

MAGNIFICENT TEJON RANCH THREATENED BY URBAN SPRAWL



Tejon Ranch is one of the last great wildlands of southern California, encompassing over 270,000 acres, the largest continuous parcel of privately owned property in the state. Tejon Ranch is a valuable natural area, hotspot for biological diversity, haven for rare and endemic species, and home to as many as 20 state and federally listed species, including the California condor, California spotted owl and San Joaquin kit fox. Much of Tejon Ranch has been designated as Critical Habitat for the endangered condor, since it harbors important condor flyways and essential foraging and roosting habitat. Twenty-three different plant communities can be found on Tejon Ranch, including extensive native grasslands and wildflower fields, oak forests containing over one-third of the oak species in California and some of the largest individual oaks in the state.

Preserving Tejon Ranch is crucial for conservation of biodiversity in southern California, since it is located at a remarkable co-joining of ecological regions. The Northern Great Basin, Transverse and Coast Ranges, West Mojave and Sonoran deserts, Tehachapis, Sierra Nevada, and the Great Central Valley converge here. Tejon Ranch is also an essential habitat corridor and wildlands linkage between the Sierra Nevada and the Coast Range, connecting protected lands in Los Padres National Forest, Bitter Creek National Wildlife Refuge, Wind Wolves Preserve, and Carrizo Plain to the west with the Sequoia National Forest and Bureau of Land Management lands to the east. It is a unique and diverse biological core area for southern California wildlands, due to high habitat integrity, intact, functioning watersheds, and significant roadless areas.

Tejon Ranch also has a rich cultural and historical significance for the Kawaiisu Tribe of Tejon, the original inhabitants of the area. There are numerous known Native American burial sites, extensive remains of a Native trading village near Lake Castac, and cultural and ceremonial sites important to the Kawaiisu today.

Tejon Ranch has long been at the core of the condor's habitat and was one of the last places wild condors inhabited before all remaining birds were captured for an ambitious captive-breeding program. The Tehachapis are located on what was the major flyway for condors moving between the coastal Transverse Ranges and the Southern Sierra in the historic population. Today, reintroduced condors use the remote open spaces of Tejon Ranch as essential foraging and roosting areas.

Threats to this important landscape are enormous. Because of Tejon Ranch Company plans for extensive commercial, residential, and industrial development, the Ranch was identified by the California Wilderness Coalition as one of the top ten most threatened landscapes in California. TRC has already built the Pastoria Energy Plant and the 350-acre Tejon Industrial Complex West in the lower-elevation grasslands in Kern County. Although no comprehensive land use plan has ever been prepared for Tejon Ranch, TRC recently unveiled plans for three additional developments that will severely compromise the ecological integrity of this largely undeveloped and natural landscape:

Tejon Mountain Village

- Proposed 28,000-acre development surrounding Castac Lake on the western edge of the ranch
- Sprawl development including an exclusive residential resort and golf courses
- 3,450 residential units, 750 hotel units, 4 golf courses and 160,000 sq. feet of commercial space
- In the heart of Critical Habitat for the endangered California condor

Centennial Project

- 11,600 acres along Highway 138 in Antelope Valley
- 23,000 homes and 14 million sq. feet of commercial space, the largest single development ever considered in California
- Threatens valuable grasslands, juniper and oak woodlands, chaparral, scrublands and wildflower fields

Tejon Industrial Complex East

- Threatens 1,100 acres of grasslands and farmland on the San Joaquin Valley floor
- At 15 million sq. feet, one of the largest industrial developments in Kern County history
- Would impact an important wildlife linkage and habitat for the threatened San Joaquin kit fox
- Would greatly increase diesel truck traffic and air pollution in a highly polluted air basin
- A court rejected the project EIR for inadequate analysis of air quality and wildlife habitat impacts

Allowing such urbanization would be an ecological disaster that would fragment and degrade this remarkable natural area and the surrounding region. Tejon Ranch Company has proposed piecemeal developments without adequate public involvement or long-term planning. Decisions over the fate of Tejon Ranch should be made through comprehensive, multi-jurisdictional planning at a regional scale. Planning should occur in a public arena and be guided by the best available science to balance economic development with protection of Tejon Ranch's irreplaceable natural values. California's heritage and future quality of life are at stake in the decisions that are being made today.

Because of its unique natural resources and role as a critical wildlife corridor, the Ranch should be among the state's highest priority for protection of private wildlands. Tejon Ranch is largely roadless and un-fragmented by urbanization, something very rare in southern California. In order to maintain its biological values in the face of California's rapid development and agricultural conversion, Tejon Ranch should be preserved as a state or national park for future generations to enjoy and for wildlife to thrive.

For more information visit www.biologicaldiversity.org/swcbd/programs/sprawl/tejon

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