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## **Following Natural Disaster, Recovery Includes Concern for Wildlife Habitat**

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People and property are the first priorities for protection during natural disasters, but as we recover, we can also assess and address the losses of wildlife and natural habitat. Fortunate people have insurance policies and public agencies to help with rebuilding, but the web of life on wild lands, from plants and insects, to birds and bobcats, will strain to cope with new circumstances.

One way people can help is to avoid toxic substances for rodent control. Following a fire, fleeing mice and rats infest new areas. If homeowners near burn areas react to rodent problems by using poison, they risk posing new dangers to wildlife. Anti-coagulants kill mice and rats through internal bleeding, but poisoned pests take a long time to die, and in the meantime, they often become food for wildlife ranging from mountain lions to birds of prey, potentially spreading the poison up the food chain.

Prevent a problem by sealing off potential home entry points with wire mesh. Trim trees overhanging your roof and avoid dense growth capable of sheltering rats. Keep pet food secured and clean up pet dropping promptly.

If those methods fail, rely on mechanical methods of pest control. Classic snap traps and electric shock traps are most effective when set in pairs along a wall, with the trip pads pointing in opposite directions. Use a proven effective bait, such as peanut butter. Use both mouse and rat sized traps if you are not sure which is in your home.

Earlier this month, the non-profit group Poison Free Malibu promoted this message in a documentary shown at the Thousand Oaks Civic Arts Plaza. *The Cat that Changed America* also focuses on people involved in an effort to expand wildlife habitat by building a vegetated bridge across a local freeway.

Erosion control is another way to help wildlife harmed by the recent disaster. February is typically Ventura County's wettest month, so the coming weeks are crucial for those with weakened landscapes to prevent topsoil from washing down storm drains and polluting waterways.

Straw wattles are one of the simplest and least expensive immediate measures to prevent erosion. Wattles are long tubes full of straw, mulch chips or coir, which is coconut mixed with straw. Wattles are placed across a slope, so they slow runoff, allowing water to flow through while holding back sediment.

Sediment-laden water flowing from storm drains into waterways can suffocate fish and block sunlight, inhibiting the growth of plants necessary to sustain natural habitat. Runoff can also carry harmful metals, pesticides and fertilizers.

Secure wattles into trenches a few inches deep, and use stakes on both sides to prevent them from washing away and clogging nearby storm drains. Jute and fiber blankets can provide similar protection on flatter areas, and sandbags can direct water away from erosion prone areas.

If you are considering working with a professional landscape company to plan or plant your garden, the sooner you start, the more likely you are to be prepared for the first major rain of the season. Lupe Pardue, Operations Manager of Halter Encinas Enterprises, reports she has received calls from 50 of the company's 250 regular residential garden maintenance customers in the past two weeks, and these customers, as well as others, are eager to plan new landscapes.