In addition, there is a need for toilet paper, paper plates, coffee and coffee cups.

The shelter opens at 7 p.m. each night, and a light
snack is served as the women arrive. In the morning volunteers make coffee and put out pastries. The plan is to have the shelter open nightly through March 31.

Ferguson said it’s vital to offer homeless women a place where they’re protected.

“It’s the only place where women can get off the street where they don’t have to worry about any type of violence or predators out there,” he said. “It’s the only place available, and that’s why we’re trying to make sure we’re able to continue this, and give them the option to get off the street.”

The public can learn more about homelessness in Redlands by attending the upcoming homeless forums at the University of Redlands, he said.

RELATED LINKS

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homelessness and mental health issues on Feb. 7, employability and other services on Feb. 21 and housing on March 7.

All forums will begin at 5:30 p.m. in the Casa Loma Room at the university, 1200 E. Colton Ave.

Following the forums, a city-wide summit is set for April which will then lead to recommendations to the City Council, likely in May.

“We want the pros and we want the cons, because we want to be educated, and we want everybody to be educated from the professionals that we’re bringing in (to speak),” Ferguson said. “If the citizens out there have great ideas, we all need to hear them.”

Tags: homeless, Top Stories RDF
Ontario International Airport opens new lounge with food service

For the price of a day pass, travelers can get food, drinks, and wi-fi in Terminal 2’s new Escape Lounge.

A jet heads down the runway during the grand opening of the Escape Lounge in Terminal 2 at Ontario International Airport Wednesday. (Photo by Will Lester, Inland Valley Daily Bulletin/SNG)

By FIELDING BUCK | fbuck@scng.com | The Press-Enterprise
PUBLISHED: January 30, 2019 at 3:22 pm | UPDATED: January 30, 2019 at 3:23 pm

A lounge offering premium amenities to fliers has opened in Ontario International Airport, and another is on the way.

The Escape Lounge is open to any passenger in Terminal 2 for the price of a day pass, which costs $45 to walk-ups and $40 to people who book online.

Children are welcome in Escape Lounge, according to its website. But Mark Thorpe, the airport’s chief executive officer, said that the space is aimed at business travelers.

“This is the easiest airport to get to and get through in Southern California,” he said. “And now we went to be an easy place to keep busy while you’re here.”
Escape Lounge amenities include hot and cold food; free beverages, and a full bar, although there is an additional charge for some alcoholic drinks; high-speed Wi-Fi; power outlets and magazines and local newspapers.

The 2800-square-foot facility is part of a chain of common use lounges opened by MAG USA, a subsidiary of an English hospitality company called the Manchester Airport Group. Other U.S. airports with Escape Lounges include Minneapolis, Oakland, and Reno-Tahoe.

Martin Jones, chief executive officer of MAG USA, said the lounges have "a common feel" but that each has a local food supplier.

In Ontario that person is Henry Gonzalez, executive chef and owner of of Spaggi’s, a family-run restaurant in Ontario that also has an extensive catering business.

"This is the direction we want to go," he said.

The Escape Lounge is supplying meals from 5 a.m. to 10 p.m. as well as cookies and snacks.

The current breakfast menu includes French toast with berries, hash brown casserole, frittatas, yogurt and hot and cold cereal.

The lunch and dinner menu features lemon chicken, bourbon shortrib with mashed potatoes, salmon, and soups and salads.

An all-day charcuterie platter includes meats, cheeses, assorted breads and olive spread.

A late dinner menu includes sushi, vegetable spring rolls, fried noodles, and vegetable fried rice.

The lounge is committed to serving travelers on China Airlines, which began daily service to and from Taiwan last March. Simon Lee, China Airlines’ vice president for the Americas, said the carrier has brought more than 145,000 travelers to Ontario.

Thorpe and other dignitaries speaking at a grand opening ceremony Wednesday morning said the airline’s support was influential in bringing Escape Lounge to Ontario.

