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RivCo settles lawsuit over K-rat preserve

The 1,100-acre wildlife preserve near March Air Reserve Base will be safeguarded against industrial development.

City News Service Staff Writer

A legal settlement between environmental groups and the federal government will safeguard an 1,100-acre wildlife preserve near March Air Reserve Base against industrial development, it was announced today.

The Center for Biological Diversity and the San Bernardino Valley Audubon Society reached an out-of-court agreement with the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service that prevents large-scale developments in the March Stephens Kangaroo Rat Preserve, habitat of the endangered rat, as well as other species, according to the plaintiffs.

“This land was dedicated for permanent conservation to balance the previous destruction of endangered wildlife,” said Jonathan Evans, spokesman for the Center for Biological Diversity. “We owe it to future generations to uphold past promises and stop paving over wildlife preserves.”

Government officials were not immediately available for comment.

The environmental groups filed suit in 2006 to block any attempts to build on the site after learning federal officials planned to open it up to commercial developers, according to Evans.

Drew Feldman, vice president of the San Bernardino Valley

Audubon Society, said the USFWS determined any negative impact from development would be offset by increasing the space dedicated to preservation in the Portrero Valley, roughly 25 miles away.

“This land swap was a net loser for wildlife in Southern California,” Feldman said. “Eliminating the supposedly permanent March Preserve threatened an entire system of nature reserves throughout Riverside County and threatened the future of wildlife that call the March Preserve home.”

Under the terms of the settlement, future proposals for a development of any size in the area will have to undergo intense scrutiny, according to Feldman.