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e-mail: northfriends@northfriends.org

The Friends is a 501(c)(3) organization.

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Just go to

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and click the Donate button.

A yellow button with the word "Donate" in black text.

Make sure we have your email address.

We hope this is the last issue of the newsletter that will be mailed to you. Please help us save money and view pictures in living color.

IMPORTANT!

Email us asking to be included on the email list.

Send the email to:

northfriends@northfriends.org



Summary of Activities and Need For Assistance

As with all things, the San Jacinto Wildlife Area is impermanent and the time and steps in its evolution are uncertain. The Friends continue to monitor these changes, work to encourage the ones we feel are beneficial, prevent or mitigate the ones we feel are not beneficial and work to make the SJWA an educational, recreational, and wildlife (plant and animal) oasis that successfully adapt and thrive in the changing climate and increased urbanization and industrialization of the San Jacinto Valley. We need more people on the Board, as there are too many things going on and too many uncertainties for just a few people to keep track of. (Sue Nash 909-228-6710 or snash22@earthlink.net)

Friends Board Meeting: Tuesday December 8, 2015, 6-8pm. Panera's in Moreno Valley (12510 Day Street). All, including possible new Board members, are welcome! We will bring everyone up to date on the issues, lawsuits, walks and other activities and ask for ideas on how we can best serve our membership. Please join us.



Issues Facing the San Jacinto Wildlife Area

Climate Change: With temperatures rising, more frequent and longer droughts are predicted. Less Sierra snow pack means less water coming from northern California. With a decrease in water supply, there is more competition with other users, able to pay higher prices, for the reclaimed water that is the lifeblood of the SJWA. With increased ocean temperatures, will there be more rain and Mystic Lake will once again fill with water and cover a large percentage of the valley portion of the SJWA?

Management: Will the California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW) prepare a CEQA document and finalize

the SJWA management plan so that it can be implemented on the SJWA? Will the CDFW and EMWD come up with a long-term contract to supply the SJWA with an adequate, dependable & affordable supply of reclaimed water for the area to fulfill its many missions: partial mitigation for the state water project; MSHCP core reserve, wildlife viewing and research & hunting opportunities?

Development: Will the Agricultural lands surrounding the SJWA remain essentially as they are, or will the Area be surrounded by warehouses, homes, commercial and industrial development?

Will the small remaining portion of the Ramona Expressway from Sanderson to the 215 be widened to four lanes (with stop lights added as necessary) or will the 8 lane Mid County Parkway/Freeway be built, with no viable access to the SJWA?

Will the Villages of Lakeview and the Motte Ranch be built, creating the core of the new "City of Lakeview" long

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IF YOU RECEIVED A HARD COPY OF THIS NEWSLETTER IN THE MAIL AND HAVE AN EMAIL ADDRESS, PLEASE EMAIL northfriends@northfriends.org ASAP. If you do not give us an email, we will continue to send you a hard copy.

Issues Facing the SJWA

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envisioned by the County, so that the SJWA will be 100% surrounded by urban uses?

Will these developments increase pressure to turn Davis Road into a 4 lane truck

way through the SJWA and to channelize the San Jacinto River up to or around the San Jacinto Wildlife Area?

The Trans-Pacific Partnership: The TPP would grant foreign corporations extraordinary new powers to attack the laws we rely on for a clean environment, essential services, and healthy commu-

nities. Foreign corporations would be empowered to bypass domestic courts and directly “sue” the U.S. government before a tribunal of private lawyers that sits outside of any domestic legal system. These lawyers would be authorized to order the U.S. government to hand millions of our tax dollars to the corporations for laws that they find inconvenient.

DOWNWARD SPIRAL FOR BURROWING OWLS

By Tom Paulek

This Spring I performed multiple survey hikes for Burrowing Owls. I have always enjoyed hiking on the Davis Road Unit of the San Jacinto Wildlife Area (SJWA) and included the northern upper basin of Lake Perris State Recreation Area in my search for burrowing owls. My morning hikes began on February 25th and I finished the search for owls on May 28, 2015. Ten survey hikes were distributed over the entire 10,000 acre Davis Road Unit; the Lake Perris northern basin was covered on the 26th of May. A total of eleven survey hikes were thus completed hiking 50 miles over 32 hours. Having lived on the wildlife area for 15 years as the area manager my survey efforts were advantaged by numerous observations of historic burrowing owl locations since 1991.