Other carriers in Terminal 2 include Alaska Airlines, Delta Air Lines, Frontier Airlines, JetBlue, United Airlines, and Volaris.

MAG USA will open a second lounge in Terminal 4 in March or April, said Bruce Atlas, the airport’s chief operating officer.

Carriers at Terminal 4 include American Airlines and Southwest Airlines.

MAG USA also offers online parking reservations at the airport. The Escape Lounge does not take cash.

Information: escapelounges.com

Tags: Ontario Airport, restaurants, Top Stories IVDB, Top Stories PE, Top Stories RDF, Top Stories SGVT, Top Stories Sun

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Royals Who Suffered From Genetic Mutations Due to Inbreeding

By Ranker

Long before the concept of "designer babies", inbreeding in royal families was viewed as a way to ensure genetic...

Fielding Buck

Fielding Buck has been a business reporter since 2014 with a focus on logistics, supply chain and GIS. Prior experience includes extensive entertainment reporting. He loves photography and dogs and lives in San Bernardino County. follow-fielding-buck@fielding-buck

Culichi Town brings Mexican-Japanese fusion menu to town

By Rene Ray De La Cruz
Staff Writer

HESPERIA — Progressive Real Estate Partners announced Monday the signing of a lease with Culichi Town restaurant, with the business occupying the building that once housed the Hidden Tavern bar and eatery.

Progressive officials said Culichi Town will move into the 6,000 square-foot building located along Main Street in Hesperia. The building remodel project is underway and the restaurant is projected to open in February.

This will be the tenth California restaurant and first location in the High Desert for the eatery that specializes in dishes popular in the city of Culiacán, Sinaloa, Mexico. These “Sinaloa-style” meals combine fish, seafood and sushi to create a unique Mexican-Japanese fusion menu.

Some Culichi Town menu items include the sushi tray, seafood snack platters, shrimp empanadas, fish tacos, burrito rolls, marlin quesadilla, breaded deep fried rolls, fried fish, prawns, shrimp cocktail, seafood tostada and chicken milanese.

The menu also includes domestic imported beers, a variety of mixed drinks, non-alcoholic beverages and a kids menu.

Culichi Town serves breakfast, lunch and dinner and is also known for its high energy atmosphere with themed nights and mariachi style music, the Ontario-based company said.

The original story of the restaurant includes Culiacán native Ramon Guerrero, a “culichi,” that came to the U.S. and brought with him a passion to serve his native food to his fellow Sinaloans.

Founded in 2011, Culichi Town also has restaurants in Chicago, Houston and Las Vegas, with plans to construct several more.

Built in the late 1990s for Bob’s Big Boy, the Culichi Town building has been renovated several times — once by Beef O’Brady, which closed without notice in 2016, and by the recently-shuttered Hidden Tavern.

The restaurant is adjacent to a Holiday Inn Express and Suites on Key Pointe Avenue; and directly across from the High Desert Gateway shopping center, which is anchored by Super Target, Ross, Marshalls, Pier 1 Imports and Planet Fitness.

Progressive Real Estate Partners Senior Retail Specialist Gretchen Lastra, and Investment Sales and Land Specialist Chris Lindholm, marketed the property and represented the lessor, Hesperia-based Lemar Investments in the transaction. The tenant was represented by Jose Chavez with Karpe Commercial Real Estate.

“In addition to the excellent regional location, the building was fully equipped for a restaurant, therefore requiring less time and investment to open, making this a perfect opportunity for Culichi Town to expand its popular dining concept to a new customer base,” Lastra said.

“Their menu will give residents of the High Desert a chance to experience a truly unique dining experience that blends Mexican food and seafood including sushi in an authentic Sinaloa way.”

Culichi Town is located at 12728 Main Street in Hesperia. For more information, visit www.culichitowns.com.

