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Long Beach Pacific Ford

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Hennessey: Bridge light plan too energetic

By Tom Hennessey

SPORTS

It is amazing how decisions affecting nature are often made by people who don't know a whooping crane from a petunia.

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Take, for example, the light-in-the-sky plan for the Vincent Thomas Bridge. The city of L.A. wants to install two mammoth lights atop the bridge and point them at the sky.

BUSINESS

The idea apparently was launched a dozen years ago by well-meaning San Pedro citizens wanting to provide a grand welcome to people arriving in L.A. via the harbor. But since most people arrive in L.A. via freeway or LAX, it might have been wiser to push for better roads or, maybe more gratifyingly, better airport food.

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Alas, those noble citizens may not have considered the impact the lights could have on wildlife.

Millennium mania

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Suddenly, the idea that languished for years has taken on battle speed, pushed by government folks who think that turning on the lights at 9 p.m. Dec. 31 will be a dandy way to mark the millennium celebration.

Officials say there are so many lights in the area now that two more, however powerful, won't matter. But was there a public hearing about this? No. Or an environmental impact study? No. Instead of scrutinizing the plan, officials seem to be saying, S'Let's do this and see what happens.%o



One thing that may happen, aside from an electric bill that could run between \$1 and \$3 million a year, is that L.A.'s proposed gift to the millennium could kill a lot of birds.



For starters, let's note that we are not talking here about bulbs from Aisle 10 of the supermarket. We are talking about two 7,000-watt xenon lights. In reach and power, they are to lighting what Michael Jordan was to basketball, even more so. Arthur Uppgren, a Wesleyan University astronomer, thinks they might be visible from the moon by the Å you should excuse the expression Å naked eye.

They are to be placed on each of the bridge's 330-foot towers and aimed skyward. Other lights will illuminate the towers themselves. Also, atop each tower, there will be a quartet of parabolic disks, each 8 feet in diameter and designed to reflect the light of the sun during the day. (Has anyone studied how this might affect motorists?)

Let's not be hasty

I'm aware that my reputation for identifying inappropriate innovations has been shaky ever since I opposed the location of Hooters in downtown Long Beach, and 99 percent of the populace rose up against me. Still, every intuitive cell within me suggests the super lighting plan for the VT bridge may be a super lousy idea.

There are, admittedly, conflicting opinions on this among experts, but some say the lights will become an avian death trap, confusing many migratory birds and causing them to crash into the bridge and other objects. What is clear is that not enough information, pro or con, has been gathered to proceed with this project just for the sake of adding some pizzazz to the millennium party.

I'm also given to wonder whatever happened to that crazy idea about conserving energy.

The plan will be taken up Tuesday by the California Coastal Commission in a hearing that begins at 9 a.m. in the Four Points Hotel, Santa Monica. If you can't attend, you can send a short message Å S'Delay the Vincent Thomas lighting project%o will do nicely Å to: California Coastal Commissioners, 45 Fremont St., Suite 2000, San Francisco CA 94105-2219.

Whoops!: Hope Hill Middle School students can forgive me for saying Hill S'Elementary%o in Thursday's column.

Tom Hennessey's viewpoint appears Sundays, Tuesdays, Thursdays, and Fridays. He can be reached at (562) 499-1270, or via e-mail at scribe17@aol.com.