
Los Angeles Times

NOVEMBER 13, 2009

Groups sue to block Tejon Ranch development

They say the development of a 5,000-acre resort community in the Tehachapi Mountains would endanger the California condor, degrade air quality and add traffic to Interstate 5.

By Ann M. Simmons

A coalition of environmentalists, Native Americans and local residents filed a lawsuit Thursday aimed at halting the development of a 5,000-acre resort community on the Tejon Ranch in the Tehachapi Mountains.

The suit, filed in Kern County Superior Court, argues that the Tejon Mountain Village project threatens the endangered California condor and would negatively affect villages and sacred Chumash sites.

The project, which was unanimously approved last month by Kern County supervisors, also would degrade air quality and add traffic to the overburdened Grapevine pass on Interstate 5, the lawsuit alleges.

“This project is anything but green. It’s an environmental catastrophe.”

said Adam Keats, a spokesman for the Center for Biological Diversity, one of the plaintiffs. “You could not put a housing development in a worse place.”

David Crowder, government and community relations director for Tejon Mountain Village LLC, expressed disappointment.

Last year, Tejon Ranch Co. agreed to preserve 90% of its 270,000-acre property, where the Tejon Mountain Village would be the smaller of two massive developments. The village project would include 3,450 homes, golf courses, hotels, and a commerce center

In exchange, a coalition of environmental groups, including the Sierra Club, Audubon California and Natural Resources Defense Council, agreed not to challenge the projects slated for the remaining 10% of the Tejon land.

Crowder said in a written statement that this agreement “was a much better outcome for conservation than could have been achieved through litigation.”

“The county planning staff and the supervisors were unanimously satisfied that our plan for Tejon Mountain Village has set new standards for conservation and sustainable development,” Crowder said.

“We feel that the record will show that the county made a well-reasoned decision and that the courts will find in our favor.”

The Tejon Ranch property is about 30 miles north of Santa Clarita.

ann.simmons@latimes.com

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