Reporter Rene Ray De La Cruz may be reached at 760-951-6227, RDeLaCruz@VVDailyPress.com, Twitter @DP_ReneDeLaCruz
Three AESD schools to receive $50K each in grants for coding programs

By Matthew Cabe
Staff Writer

Posted Jan 30, 2019 at 5:47 PM
Updated Jan 30, 2019 at 5:47 PM

ADELANTO — A trio of schools here are among 10 throughout the county that will receive a statewide share of $15 million in grant funding for programs for coding education in California.

Adelanto, West Creek and Westside Park elementary schools will each receive $50,000 through the California Department of Education’s After School Education and Safety Kids Code grant program, according to a statement from the San Bernardino County Superintendent of Schools.

Money from the pilot program will be distributed over multiple school years, with an initial amount coming in the current fiscal year, according to the CDE website.

The funds will be used to purchase equipment and other resources for after-school programs aimed at bolstering students’ knowledge of coding, the computer language used to develop cellphone applications, websites and other software.

Adelanto Elementary School District Superintendent Amy Nguyen-Hernandez did not respond Wednesday to a request for comment on how each school will use the funding.

More than 1,500 schools across California applied for funding, with nearly 260 receiving grants ranging from $50,000 to $80,000, CDE documents showed. More than 70 of the awarded schools were in Los Angeles County.

The eligibility process was twofold. An applying school first had to be a currently funded After School Education and Safety grantee. From there, CDE officials reviewed Free or Reduced Price Meals data from the 2016-17 school year to determine which schools had the greatest need for the money.

In essence, schools with higher percentages of students enrolled in the FRPM program were awarded grants, as the CDE looked to provide funding on campuses with larger populations of underprivileged students.

Each school that won grant money reported an FRPM enrollment above 80 percent, CDE documents showed. Four schools, none of which were local, had 100 percent enrollment.

In Adelanto — where the U.S. Census Bureau estimates a median household income below $34,500 and a poverty rate of nearly 39 percent — the three awarded schools all reported student enrollment in the meal program well above 90 percent for 2016-17.

At West Creek Elementary, enrollment was 94.4 percent, CDE documents showed. Adelanto and Westside Park elementaries reported 99.2 and 99.1 percent, respectively.

In San Bernardino County, seven other schools in four districts will receive between $50,000 and $65,000 each.

Like AESD, San Bernardino City Unified School District had three schools that combined for $150,000 in funding. Schools in the Colton Joint Unified, Fontana Unified and Rialto Unified school districts were awarded a total of $245,000.

In total, the 10 county schools combined for $545,000 in grant funding.

The coding programs will fall under the umbrella of what the CDE calls “expanded learning” programs, which engage students in year-round opportunities designed to prepare them for college and future careers.

Matthew Cabe can be reached at MCabe@VVDailyPress.com or at 760-951-6254. Follow him on Twitter @DP_MatthewCabe.
Adelanto woman killed in crash near Helendale

By Matthew Cabe
Staff Writer

Posted Jan 30, 2019 at 6:58 PM
Updated Jan 30, 2019 at 9:20 PM

The unnamed 23 year old and her overturned car were found in the desert south of Shadow Mountain Road.

HELENDALE — A 23-year-old Adelanto woman was pronounced dead early Wednesday after California Highway Patrol volunteers found her overturned car several miles northeast of her home city.

The unnamed woman was found just before 8 a.m. in the Helendale area by the volunteers, who were driving westbound on Shadow Mountain Road, east of Highway 395, CHP officials said in a statement. While traveling, they saw a 2006 white Ford Focus overturned in the open desert south of the roadway.

It appeared to the volunteers that the car had been involved in a crash.

Upon further investigation, responding CHP officers and San Bernardino County Fire Department personnel found that the woman had been driving eastbound on Shadow Mountain Road, east of the highway, at an unknown speed before the crash, according to the statement.

At some point, the Focus veered off the road and collided with a dirt embankment before continuing farther into the desert. The woman, who CHP officials said was not wearing a seatbelt, was pronounced dead by County Fire.

Further details were not available Wednesday. The cause of the crash remains under investigation.

