

## Colton nears solution to endangered species impediment

By Jim Steinberg, *The Sun*  
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### Colton nears solution to endangered species impediment



COLTON >> There is a buzz about what's going to happen here.

After 21 years, this city of 53,000 is about to shed a major impediment to its economic growth.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the city have come to terms with a plan to preserve habitat for the Delhi Sands Flower-loving fly while allowing development in a roughly 400-acre area.

The result of the settlement "is going to be an economic engine. Businesses and jobs are going to be coming," said Councilman David Toro, who has been involved in the Sands Fly saga for years.

"If people who live in this area can hang in there for the next two years, they are going to see an improvement in the quality of life, and home values are going to increase considerably," he said.

"Colton is going to become an economic center (for the Inland Empire)," he said.

A critical part of that new economic engine will be the California University of Science and Medicine, which is expected to open its doors in fall 2016.

Founders of the Cal Med medical school expect to start pharmacy, nursing, physician assistant and physical therapy training later, on land southeast of Arrowhead Regional Medical Center.

John Husing, a Redlands-based economist who studies the Inland Empire, said "my instinct tells me" that because the region is under-served medically, and because the Affordable Care Act creates many more paying patients, and because the "Baby Boomers" are aging, the area around the medical school and Arrowhead Regional will largely be developed for medically related projects.

Toro noted that the LA Fitness Center group is planning to open a gym near the hospital and a nearby gas station/convenience mart plans significant expansion.

"Hallelujah. About time," said Lori Pierson Cripe, whose family owns land across from Arrowhead Regional and for more than two decades has been unable to develop it.

Earlier this month, the Fish and Wildlife Service posted notice of the Habitat Conservation Plan in the Federal Register, one of the few bureaucratic procedures remaining before the city can begin issuing building permits for the large "can't touch" slice of Colton.

A key part of the environmental plan includes a set-aside of about 50 acres of what one environmental group calls "high-quality, Delhi Sands Fly habitat."

The endangered fly, a carnivore as a grub most of its life below ground, emerges for August and September as an airborne vegetarian to breed, feed on nectar and lay eggs.

Dr. Dan Silver, executive director of the Los Angeles-based Endangered Habitats League, said the plan for this endangered species' survival "is a good one.

"We reviewed it and it is biologically sound," he said.

Silver said that while the effort to preserve this species has been ridiculed by politicians and residents for years, that 50-acre preservation site will "be an amenity to the city.

"It will preserve a sense of history and natural place," he said.

It will be a site — in the middle of the city — where schoolchildren can be educated about what the area was like before human settlement.

"It will give the city a competitive edge," Silver said.

In 2011, then-Rep. Joe Baca, D-San Bernardino, authored a bill that would have taken the fly off the endangered species list, clearing the way for development.

At one point, Baca said that fly species was extinct or at least hadn't been seen for 10 years.

But federal wildlife and Colton officials then showed there had been recent sightings.

Baca withdrew that statement and the bill went nowhere.

After some more bureaucratic formalities, city officials say they will be able to issue building permits "in a few months."

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