After completing the 50 miles of survey no burrowing owls were observed and no active burrowing owl sign was seen. The lack of owl observations during the breeding season [March – August] was disturbing because the survey routes specifically passed through many of the historic burrowing owl locations as well as existing artificial burrow sites. Discouraged by the results, I asked Tom Trakes the CDFW Wildlife Habitat Supervisor if he had observed any burrowing owl activity this year during his work travels around the wildlife area. Tom had one observation and he and I subsequently met at the field trial area where we observed two adult owls that likely nested at that location. These troubling survey results should lead one to ask: where



Photo by Michael Bruce

have all the burrowing owls gone?

The scarcity of burrowing owls on the SJWA/Lake Perris Multiple Species Habitat Conservation Plan (MSHCP) Core Reserve could comfortably be explained by the ongoing California drought. I suspect something else is happening. The reoccurring practice of relocation of burrowing owls from development project sites to MSHCP Core reserves can only accelerate habitat fragmentation [division of larger continuous burrowing owl habitat/populations into smaller more isolated habitat/populations]. Compounding the impact of frag-

mentation, increased predation [avian and mammalian] at the MSHCP Core reserve relocation receiving site further exacerbates the downward spiral of the burrowing owl.

Its time to say the MSHCP is not working for the burrowing owl. The cumulative impact of relocations of burrowing owls from future development sites certainly warrants careful analysis in environmental documents under the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA). Don't turn your back on the burrowing owl; if you do they will be gone from western Riverside County.



The upper left photo is the Highland Springs Avenue boundary gate for the 9000 acre Potrero Unit of the San Jacinto Wildlife Area (SJWA). The upper right photograph depicts the Lambs Canyon (Highway 79) boundary gate for the Potrero Conservation area. *Photos by Tom Paulek*

California Department Of Fish And Wildlife: Trustee For The Public ?

By Tom Paulek

Twelve years ago, in 2003, the Potrero Unit of the SJWA was purchased by the state Wildlife Conservation Board (WCB) from the Lockheed Martin Corporation [Department of Toxic Substances Control (DTSC) remediation site] for 25 million dollars. The newly acquired public lands are to be managed by the California Department of Fish and Wildlife. [WCB Meeting Minutes November 18, 2003] All WCB fee acquisitions are supposed to be managed and controlled so that the public has access to and use of the lands for all recreational purposes [Fish and Game Code section 1351].

In 2007, the Wildlife Conservation Board (WCB) allocated \$221,000 for preparation of the land management plan for the San Jacinto Wildlife Area [WCB Meeting Minutes, May 24, 2007]. In 2010, an additional \$260,000 was added to the management plan funding [total \$481,000] for environmental review and public participation in the wildlife area plan preparation [WCB Meeting Minutes August 20, 2010].

To date the San Jacinto Wildlife Area land management plan

has not been adopted or shared with the public. Rumors have circulated that local Department of Fish and Wildlife employees are jesting that they do not expect the SJWA land management plan to be completed in their lifetime. If correct such flippancy cannot result in good expectations for the public interest.

The Department of Fish and Wildlife has jurisdiction [under law] over the conservation, protection, and management of fish, wildlife, native plants, and habitat necessary for biologically sustainable populations of those species (Fish and Game Code section 1802). The fish and wildlife resources are held in trust for the people of the state by and through the Department of Fish and Wildlife (Fish and Game Code section 711.7). The Department of Fish and Wildlife performance of its trustee duties has been and continues to be disgraceful.

Wanted: Newsletter Submissions

Friends welcome articles and photos for the newsletter, subject to the Board's approval, regarding any and all issues relating to the SJWA. We want to know your concerns, a great birding day, book or movie reviews about the environment, poems, photos, etc. Submit to northfriends@northfriends.org.

Interested in Helping Friends Create a Map Brochure?

