



# The Carmel Pine Cone

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## Panetta travels to Israel, Jordan and Afghanistan

By KELLY NIX

IN A trip shrouded in secrecy because of concerns over security, Congressman Jimmy Panetta and other members of a Democratic congressional delegation this week traveled to Afghanistan to talk to officials about a host of issues, including the United States' ongoing role in the country and ways to convince the Taliban to come to the negotiating table.

The roughly 24-hour visit to Afghanistan — from Wednesday to Thursday — was part of whirlwind trip to the Middle East led by House Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi that began March 25 and included stops in Israel and Jordan to meet with high-level officials and others to discuss national security, economic and social development, regional peace, and refugee and humanitarian issues.

But it was the delegation's excursion into Afghanistan that was kept quiet until Thursday, after the Democrats had left the volatile country and flown back to Israel. While in Jerusalem, Panetta gave a 10-minute interview to The Pine Cone about the March 25-29 trip, including the Afghanistan leg.

"We had briefings in Afghanistan all day," Panetta said. "Then we went to the presidential palace in Kabul and met with President Ashraf Ghani."

During the meeting with Ghani and Afghan Chief Executive Abdullah Abdullah, the delegation of 11 congressional members stressed the urgency of reducing corruption in the country and holding free and fair parliamentary and presidential elections.

The congressional members, which included Southern California Representative Adam Schiff, stressed the importance of not allowing the Taliban use Afghanistan to carry out terrorism,

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PHOTO/OFFICE OF NANCY PELOSI

In Jordan this week during a Middle East fact-finding tour, Congressman Jimmy Panetta (far right) and other congressional representatives visited Dahiet Al Ameer School, which was built with funds provided by United States taxpayers in 2011 and serves Syrian refugee children.

## Hikers worry historic Big Sur trail may close

By CHRIS COUNTS

A GATE that marks the start of Big Sur's Little Sur Trail — which has been used by hikers for more than a half century — now has a "No Trespassing" sign on it, leading to speculation that the owner of the property it crosses, El Sur Ranch, intends to permanently close access to it from Old Coast Road.

A publicist who represents El Sur Ranch said owner Jim Hill was unavailable for comment, but Hill's attorney, Pam

Silkwood, said the closure is a direct response to the poor condition of the trail. "The concern is the liability and the potential for someone to sue," Silkwood told The Pine Cone.

Silkwood said she doesn't know Hill's longterm plans for allowing public access across his land.

The Little Sur Trail starts about 4 miles from the south end of the Old Coast Road. From there, the path travels east, winding its way through a lush redwood forest before climbing above the trees and offering sweeping views up and down a canyon carved by the Little Sur River's South Fork.

Not only does the trail connect to many others in the backcountry, but it passes through an area that was site of extensive mining during the late 19th century, and some remnants of that activity can still be seen along the way. The path also

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The owner of this property in Big Sur has posted a sign closing a hiking trail that crosses his land. Jim Hill's attorney said he posted the sign because the trail is unsafe, but some worry the closure might be permanent.

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## Plan to reduce trees on North Dunes headed to coastal commission

By MARY SCHLEY

AFTER THE city council authorized the removal of up to 31 trees from the sand dunes on the north side of Ocean Avenue above Carmel Beach, Maria Sutherland, president of the Friends of Carmel Forest group, has asked the California Coastal Commission to overrule the city's March 6 decision.

Sutherland said this week she filed the appeal "not to hold up the project, but to make it better."

According to the permit approved by the planning commission in September 2016, the goal of the North Dunes Habitat Restoration Project is to get rid of non-native plants, restore the native scrub that grows on the dunes, and increase the number of Tidestrom's lupine and black legless lizards. It also calls for marked trails to keep beach goers from trampling the plants.

### Restoring the habitat

Initially, the permit allowed for the removal of up to five live trees, but in her recent assessment of the dunes, biologist Joey Canepa identified more trees that should be cut down for the sake of restoring the dunes habitat, where more than 100 are growing now, according to her count.

The forest and beach commission reviewed the plan in January and supported her recommendation to remove up to 20 trees in various areas of the dunes, along with up to 10 more smaller trees as necessary. The following month, the planning commission weighed in, recommending the removal of up to 20 trees and not replanting any.

After that, planning and forestry staff worked with Canepa to slightly revise the number to 21 — 17 Monterey cypress and four Monterey pines. "These trees are proposed for removal because they impede the growth of native dunes plants such as Tidestrom's lupine, which is listed as an endangered

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## ALL'S FAIR IN LOVE, WAR, AND OPPOSING THE HOUSE NEXT DOOR?

By MARY SCHLEY

ROBIN SCATTINI, hired as the city's finance manager in January, is learning firsthand about the trials and tribulations of trying to build a house here.

She and her husband, Greg, received unanimous approval from the planning commission March 14 to build an 1,800-square-foot, two-story house on a vacant corner lot at Guadalupe and First. But this week, the woman who owns the cottage next door filed paperwork asking the city council to overturn that approval, arguing the house will block out light from the cottage's living room window, and demanding environmental review because the lot should be considered an "environmentally sensitive habitat area."

After receiving preliminary approval from the planning commission last month, but being asked to work with neighbor, Laura Spiegelman, to address her concerns, designer Claudio Ortiz shifted the house 18 inches. Spiegelman, who lives elsewhere in town and bought the cottage for her parents to use as a retirement home, had asked him to move it 5 feet 6 inches, so someone looking out the living room window could see across the Scattinis' property instead of looking at the house next door.

"I understand Laura's concern, but is it a significant view that she has? Is it a real hardship to her in her home?" Ortiz

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