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Judge Rules Against Destructive Harmony Development in Southern California

Project Would Have Devastated Wildlife Habitat, Increased Traffic, Air Pollution

HIGHLAND, *Calif.*— In an important victory against sprawl, a judge has ruled against a large proposed development in Southern California. The ruling comes in a lawsuit filed by public interest groups over the Harmony project, which proposed constructing 3,600 houses in habitat for endangered species, rare wetlands and crucial wildlife connectivity corridors while bringing more air pollution and traffic to the community.

The ruling by Judge Donald Alvarez found the City of Highland's environmental review for the development was inadequate under the California Environmental Quality Act for failing to analyze the entire scope of the project and its potential threats to water and sensitive wildlife habitat.

"This is a major victory against an ill-planned, destructive project," said Aruna Prabhala, a staff attorney with the Center for Biological Diversity. "The ruling affirms concerns raised by the public for many years about this project's major environmental threats to the community and wildlife. People don't want the traffic headaches and air pollution caused by building more sprawl near sensitive habitat and limited open space."

Located at the confluence of Mill Creek and the Santa Ana River and adjacent to San Bernardino National Forest lands, the proposed development site is far removed from Highland's city services and vulnerable to episodic fire and earthquake risk. The ruling found the environmental review improperly ignored a key piece of the project — a bridge over Mill Creek. The city also failed to address the potential risk for flooding, both on-site and in downstream communities.

"The need for housing must be balanced against public safety, and this is a publicly owned property that is absolutely unfit for large-scale leapfrog development. It's a dinosaur project that is too far from transportation and public safety resources, on a flood plain, in high-risk wildfire and earthquake hazard zone," said Wendy Rea with the Greenspot Residents Association and Executive Director of Alliance for Mill Creek. "We must be smarter; focusing on realistic and sustainable economic development, urban renewal, and better leverage the local resources we have in mobile community

development and GIS expertise — and absolutely avoid putting the existing community at increased risk. We can, and should, do better.”

The project will also harm rare and protected species, including critical habitat for endangered San Bernardino kangaroo rats and federally threatened [Santa Ana sucker fish](#), as well as habitat for endangered birds called southwestern willow flycatchers.

“It’s developments such as this that push rare plants and animals to the brink of extinction,” said Drew Feldmann with the San Bernardino Valley Audubon Society. “The amount of rare wildlife and habitat already existing on the site points to conserving it, not developing it.”

The lawsuit was filed in September 2016 by the Center for Biological Diversity, San Bernardino Valley Audubon Society and the Greenspot Residents Association, who are represented by the law firm Shute, Mihaly and Weinberger. Judge Alvarez also ruled in a related case that the project’s environmental review violated CEQA on a host of other issues including not adequately analyzing water resources, wastewater and energy impacts from the development.

*The Center for Biological Diversity is a national, nonprofit conservation organization with more than 1.6 million members and online activists dedicated to the protection of endangered species and wild places.
www.biologicaldiversity.org*

The San Bernardino Valley Audubon Society is a local chapter of the National Audubon Society, with about 2,000 members dedicated to preserving the habitat in the area, not just for birds, but for other wildlife, and to maintain the quality of life in and around San Bernardino County.

The Greenspot Residents Association is an unincorporated association comprised of concerned citizens within the area historically known as “Greenspot,” that covers much of the Mentone, Redlands, and Mill Creek Canyon communities. Dedicated to the historic, cultural, ecological and agricultural preservation of the area, the association was formed and is managed exclusively by local residents.