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## Suit against developer goes to L.A.

### Greens try to halt Riverpark

**By Eugene Tong,**  
*Staff Writer*

Thursday, July 14, 2005 - A Ventura County judge on Wednesday allowed a pending case filed by four environmental groups to halt Newhall Land's 1,089-home Riverpark development in Santa Clarita to change venues to Los Angeles County.

The lawsuit filed last month by the Sierra Club, Friends of the Santa Clara River, the Center for Biological Diversity and the California Water Impact Network alleged that the city of Santa Clarita ignored key environmental concerns in approving The Newhall Land and Farming Company subdivision in May.

Ventura Superior Court Judge Vincent J. O'Neill granted the change-of-venue request from the city and Newhall Land.

"It appears they're forum-shopping," Newhall Land spokeswoman Marlee Lauffer said. "The community was approved in Los Angeles County in the Santa Clarita Valley. Ventura County is the wrong venue."

The plaintiffs argued that the project would encroach on the floodplains and worsen air and water pollution along the 84-mile Santa Clara River, which runs through Ventura County. A national report released in April ranked the waterway the 10th-most-endangered in the United States.

The decision would move the case to a

jurisdiction believed to be less sympathetic to their side, said Ron Bottorff, chairman of the Newbury Park-based Friends of the Santa Clara River.

"They have not seemed to be persuaded by the kinds of arguments that we think should be persuasive regarding environmental issues," he said.

Santa Clarita City Attorney Carl Newton disagreed.

"I think they're quite even-handed in both dealing with public agencies and challenges of environmental action."

Local environmentalist Lynne Plambeck believes Ventura County has a stake in the case.

"It's too bad Ventura wouldn't hear it, because all the development up here is increasing the chloride levels in the river, which affects their agriculture industry," said Plambeck of the Santa Clarita Organization for Planning the Environment. SCOPE is not a plaintiff in the case.

But Lauffer said this argument doesn't pan out in the Riverpark environmental impact review.

"The reasons that say downstream flows and water-quality impacts are not supported in the Riverpark EIR," she said.

The 1,089-home subdivision proposed on 695 acres north of the Santa Clara River in Saugus includes nearly 700 acres of open-space concessions for the city,

along with more than \$22 million in right-of-way dedications and bridge fees for the 8.5-mile east-west Cross Valley Connector road.

Despite the lawsuit, Lauffer said crews are conducting general preparations at the site for all future construction, including the connector. Environmental reviews for the road are expected to be completed this month.

"We're doing some clearing of brush and weeds, we're removing some non-native trees," she said. "We have all the permits in place for what we're doing right now. We are proceeding forward in a very orderly fashion."

But Plambeck believes the developer is trying to circumvent the review process.

"They told everybody in every public hearing there was no connection between (Riverpark) and the Cross Valley Connector," she said. "I think it's deceptive. They are proceeding with the project even though there are major concerns. We have a big developer that is no longer community-based, who is no longer working with the concerns of the community."

Lauffer disagreed, saying no work directly pertaining to the road was done.

"This is a very important part of the Cross Valley Connector project," she said. "We want to be sure we have forward momentum so that we can work with the city on completing it."