Anyone who witnessed or has information on the crash is urged to contact the CHP’s Victorville office at 760-241-1186.
Deputies: Rancho Cucamonga man facing sex charge has possibly fled to North Carolina

Shadi Al-Abdual Razaq, 33, of Rancho Cucamonga, was arrested in August on suspicion of attempting to meet a minor for sex and sending harmful material to a minor. (Photo courtesy of the San Bernardino County Sheriff's Department)

By ERIC LICAS | elicas@scng.com | Orange County Register
PUBLISHED: January 30, 2019 at 9:10 pm | UPDATED: January 31, 2019 at 12:48 am

A defendant arrested during a Rancho
Cucamonga sting operation targeting adults contacting minors for sex fled the county while awaiting trial and may be headed toward North Carolina, officials said on Wednesday, Jan. 30.

Shadi Al-Abdual Razaq, 33, was taken into custody in August on suspicion of sending harmful material to a minor and attempting to meet a minor for sex acts, according to a release from the San Bernardino County Sheriff’s Department. It said he was one of nine men arrested during the nine-day operation.

The defendant is a resident of Jordan who was in the United States on an unspecified Visa, according to Wednesday’s release. He was freed on bail, but was later temporarily in the custody of Immigration and Customs Enforcement agents and subsequently fitted with a GPS ankle bracelet. On about Jan. 19, he stopped charging the tracking device, then failed to appear for a Jan. 25 court appearance, said the release.

The fugitive’s whereabouts were unknown Wednesday, but investigators believe he may be on his way to North Carolina, according to the release. It said he was last seen driving a tan Lexus RX series SUV bearing California license plate number 4SUP458.
A tan Lexus RX series SUV believed to be driven by suspected fugitive Shadi Al-Abdual Razaq. He was arrested in August on suspicion of attempting to contact a minor for sex, and later stopped charging a GPS tracking anklet ahead of a court date scheduled for Jan. 25. (Photo courtesy of the San Bernardino County Sheriff's Department)

Anyone who might have information that can help detectives find the defendant was asked to call the Rancho Cucamonga Police Department’s Detective Bureau or 911. Anonymous tips can also be left with the We-tip Hotline by dialing 800-78-CRIME (27463) or visiting www.wetip.com.

Tags: child sex abuse, courts, Top Stories IVDB
Police arrested a Fontana man on suspicion of distributing child pornography on Wednesday, Jan. 30.

Detectives served a search warrant at the suspect's home at 15950 Rosemary Dr. and discovered evidence suggesting he had downloaded and shared illicit content involving minors, according to a news release from the Fontana Police Department. It said Ivan Rodriguez, 22, was later arrested without incident at his workplace in San Bernardino.

The release did not state how many illegal pornographic files
were found. It also did not provide details regarding the nature of the content or the victims involved.

Detectives do not believe the minors seen in the pornography discovered at the suspect's home were from Fontana or neighboring communities, according to Officer Daniel Romero, a spokesman for the police department. He said the files did not appear to have been locally produced.

Rodriguez was booked and held at the West Valley Detention Center after he was taken into custody, according to the release.

Police believe his case is unrelated to other recent child pornography-related arrests made in San Bernardino County, said Romero.

Rodriguez is at least the fifth person taken into custody by Fontana police for allegedly distributing illicit material involving minors in recent months. Detectives from the department's Internet Crimes Against Children Task Force arrested another suspect from Fontana in October, a Rancho Cucamonga man in late November, then two other men from Colton and Rialto in December, all on suspicion of similar crimes.
Suspect in school break-in sought

By Scott Nordhues

Posted Jan 30, 2019 at 4:20 PM

VICTORVILLE — The San Bernardino County Sheriff’s Department is seeking the public’s help in identifying a suspect who stole equipment from Lomitas Elementary School last week.

Deputies said a black male entered the school by shattering windows in four of the school’s classrooms shortly after 1 p.m. on Jan. 20. Electronic devices and audio-visual equipment worth several thousand dollars was taken, deputies reported.

A surveillance camera recorded the suspect leaving one of the classrooms. The school is located at 12571 First Avenue.

