

Historic Tejon Ranch conservation plan coming soon

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A draft plan to protect the California condor and 26 other plants and animals as Tejon Ranch proceeds with building a 3,500-home community on its historic ranch land should be released within a month, a Tejon Ranch official said Tuesday.



A map showing Tejon Ranch and the proposed areas of land conservation announced Thursday by Tejon officials and several environmental groups. Handout image from Tejon Ranch

Plan approval is required for Tejon to proceed with Tejon Mountain Village, a community of homes, golf courses, shopping and hotels to be built in some areas deemed critical habitat for the California condor.

The habitat conservation plan seeks to balance wildlife protection with a landowner's right to develop property.



Photo by Alex Horvath / The Californian

An aerial view of Tejon Ranch land that is part of the largest conservation and land use agreement in California history. The agreement would provide permanent protection of 240,000 acres of the historic ranch, approximately 90 percent of the entire landholding.



Joel Reynolds with the Natural Resources Defense Council shakes hands with Robert A. Stine, president and CEO of Tejon Ranch Co. before the announcement of the largest conservation and land use agreement in California history.

Tejon Ranch spokesman Barry Zoeller said the plan will leave the “vast majority” of critical condor habitat untouched and will not permit activities that could result in the death of a condor. If a condor death occurs, civil and criminal penalties could apply.

“We think personal property rights and protection of endangered species can work together,” Zoeller said.

The plan will cover 142,000 of the ranch’s 270,000 acres, mainly in the Tehachapi uplands, a large swath of higher elevation land that runs through the middle of the ranch and includes some of the most biologically diverse areas.

Though Tejon Ranch has struck a landmark conservation agreement with several major environmental groups, it’ll likely see opposition to the habitat conservation plan from The Center for Biological Diversity.

Adam Keats, director of the Center’s Urban Wildlands Program, said Tejon Mountain Village will be located in an area that connects the condor’s historical range — the coastal range, Tehachapis and lower Sierra.

“With only 200 or 300 condors existing on this planet, they’re going to stick a housing development right in the linchpin,” he said.

Tejon Ranch has developed the conservation plan with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, which will release an environmental impact statement on the plan the same day the plan is released.

Zoeller said Tejon had already redrawn boundaries for Tejon Mountain Village away from some ridgelines to provide an additional buffer between the community and areas where the condors are known to visit. Other protections and precautions for the condor will include:

- burying utility lines underground.
- providing feeding-stations in areas away from Tejon Mountain Village.
- providing tracking devices to help wildlife officials identify when birds are in trouble and where to find them.
- establishing a 37,000-acre condor study area within the plan boundaries.