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# Environmental Group Files Response in Tejon Ranchcorp Case

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The Center for Biological Diversity filed a response Friday in federal court to Tejon Ranchcorp's legal effort to seek \$347,000 in fees from center attorneys after the nonprofit organization and tribal groups challenged a plan to build a large-scale residential project.

"Tejon and its Wall Street backers have reached a new low by trying to intimidate our organization for working to enforce federal laws designed to protect sacred Native American cultural resources," said J.P. Rose, an attorney with the center. "We're confident the court will reject this heavy-handed attempt to silence us and our clients."

A message seeking comment sent to a Tejon Ranchcorp representative was not immediately answered.

Tejon filed a motion seeking the money in late December as part of a legal battle over the development, planned on what the center says is thousands of acres of critical habitat for the California condor.

Tejon Ranch has proposed three major housing developments on its 270,000-acre property straddling southern Kern and northern Los Angeles counties.

The center and tribal groups sued the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service in April 2019 for allegedly authorizing Tejon's project without considering how it would harm the condor as a sacred cultural resource for Native Americans. In December, a Santa Ana federal judge sided with the wildlife service.

The center's challenge to the permit arises from a lawsuit filed by Tejon against the federal government in 1997, where Tejon sought to halt condor recovery efforts near the ranch in connection with its development plans and ultimately prevailed.

Environmentalists allege Tejon is in breach of an historic 2008 Ranchwide Agreement with the Natural Resources Defense Council, Sierra Club and other conservation groups, which filed a lawsuit in December, after Tejon allegedly refused to make legally required payments to the Tejon Ranch Conservancy, which is charged with managing conservation lands on the ranch.