

Suit filed in Conservation District plan

The Center for Biological Diversity filed a lawsuit Wednesday against the Local Area Formation Committee of San Bernardino (LAFCO) for setting a zero sphere of influence for the San Bernardino Valley Water Conservation District. The move by LAFCO is the first step in its effort to eliminate the Water Conservation District and have the San Bernardino Valley Municipal Water District take over its functions.

The lawsuit by the Center claims that LAFCO's actions violated the California Environmental Quality Act by not adequately reviewing the environmental effects of eliminating the Water Conservation District.

"LAFCO is attempting to hobble the Water Conservation District by completely eliminating its sphere of influence, which is one step away from killing the agency," says Adam Keats, staff attorney for the Center. "As this action will severely impact the District's ability to further its mission in conserving and protecting water in the Santa Ana watershed, it will undoubtedly have an environmental effect. LAFCO can-

not ignore state law that says that it must address these concerns before moving forward."

For over 100 years, the Water Conservation District has taken local water from the Santa Ana River as it drops into the valley and diverted it into spreading basins just southwest of Greenspot Road, recharging the ground water in the Bunker Hill Basin.

The Municipal Water District was formed in 1954 to import water from the State Water Project. It stores the imported water in a number of ground water basins, including Bunker Hill. But the two agencies have dramatically different purposes, said the Center: one seeks to conserve local water and protect the environment while the other is primarily concerned with finding water and providing it to users. Critics contend that eliminating the Water Conservation District will result in further decreases to life-sustaining flows in the upper Santa Ana River, as the District's focus on conservation is shoved aside by Muni's desire to supply water to developers. Such a scenario would come at the expense of numerous rare plants and

animals that rely on surface flows in the watershed.

"The upper Santa Ana River has already suffered changes in water regimes that are jeopardizing a number of plants and animals found no where else in the world," says ecologist, Ileene Anderson. "Getting rid of the Water Conservation District and replacing it with Muni is just like having the wolf guard the henhouse. It will further imperil all the plants and animals in the area."