We are always interested in new members and volunteers. We are especially interested in making a map/brochure for people to pick up as they enter the wildlife area which will clearly map the public lands which currently appear to be private duck clubs. We need new walk leaders and ideas about where we should best focus our efforts. Our Board meetings are the second Tuesday of the month, usually. Please let Sue know if you are interest in helping in any way, or joining the Board. snash22@earthlink.net

Information about these cases can be obtained by going to this link <http://www.courts.ca.gov/4dca.htm> and entering the case number or name.

Paulek v. Western Riverside County Regional Conservation Authority (RIC 1203353)

The final depublished opinion in this case held (1) both the person making comments on a project and the organization they represent have standing to sue under CEQA. (2) The MSHCP Criteria refinement process is akin to a general plan amendment and therefore a Project potentially subject to CEQA. (3) There was not substantial evidence in the record to show the Anheuser-Busch criteria refinement “fit” or “applied” to the class 7 and class 8 exemptions meant only for projects which protect, enhance, maintain natural resources and the environment. The Court of appeal ordered the Regional Conservation Authority to vacate the Criteria Refinement approval and the CEQA categorical exemptions. This action is currently scheduled to happen on Monday December 7 at 9am.

Paulek & Friends of the Northern San Jacinto Valley v. City of Moreno Valley & Highland Fairview (RIC 1510967)

This lawsuit challenges the City of Moreno Valley’s approval of the World Logistics Center. Our complaint focuses only on the numerous negative impacts to the SJWA, such as the

fraudulent claim that parts of the SJWA are a “conservation buffer”; the resulting incorrect analysis of the Project’s Biological impacts, mitigation, and alternatives; the failure to comply with the Stephen’s kangaroo rate habitat conservation plan and the western riverside county multispecies habitat conservation plan; and the failure to comply with CEQA in analyzing all impacts to the SJWA. Other entities are challenging the substantial air quality and traffic impacts of the Project.



Center for Biodiversity, San Bernardino Valley Audubon Society, Sierra Club, Friends of Northern San Jacinto Valley v. Riverside County Transportation Agency [RCTC] (RIC 1505449)

This lawsuit challenges the RCTC’s approval of the Mid County Parkway (MCP) which would replace the Ramona Expressway between Sanderson and the 215. The MCP would be built basically on the southern boundary of the SJWA. We are trying to stop this project to preserve agriculture in the San Jacinto Valley and to prevent the MCP’s many direct, indirect and cumulatively significant impacts to the SJWA.

EMWD/CDFW Reclaimed Water Shenanigans Continue

By Tom Paulek

For the second consecutive year Eastern Municipal Water District (EMWD) and the California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW) renewed the 1987 Reclaimed Water contract [original term of the contract 25 years] for the San Jacinto Wildlife Area (SJWA) for one additional year [new expiration June 2016]. The Agreement was extended without public review or regard for provisions in the 1987 Agreement recognizing the delivery of reclaimed water to SJWA would result in the production of valuable wildlife habitat supporting resident and migratory wildlife and provide long-term benefits to the public.

The original 1987 Agreement recognized wildlife populations and public benefits would become dependent upon habitat supported by the reclaimed water delivery.

In good faith CDFW and EMWD agreed

to periodically extend the 1987 Agreement for the life of the pipeline bringing reclaimed water to SJWA [CDFW provided 1.1 million dollars to fund EMWD pipeline construction]. The 1987 contract provides for the cooperative replacement of the reclaimed water pipeline should it become necessary. The intentional longevity of the 1987 contract is further embodied by CDFW [the public] securing reserve capacity [20 acre feet per day] in the EMWD pipeline that delivers reclaimed water to SJWA and agricultural users.

Prior to the expiration of the initial twenty-five year term of the 1987 Agreement EMWD and CDFW entered into discussions for the renewal of the critically important wildlife conservation contract. EMWD sought to reduce the annual reclaimed water delivery to SJWA by roughly one half, increase the price, and eliminate the CDFW reserved capacity right in

the pipeline delivering reclaimed water to the wildlife area. Moreover should the contract be terminated EMWD would retain the pipeline easements on the SJWA public lands. The apparently hapless CDFW negotiators were willing to concede to these EMWD renewal terms. When the protest from public conservation agencies ensued, the public agencies then began the annual 1- year extensions of the 1987 Agreement.

