

L.A. Studies Law to Save Historic Oaks

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One oak tree supported the original San Fernando Mission bell—and a few years later gold was discovered under another oak tree in Newhall.

Acorns from oaks were the staple of Valley Indians' diet for centuries—and the gnarled old trees nourish the esthetic senses of modern Valley homeowners.

Protection of the historic trees from needless destruction is being studied by City Council, which has voted week for the City Attorney to write an ordinance protecting trees located on private property.

The proposed ordinance is modeled after legislation passed by Thousand Oaks in 1970.

It regulates both the trimming and the removal of oak trees.

Currently the city has jurisdiction only over oaks growing on city property or lining city streets—or over the trees involved in subdivision plans or marked as Cultural Heritage Monuments.

One Los Angeles problem is that developers circumvent the city's tree preservation requirements by removing the trees prior to submitting their subdivision plans to the city.

In Thousand Oaks, where landscape architect George Moore, the city's oak tree consultant, claims the ordinance has saved thousands of trees from destruction, the violation has a maximum penalty of \$500 and 6 months in jail.

"It's less expensive for developers to remove trees than to plan improvements around them," Moore said.

He said the city applies the ordinance mainly on new building projects or on modifications of existing construction, not for routine maintenance of trees in home gardens.

Thousand Oaks grants permission to trim or remove the trees on private property based on such criteria as the condition of the tree regarding disease and its proximity to buildings or utility lines, the effect of its pruning or removal on soil and water retention in the vicinity and on the number of other oaks in the area.

Moore said the law has created more public interest in oak trees in the Conejo Valley.

He said the trees are from 150 to more than 500 years old.