Deputies posted the surveillance video to Youtube and released a still photo of the suspect leaving a classroom.

Anyone who may have information about the investigation is asked to contact the Victorville Sheriff’s Station at 760-241-2911, or Sheriff’s dispatch at 760-956-5001. Callers who want to remain anonymous may call the We-Tip Hotline at 1-800-782-7463, or leave information on the We-Tip website at www.wetip.com.
Man walking along 10 Freeway in Fontana is struck and killed

A man walking along the westbound lanes of the 10 Freeway near Sierra Avenue in Fontana was struck and killed early Thursday, Jan. 31, 2019.

By BEATRIZ E. VALENZUELA | bvalenzuela@scng.com | San Bernardino Sun
PUBLISHED: January 31, 2019 at 5:54 am | UPDATED: January 31, 2019 at 6:39 am

A man walking along the westbound lanes of the 10 Freeway near Sierra Avenue in Fontana was struck and killed Thursday morning, according to
Man walking along 10 Freeway in Fontana is struck and killed – Daily Bulletin

California Highway Patrol officials.

The crash was reported just after 5 a.m., CHP logs indicate.

Dispatchers began receiving calls about a man wearing shorts and a hoodie walking along the westbound lanes a little before 5 a.m., officials said. Callers then reported the man was in the center divider before he was struck by a vehicle.

The coroner was called to the scene around 5:20 a.m., and two lanes of the freeway were shut down.

As of 6 a.m., traffic on the westbound 10 Freeway was backed up to Pepper Avenue in Rialto.

Authorities are investigating the crash.

This story is developing. Check back later for more information.
Mother surrenders newborn twins at fire station

By Rene Ray De La Cruz  
Staff Writer

Posted Jan 30, 2019 at 3:10 PM  
Updated Jan 30, 2019 at 3:11 PM

HESPERIA — Community leaders in the High Desert on Wednesday praised the actions of a young mother who surrendered her newborn twins to a local fire station.

San Bernardino County Fire reported that at 8:39 p.m. Monday, a young female arrived at Fire Station 302 on Olive Street in Hesperia and announced she had just given birth to twins and desired to leave the babies at the station under the state’s Safe-Surrender law.

Fire Captain Andrea Binley and her fire crew immediately took possession of the newborns and assessed their medical needs before the babies were transported by ambulance to a nearby hospital for further medical evaluation.

Prior to arriving at the fire station, both infants were found clean, fed and in good medical condition. The mother refused medical attention and was provided information and instructions on how to reclaim her children in the event she wished to do so in accordance with the law.

“I was amazed when I heard what this brave, young mother did for her babies,” said spokeswoman Laura Foss, with the Rose of Sharon Pregnancy Resource Center in Victorville. “For this mother to take the initiative to surrender her babies shows just how much she really loves those babies.”

Foss said she’s read too many tragic stories of women who gave birth and abandoned their newborns in trash dumpsters, back alleys and other unsafe locations.

Mayor Larry Bird also credited the mother for her decision to surrender her babies at the fire station.

“Life is so precious,” Bird told the Daily Press. “Giving mothers this safe place prevents tragic deaths and injuries. Bless her for making this responsible decision.”

In a written statement, Fire Chief Mark Hartwig said, the Safe Surrender program was created for these situations.

“This young mother did the right thing by bringing her babies to the fire station,” Hartwig said. “Regardless of your circumstances, the Safe Surrender program is a viable and loving option. No questions asked.”

Known as the “Safely Surrendered Baby Law” or “Safe-Haven Law,” state law provides immunity for mothers or guardians of newborn infants to safely surrender the infant within 72 hours of birth, with no questions asked and free from criminal prosecution.

The law responds to the increasing number of newborn infant deaths due to abandonment in unsafe locations. The law specifies that the person with lawful physical custody, after surrendering the child, have 14 days to change their mind and reclaim the baby.

From 2001 through 2017, 931 newborns have been surrendered in California, and 88 newborns were surrendered during the 2017 calendar year.

