



S.B. County sued over growth plan

10:00 PM PDT on Wednesday, April 11, 2007

By IMRAN GHORI

The Press-Enterprise

San Bernardino County's recently adopted general plan update is coming under fire from environmentalists for not doing enough to counter the effects of global warming.

The general plan, a blueprint for the county's growth through 2030, does not analyze the impact of increased greenhouse gases from future growth, several conservation groups charge in a lawsuit filed Wednesday in San Bernardino County Superior Court.

"The county sticks its head in the sand and fails to address the most important issue of our generation, which is global warming," said Jonathan Evans, an attorney with the Center for Biological Diversity, a party to the suit along with the Sierra Club and the San Bernardino Valley Audubon Society.

The suit alleges that the plan violates the California Environmental Quality Act, the state law requiring analysis of environmental impacts.

The Board of Supervisors adopted the updated general plan last month after more than five years of study and numerous public meetings. The document projects that the county population will increase from 1.7 million to 2.6 million.

"The county worked long and hard and worked with every community in the county to adopt a very responsible general plan," county spokesman David Wert said. "The county is very confident the general plan will stand up to any scrutiny."

Wert said he had not seen the specific complaint. He described the Center for Biological Diversity as a group that "litigates quite a bit." He said the suit was not surprising and called it unfortunate for taxpayers.

The center has sued the county on other projects, most recently the Board of Supervisors' approval in February of an open-air compost facility near the High Desert community of Hinkley.

Evans said the county ignored requests by conservation groups and the state Attorney General's office to analyze greenhouse effects and climate change in the plan.

He said the county can't put off the issue until a later date because the region already is experiencing the effects of global warming with extended drought and increased forest fire risk.

"If we don't deal with it now, we're going to deal with it in a worse way in the future," he said.

Reach Imran Ghorl at 909-806-3061 or ighori@PE.com