



SCOPE
Santa Clarita Organization
For Planning and the
Environment



For Immediate Release, March 6, 2014

Contact: John Buse, Center for Biological Diversity, (323) 533-4416
Lynne Plambeck, Santa Clarita Organization for Planning the Environment,
(661) 255-6899
Ron Bottorff, Friends of the Santa Clara River, (805) 498-4323
Jason Weiner, Wishtoyo Foundation's Ventura Coastkeeper Program, (805)
823-3301
Mati Waiya, Wishtoyo Foundation, (805) 794-1248

Lawsuit Fights to Save River, Wildlife from Sprawling Newhall Ranch Project

New 20,000-home City Would Wipe Out Wildlife Habitat, Threaten Cultural Resources

LOS ANGELES — A group of public-interest organizations sued the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and U.S. Environmental Protection Agency in federal court today over the agencies' approval of permits for the sprawling Newhall Ranch development. The development is one of the largest residential projects ever approved in California and would transform more than 2,000 acres along the Santa Clara River from rugged open space and agricultural land into a sprawling new suburban city.

"These federal permits pave the way for the destruction of the Santa Clara River, one of the most endangered rivers in America, by bringing massive development within the river's floodplain and along its tributaries," said John Buse, a senior attorney with the Center for Biological Diversity. "It's unconscionable that the federal agencies charged with protecting the river have permitted the destruction of its floodplain and tributaries on a scale that would have been unthinkable in the 1950s, much less today."

Filed in the Central District of California, the lawsuit challenges the Army Corps' failure to comply with the Clean Water Act, National Environmental Policy Act and National Historic Preservation Act when the agency issued permits for the Newhall Ranch development in 2011. The lawsuit also challenges the EPA's approval of the project's permits despite repeatedly voicing serious and unresolved concerns about the development's environmental impacts. The suit was filed by the Center for Biological Diversity, Friends of the Santa Clara River, Santa Clarita Organization for Planning the Environment (SCOPE), and Wishtoyo Foundation and its Ventura Coastkeeper program.

The Newhall Ranch development, conceived in the 1980s, will include nearly 20,000 housing units spread throughout the fragile landscape of the Santa Clara River Valley. The proposed development approved by the Army Corps will require extensive

modification of the river and its floodplain, harming habitat for a variety of rare fish, wildlife and plants, including the unarmored threespine stickleback, the California condor, least Bell's vireo, southwestern willow flycatcher, California red-legged frog, arroyo toad, southern California steelhead and San Fernando Valley spineflower. The project is also likely to destroy Chumash Native American burial sites and ancestral remains, while permanently erasing sacred places and natural cultural resources essential to Chumash heritage.

"The Army Corps brushed off better alternatives for Newhall Ranch that would have reduced the harm to the river and its floodplain," said Ron Bottorff, chairman of Friends of the Santa Clara River. "Instead the Army Corps, with the EPA's willing cooperation, adopted an alternative that will cause unacceptable impacts to some of the finest riparian areas to be found anywhere in Southern California — a region which has lost all but 3 percent of its historic river woodlands."

"The project's discharges of pollutants into the Santa Clara will impart irreversible impacts to the wellbeing of watershed residents for years to come, and threatens the tremendous southern California steelhead recovery effort in the watershed," said Jason Weiner, associate director and staff attorney at the Wishtoyo Foundation's Ventura Coastkeeper Program.

"The impacts to hundreds upon hundreds of our burial sites and natural cultural resources, such as river rock, willow, and the California condor, that are such a vital components of our culture and religious practices, will be devastating and irreversible," said Mati Waiya, a Chumash ceremonial elder and executive director of the Wishtoyo Foundation.

"Rather than ensuring that the last free-flowing river in the county is preserved, the agencies have approved development directly in the Santa Clara River's fragile floodplain," said Lynne Plambeck, president of the Santa Clarita Organization for Planning the Environment. "Such a massive development in sensitive habitat and prime farmland is out of step with contemporary urban planning. It is time to implement new planning concepts that protect, not destroy, wildlife habitat, water resources and our local agriculture."

The Center for Biological Diversity is a national, nonprofit conservation organization with more than 675,000 members and online activists dedicated to the protection of endangered species and wild places. To learn more about the Center's work fighting the Newhall Ranch development and other sprawl-inducing projects visit <http://www.biologicaldiversity.org/programs/urban/index.html>

***Wishtoyo Foundation** is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit grassroots organization with over 700 members consisting of Ventura County's diverse residents and Chumash Native Americans. Wishtoyo's mission is to preserve and protect Chumash culture, the culture of all of Ventura County's diverse communities, and the environment that our current and future generations depend upon.*

*Wishtoyo's **Ventura Coastkeeper Program**'s mission is to protect, preserve, and restore the ecological integrity and water quality of Ventura County's inland and coastal waterbodies.*

<http://www.wishtoyo.org>