It is now clear that EMWD is seeking and entering into multi-year contracts with more lucrative reclaimed water buyers. There will come a point when the finite reclaimed water supply will all be spoken for and the wildlife resources at the SJWA will be left high and dry. The Friends will continue to advocate that these public agencies perform the necessary CEQA environmental review on this critically important wildlife conservation project.

SJWA INVITES BICYCLISTS TO ENJOY NATURE

By Jenny Gagnon

While driving down the Ramona Expressway in San Jacinto recently, I noticed that the new protected bike lane between Main St. and State St. was in full use, with both cyclists and hikers. On the other side of the Expressway, the San Jacinto River Levee was also being used for cycling and hiking. The citizens of the San Jacinto Valley are taking advantage of these outdoor opportunities. With the San Jacinto River Levee project taking another step forward, this may be another fantastic chance to add to our abilities to get out and connect with nature.

The San Jacinto Wildlife Area (SJWA) is a great destination for bicyclists and hikers. It has quiet, well-maintained dirt roads, with majestic mountain views, and plenty of opportunities to connect with nature. The prospect of extending the San Jacinto River Levee out to Sanderson Avenue will give us the opportunity to create an attractive, protected bike lane along the river, near wild nature corridors, and out to the SJWA.

Historically, the route that the San Jacinto River has taken has also been used by Native Americans to farm and hunt. While this may no longer be the case, a bike lane starting on or near the Soboba reservation, could potentially give the Soboba tribe renewed access to this area, and the ability to more deeply bond with some of their ancestral homelands.

The City of San Jacinto recently approved the final engineering report for the San Jacinto River Levee project. In the Valley Chronicle Article of June 11,



2015, by Jessica Self, it was noted that the levee will not only protect the city, but will also strengthen the wildlife corridor between Soboba and the SJWA. Many cities located near rivers have taken the next step and created bike lanes along its banks such as Bakersfield and the Kern River, and Riverside with the Santa Ana River. Not only will the residents of the San Jacinto Valley take advantage of this, but a protected bike lane near a wildlife corridor to the SJWA will also attract nature lovers from outside the area, making this a tourist destination.

There are many organizations willing to help cities and counties become more bike-friendly. One of the most well known is through the League of American Cyclists. Their website and magazines offer ideas and guidance through the process of becoming a Bicycle Friendly Community. They can be reached at www.bike-league.org/bfa. The City of San Jacinto has done something like this before in the

Rancho San Jacinto housing development where they developed bike lanes that are also part of the storm drain system.

Taking a holistic view of how the San Jacinto Valley can be connected and inter-supported will give an overarching blueprint for how the cities of Hemet and San Jacinto, Riverside County, the Soboba Band of Mission Indians, and the San Jacinto Wildlife Area can be connected to create a sustainable and attractive addition through a bike lane along the SJ River Levee.

Donate

We welcome donations. To make a tax-deductible donation to Friends of the Northern San Jacinto Valley online, please go to <http://www.northfriends.org> and click the Donate button.

Bird Checklist for Beginning Birders

Rosedith Marx has shortened the exhaustive list of the San Jacinto Wildlife Area for beginning birders which shows 175 of the over 350 birds on the exhaustive list prepared by Doug Morton and others. Both lists can be downloaded at www.northfriends.org before you come on our walks.



Sign up for our Newsletter

To receive the Friends newsletter twice a year via email, just send us an email with the request to Friends of the Northern San Jacinto Valley, northfriends@northfriends.org

Calendar of Audubon Walks at the SJWA & Lake Perris

All walks are free and open to everyone. No reservations are needed. Children are welcome. Binoculars and birding books provided. To all walks, wear comfortable shoes, hats and sunscreen and bring water, snacks and binoculars, if you have them. We hope you can join us and invite your friends and family to learn more about all aspects of nature and how we are connected to and dependent upon the well being of our environment for our own well being. All Friends walks are free and open to all. Children are welcome. (See Audubon's student policy <http://www.sbvass.net>)

Board Meetings

We do not have regular public meetings at this time, but if you think you might be interested in joining our board, the meetings are second Tuesday at 6pm, every other month. Call or send Sue Nash an email to confirm we are meeting and location. 909-228-6710, snash22@earthlink.net