In 2004, the County Board of Supervisors adopted a resolution designating fire stations as “Safe Haven” sites. Since that time, county fire stations are equipped as “Safe-Surrender” sites.

Fire stations that are not staffed full-time have a phone located outside the station that will connect directly to the dispatch center. Safe-Surrender signs are displayed at all surrender locations.

“My prayer is that someone will follow up with the mother for prayer, support and with resources,” Foss said. “I know that we’d welcome her with open arms should she decide to visit or call us.”
Rose of Sharon is a non-profit Christian ministry empowering women to carry their babies to term. The organization helped nearly 1,500 families last year with a variety of services and supplies.

Other Safe Surrender sites can be found by calling 211 or 877-222-9723. For more information on "Safe-Surrender," visit www.cdss.ca.gov/inforesources/Safely-Surrendered-Baby.

For more information on the Rose of Sharon, call 760-243-5006 or visit www.roseofsharonmca.org.

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LOCAL NEWS

Norco residents can get Newcastle disease questions answered at Feb. 5 meeting

The state set the session after virulent Newcastle disease was found in backyard chickens in the city.

Virulent Newcastle disease was recently detected in Norco in a backyard flock of chickens. State officials have set a Tuesday, Feb. 5, meeting in Norco to inform residents about the threat and discuss how they can protect their birds. (Rich Pedroncelli, AP file photo)

By DAVID DOWNEY | ddowney@scng.com | The Press-Enterprise
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Norco residents can get Newcastle disease questions answered at Feb. 5 meeting – Press Enterprise

30, 2019 at 5:53 pm

In the wake of finding virulent Newcastle disease in a small flock of backyard chickens in Norco, state officials plan an informational meeting next week in the Riverside County animal-keeping community to address residents’ questions and concerns.

The California Department of Food and Agriculture has scheduled the 7 p.m. session for Tuesday, Feb. 5, at Nellie Weaver Hall, 3737 Crestview Drive, Norco.

Veterinary professionals will share information about the disease, tell residents how to protect their birds and discuss effective methods for cleaning property, a news release stated.

The recent

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Discovery was announced Friday, Jan. 25.

Information: Norco Animal Services Division, 951-737-8972, or info@ci.norco.ca.us.

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David Downey
Dave is a general assignment reporter based in Riverside, writing about a wide variety of topics ranging from drones and El Nino to trains and wildfires. He has worked for five newspapers in four states: Wyoming, Colorado, Arizona and California. He earned a bachelor's degree in journalism from Colorado State University in 1981. Loves hiking, tennis, baseball, the beach, the Lakers and golden retrievers. He is from the Denver area.

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Home sales drop 20 percent – biggest in 8 years – in Southern California

Median home prices flatten out in the face of the biggest sales drop in eight years.

The market has flipped since the start of 2018, with homes taking longer to sell and fewer offers per sale. But if past experience is any indicator, home prices will continue going up in 2019. (File photo by the Orange County Register/SCNG)
Southern California home sales fell for a fifth consecutive month in December, dropping 20.3 percent year over year as the once-hot 2018 housing market cooled considerably, real estate data firm CoreLogic reported Wednesday, Jan. 30.

It was the biggest sales drop for any month in eight years.

With one-fifth fewer homes changing hands, prices basically flattened out, ending the year up just 1.1 percent from December 2017 levels.

Area agents say multiple offers have all but vanished, price cuts are rampant and homes are taking longer to sell than in years past when a hot seller’s market gripped the region.

“I started seeing things slow down,” said Noel Palmieri, a Century 21 agent based in the San Gabriel Valley. “We weren’t getting the showings like we were. Things weren’t flying off the shelf the way they were.”

In all, owners sold 15,781 Southern California homes last month, about a third fewer than the December average, CoreLogic figures show.

The sales drop reflects a variety of factors, CoreLogic Analyst Andrew LePage said.

