

# Los Angeles Times

FEBRUARY 15, 2006

## Lawsuit Targets Work on River

**Environmentalists want a moratorium on filling and dredging permits on the Santa Clara until the Army Corps assesses cumulative damage.**

**By GREGORY W. GRIGGS**  
*Times Staff Writer*

Three environmental groups filed suit against the Army Corps of Engineers on Tuesday, accusing the federal agency of not properly protecting the Santa Clara River, one of the last free-flowing rivers in Southern California.

Saying the corps had approved at least 100 dredging and filling projects along the river in the last five years, the groups want a federal judge to stop the agency from issuing another permit until it completes an analysis of the cumulative damage these projects would have on the river.

The 84-mile river begins in the San Gabriel Mountains and flows to the ocean near Oxnard and Ventura .

"We simply think too many permits for such dumping and filling have been issued without considering the total impacts," said Ron Bottorff, chairman of Friends of the Santa Clara River , one of the plaintiffs.

He said developers plan to build nearly 5,800 homes near the river, including a 542-home project near Canyon Country approved by Los Angeles County in January and more than 1,350 homes and apartments that the city of Santa Clarita

approved last summer.

The Center for Biological Diversity in Los Angeles and Wishtoyo Foundation/Ventura Coastkeeper, an environmental watchdog group, joined in the lawsuit, which was filed in U.S. District Court for the Central District of California.

Jeff Field, a spokesman for the Corps of Engineers, said the agency does consider the effect of future public and private development projects.

"We're put in a bind to find the balance between environmental concerns and human development. It's

**"We should not compromise this river in the name of profit..."**

our mandate," Field said. Almost half of the 60 permits approved on the Santa Clara in 2005 were to provide emergency repairs of damage caused by heavy rains last winter, he said.

Bottorff said the river is crucial to the survival of wildlife that live in and travel through the watershed, and he urged much larger buffer zones between new projects and the river's edge to stem the loss of habitat.

The watershed is home to several endangered or threatened species, including the southern steelhead

trout, arroyo toad and the least Bell 's vireo songbird.

"Bit by bit, project by project, the Santa Clara 's use as a living river is being whittled away," said Ileene Anderson, an ecologist with the Center for Biological Diversity. It is estimated that California has lost 90% of its wetlands to farming, industry, homes and other development.

Wishtoyo Executive Director Mati Waiya, a member of the Santa Clara River Valley Chumash Turtle Clan, said his ancestors lived along the river for thousands of years.

"I remember my mother telling me about harvesting steelhead in this river and washing in this river," Waiya said. "We should not compromise this river in the name of profit. Like pesticides in the body, these projects are accumulating and the river will die."