Audubon Walks



Juvenile Bald Eagle.
Photo by Rosedith Marx

Beginning Bird Walk at San Jacinto Wildlife Area

Sunday, December 6, 2015, 8-10am

Meet at SJWA Parking Lot

Brad Singer (909) 838-7951

Visiting the wildlife area allows great opportunities to view waterfowl, shorebirds and raptors. For those of you who are just beginning the wonderful pastime of bird watching, please join us for a fun, slow-paced morning of birding in one of our local wildlife

habitats. Our goal will be to teach you enough basic birding techniques and identification skills so that you will feel comfortable birding on your own or joining our longer birding trips throughout the year. We will introduce you to some of our local bird species. You may be surprised at what wonderful birds can be seen!

San Jacinto Valley and Lake Perris

Saturday, February 6, 2016, 7am-5pm *Meet at SJWA Parking Lot* **Chet McGaugh (951) 781-3699 & Tony Metcalf (951) 242-7038**

The San Jacinto Wildlife Area (SJWA) and the San Jacinto Valley have lots of birds all year. SBVAS leads a Fall trip, a Spring trip, and now a Winter trip to this remarkable birding hotspot. In addition to the high number of resident species, overwintering birds and the occasional spectacular occurrence, the diversity and number of birds of prey and gulls peak after the new year. So join us on a fairly intense but unstructured day. We will certainly cover the SJWA and adjacent lands, and we may go to Lake Perris and ...well, who knows.

Overview Schedule of Walks & Events

Date	Event	Time
2015		
Dec. 6	Beginning Bird Walk	8-10am
2016		
Feb. 6	Birding	7am - 5pm
March 6	Beginning Bird Walk	8am - 10am
April 19	Salton Sea Birding	7am - 5pm?
April 20	SJWA Birding	7am - 5pm?

Beginning Bird Walk at San Jacinto Wildlife Area

Sunday, March 6, 2016, 8-10am *Meet at SJWA Parking Lot*
Matt Grube (909) 253-3867

Visiting the wildlife area allows great opportunities to view waterfowl, shorebirds and raptors. For those of you who are just beginning the wonderful pastime of bird watching, please join us for a fun, slow-paced morning of birding in one of our local wildlife habitats. Our goal will be to teach you enough basic birding techniques and identification skills so that you will feel comfortable birding on your own or joining our longer birding trips throughout the year. We will introduce you to some of our local bird species. You may be surprised at what wonderful birds can be seen!

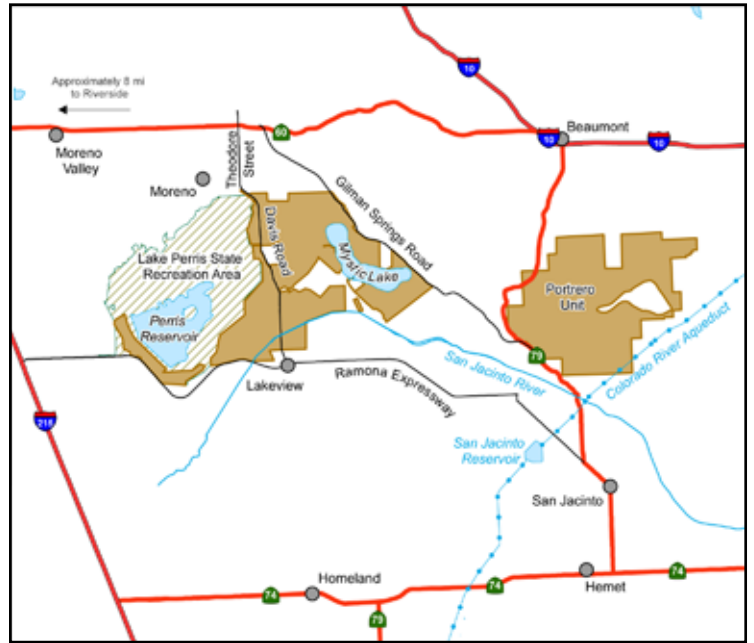
San Bernardino Valley Audubon Society Day Trips To Salton Sea and SJWA

Sat. & Sun., April 19 & 20, 2016 - 7:00 am *Meet at SJWA Parking Lot* **Tony Metcalf (951) 242-7038 and Chet McGaugh (951) 781-3699**