“Mortgage rates hit a 2018 high in November, affecting December closings, and stock-market volatility created an additional headwind in high-end markets,” he said. “Meanwhile, some would-be buyers remain priced out or unwilling to buy amid concerns that prices have overshot a
The median price of a Southern California home – or the price at the midpoint of all sales – was $515,000, just $5,500 more than the median paid a year earlier.

It was the smallest year-over-year price gain since March 2012.

The tiny gain reflects in part a shift in the mix of homes sold, LePage said. The higher end of the market represented a slightly smaller share of homes sold than in December 2017.

Home price gains were well below average throughout the six-county region, ranging from a 1.6 percent increase in Orange County to a 4.1 percent gain in Riverside County. Gains averaged from 6.1 percent to 7.3 percent during the previous 11 months.

Here’s a breakdown of price and sales numbers by county for December:

- **Los Angeles**: Price: $581,500, up 2 percent; sales: 5,291, down 20 percent.
- **Orange**: Price: $708,500, up 1.6 percent; sales:
Home sales drop 20 percent – biggest in 8 years – in Southern California – Daily Bulletin

2,260, down 26 percent.

- Riverside: Price: $380,000, up 4.1 percent; sales: 2,938, down 14.6 percent.
- San Bernardino: Price: $329,750, up 2.1 percent; sales: 1,992, down 21.5 percent.
- San Diego: Price: $550,000, up 1.9 percent; sales: 2,642, down 22.2 percent.
- Ventura: Price: $575,000, up 2.1 percent; sales: 658, down 13.5 percent.

Tags: Housing data, real-estate, Top Stories Breeze, Top Stories IVDB, Top Stories LADN, Top Stories LBPT, Top Stories OCR, Top Stories PE, Top Stories PSN, Top Stories RDF, Top Stories SGVT, Top Stories Sun, Top Stories WDN
Election officials said DMV wasn’t ready to launch Motor Voter. California went ahead anyway
As California prepared to launch its new Motor Voter program last year, top elections officials say they asked Secretary of State Alex Padilla to hold off on the roll-out.

The plan called for the Department of Motor Vehicles to automatically register people who came into its offices, one of several efforts by Democrats controlling California politics to make it easier for more people to vote.

With the June 2018 primary approaching, election officials said they warned that the department that manages car registration and boat licenses was not yet prepared to register voters.

“There wasn’t the appropriate readiness to go forward in April, and that was brought to the Secretary of State,” said Dean Logan, registrar for Los Angeles County, adding that he “definitely expressed concern” to the Secretary of State’s Office, as well as Padilla himself.

“The concern from registrars across the state, including myself, was not a resistance to moving forward. We supported the move to the New Motor Voter program in the long term. The concern
CA elections officials warned against Motor Voter launch | The Sacramento Bee

was had there been adequate testing and development to be ready for the June election.”

California moved forward anyway.

The DMV has since acknowledged making 105,000 registration errors since Motor Voter began on April 23, 2018. Some customers were registered with the wrong party. Others who wished to opt out of the program were nevertheless signed up. At least one non-citizen was added to the voter rolls, and the Secretary of State’s Office is continuing to investigate whether more non-citizens were included.

Padilla declined to be interviewed after repeated requests from The Bee. Officials for the DMV and the California Department of Technology declined to comment.

“The decision to launch Motor Voter was jointly made by the Secretary of State’s office, DMV, CDT, and Governor (Jerry) Brown’s Administration,” Padilla said in a statement issued by his office. “This project took into consideration workload and logistics for all partners. While I have expressed frustration with some of the data transfer errors since the launch of Motor Voter, the program has been an overall success, adding over 800,000 new voters to the rolls. I look forward to working with Governor Newsom and his administration to continue improving voter registration at the DMV.”

A news conference to promote the kick-off was scheduled for April 16, 2018.

