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Breaking! WAN Talks With Endangered Habitats League After Judge Blocks L.A. Development That Would Have Threatened Imperiled Mountain Lions

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By Lauren Lewis

In a victory against a destructive project threatening local mountain lions in northern **Los Angeles County**, a judge issued a ruling Monday blocking a 1,300-acre Northlake development.

The development was planned to be constructed on fire-prone wildlands, and would have imperiled rare species of wildlife and buried 3.5 miles of Grasshopper Creek, a pristine stream that feeds into Southern California's last free-flowing river, the Santa Clara.

In response to a lawsuit brought by conservation organizations, including the **Center for Biological Diversity**, along with **Endangered Habitats League**, Judge Richard L. Fruin, Jr. found that the development's environmental review failed to consider less harmful plans. One that would have avoided destruction of Grasshopper Creek, which western spadefoot toads call home, and the surrounding habitat of vulnerable wildlife including mountain lions.

“When a water system is removed, it pulls the plug on the whole ecosystem,” Dan Silver, Executive Director of the Endangered Habitats League told WAN, while providing a bit of background on the project he calls archaic. According to Silver, the project was probably bad planning in 1992 when it was first created and introduced. Now, however, it is completely unacceptable.

The Northlake development would also block a wildlife corridor that is being used by imperiled mountain lions as documented in recent photos taken by **The Mountains Recreation and Conservation Authority**. Roads and developments like Northlake are causing genetic isolation among local mountain lions, which are now a “candidate species” under the state’s **Endangered Species Act**.



Northlake mountain lion crossing photo by Mountains Recreation and Conservation Authority

The court also found that key portions of the development's environmental approvals were "fatally flawed" under the **California Environmental Quality Act** and determined that the project approvals must be voided.

"The project is outdated in terms of current issues and conditions that were much different in 1992, such as: climate change, gas emissions, fire threats, vulnerable habitats, and the need for affordable housing, among others," said Silver.

The lawsuit was filed in **May 2019** by the **Center for Biological Diversity**, which also represents the **Endangered Habitats League**. **The Santa Monica Mountains Conservancy** filed an administrative appeal against the development, and the **California Department of Fish and Wildlife** submitted a letter to the county concluding that the environmental review was deficient.

As noted by the Center, Los Angeles County Supervisors **Janice Hahn**, **Kathryn Barger**, and **Hilda A. Solis** voted in favor of the development last year, while Supervisor **Sheila Kuehl** opposed it.

"Our elected officials should never have approved this outdated proposal to bulldoze a stream to build sprawl development in fire-prone wildlands," J.P. Rose, an attorney at the Center for Biological Diversity, said in a **statement**. "Communities and local wildlife deserve better."