Tony Metcalf and Chet McGaugh will be leading back-to-back San Bernardino Valley Audubon Society field trips on the weekend of April 19-20, 2016 - to the north end of the Salton Sea (Saturday) and the San Jacinto Wildlife Area (Sunday). As we both are big fans of the shorebirds, and the date is excellent for a good migration experience, we intend to spend most of the weekend searching mudflats, marshes, slop ponds, wet fields, barnacle beaches, and open sea and sky. It is our hope that we can provide some knowledge about this fascinating bunch of birds, stimulate appreciation and interest in them, and mitigate some of the phobias. And have fun. As usual, the San Bernardino Valley Audubon Society field trips are open to all. The study of shorebirds is greatly enhanced by the use of spotting scopes so we hope there will be plenty besides our own.

Citizen Science Nest Boxes

This spring Jenny Cole did a weekly survey of the first 10 nest boxes on the SJWA (along the river, from Davis road going east). Although she could not tell for certain how many birds fledged, the number of tree swallow eggs in each nest (from 1 to 9) and the total of 51 was very encouraging. We would like to survey the other 40 nest boxes (all now mapped with GPS), replace some and get others back upright out of the water. Depending on weather and road conditions, we will be cleaning out, replacing & repairing boxes in January and February. In addition to tree swallows, the nest boxes may also attract other swallows, western bluebirds, woodpeckers and other species to be discovered by you. If you would like to participate in this fun and rewarding citizen science project, please contact Sue Nash (909-228-6710; snash22@earthlink.net)



Directions to the SJWA

All walks begin in the San Jacinto Wildlife Area headquarters parking lot, 17050 Davis Road, Nuevo CA. Tel. (951-928-0580) Because Davis (Theodore) Road is closed from Moreno Valley the only access is north off the Ramona Expressway — despite what your GPS may tell you. There is now a traffic light on Davis Rd.

From Moreno Valley: go south on Perris Blvd; east on Ramona Expressway; north 2.3 miles on Davis Rd.

From San Jacinto/Hemet: go west on Ramona Expressway; north 2.3 miles on Davis Rd.

From Interstate 215: go east on Ramona Expressway; 2.3 miles north on Davis Road.

USE EXTREME CAUTION. If raining, call area office for road conditions: (951) 928-0580.



Wildlife enthusiasts stroll through the San Jacinto Wildlife Area during one of the many wildlife walks. *Photo by Greg Ballmer*

Information About the San Jacinto Wildlife Area

The San Jacinto Wildlife Area is 19,000 acres of wildlife habitat managed by the California Department of Fish and Wildlife. Its lands are partial mitigation for the State Water Project, the project that brings water from northern California to southern California so that we can live and work here.

It is a Stephens' kangaroo rat reserve for the Riverside County Habitat Conservation Agency (RCHCA); it is a cornerstone reserve in the Riverside County Multi-Species Habitat Conservation Agency (MSHCP), the county reserve system which is supposed to protect and preserve the county's endangered ani-

mals and plants.

Tens of thousands of waterfowl and shorebirds winter in the northern San Jacinto Valley. It is a known resting point and/or wintering site for migrating birds traveling the Pacific Flyway. The northern San Jacinto Valley is known for its large number of wintering birds of prey (peregrine falcon, bald eagle, ferruginous hawk, prairie falcon).

The SJWA is considered one of the premier hunting areas in southern California. All state-owned wildlife areas allow hunting. Hunting fees help support the acquisition of wildlife habitat throughout the state of California. The northern San

Jacinto Valley is considered a Significant Natural Area by the California Department of Fish and Wildlife.

The northern San Jacinto Valley and Mystic Lake are considered Important Bird Areas by the National Audubon Society. The San Jacinto Wildlife Area represents an \$80 million investment of the taxpayers' money. The San Jacinto Wildlife Area includes the 10,000 acre Davis Road Unit (includes 2,000 acres of Mystic Lake) plus the 9,000 acre Potrero Creek Conservation Unit. San Jacinto Wildlife Area, 17050 Davis Road, Lakeview; (951) 928-0580; <http://www.dfg.ca.gov/lands/wa/region6/sanjacinto/index.html>