But Assemblywoman Lorena Gonzalez, D-San Diego, who worked closely with Padilla to pass the 2015 bill that would register Californians to vote at DMV offices unless they opted out, said the event was abruptly canceled. Gonzalez said the DMV notified Padilla and her office of technical issues with the program and postponed the launch by a week.
“In hindsight, I wish we could figure out the damn technology issues that we have in state government,” Gonzalez said. “We were scheduled to launch on Monday (April 16). On Thursday (April 12), they called and said they weren’t ready.”

Joe Holland, president of the California Association of Clerks and Election Officials, said he warned Padilla’s office against the April launch. Ultimately, he said, it was not his call to make.

“Our recommendation was not to deploy it that close to an election,” he said. “That was the opinion of most registrar of voters.”

The election was an important one, as Democrats nationally sought to position themselves to regain control of the House of Representatives. Republicans would later charge that Motor Voter contributed to a Democratic wave that saw them lose seven congressional seats in California.

Like Padilla, Gonzalez said her motivation for launching Motor Voter was simply to encourage more people to vote.

“I, at my core belief, believe that the more people that engage and participate in elections, the better,” Gonzalez said. “The fact that it helps us politically is really secondary.”

Motor Voter registration data shows half of the 186,022 new voters registered without a party preference, while 35 percent were Democrats and 15 percent were Republicans. The unusual uptick in “no party preference” registrations has disproportionately hurt Republicans.

Paul Mitchell, a political consultant and vice president of the bipartisan voter data firm Political Data, said the DMV registration may have affected just one district that flipped for Democrats. “But in 2020, it could definitely have a huge impact on the candidates that get nominated in the primaries and in general election outcomes,” he said.

By October 2018, as a smaller number of errors surfaced at the DMV, Padilla said he was “deeply frustrated” with the mistakes and had “grave concerns” about the botched implementation.

In an Oct. 8 conference call with election officials, Padilla blamed the DMV and the state
Department of Technology for the errors, according to documents obtained through a Public Records Act request. Padilla's office initially withheld most of the 577 pages it provided. The Bee received more information after filing a legal complaint, though 17 pages remain redacted because the office considers them to be “investigative records.”

“I am deeply frustrated and disappointed that the DMV and CDT have failed in their basic responsibility to collect and transmit accurate voter registration information to us — and by extension — to you,” Padilla told county clerks, according to the documents. “These errors are completely unacceptable.”

“I don't have to tell you that these errors at DMV damage voter confidence,” he added. “This has been an extremely frustrating situation, and I recognize the burden it has been on all of you.”

In an internal Oct. 8 memo, Padilla questioned whether the DMV’s former director, Jean Shiomoto, should resign.

“If the DMV and CDT do not seek an independent third party review of their practices and procedures for the New Motor Voter program, then leadership MUST change,” he wrote.

State Sen. John Moorlach, R-Costa Mesa, thinks the DMV’s implementation was flawed, but said Padilla should have taken more personal responsibility.

“If you were warned by industry experts that you’re going to have difficulties with the launch, he should have respected that,” Moorlach said. “Now that it’s sort of blown up, for him to say, ‘Hey, it was the DMV’s fault,’ I think it’s disingenuous. It’s his fault. He should have respected the advice of the experts and implementers.”

Padilla considered a temporary halt to Motor Voter ahead of the November general election. He briefly asked the DMV and CDT to stop sending voter information to his office, prompting concerns from county clerks. They worried they would wind up with a large backlog of data right before the election.

But Padilla ultimately decided to keep the program running with an added layer of review.
He acknowledged in mid-October that a backlog “may have an adverse effect at an already busy election time,” but directed counties to process all valid registration records.

“We are less than two weeks before the close of the voter registration deadline,” Padilla wrote in an Oct. 8 memo. “During this time, tens of thousands of Californians will continue (to) register or update their voter registration information at the DMV — people that want to participate in the upcoming midterm elections. I do not want to deny this opportunity to these Californians.”

Bryan Anderson is a political reporter for The Bee. He produces the daily Capitol Alert morning newsletter and hosts The Bee’s “California Nation” podcast. Anderson frequently reports on the California Legislature, the DMV, and ongoing concerns over tech and consumer privacy.