



North County Watch

Looking Out Today For Tomorrow

Press Release For Immediate Release

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Two Public Interest Groups Sue to Overturn Santa Margarita Ranch Decision

(SAN LUIS OBISPO) Two watchdog groups filed suit today in Superior Court to block the development of Santa Margarita Ranch and revoke the permit granted late last year by the County Board of Supervisors.

Representatives from both North County Watch and Endangered Habitats League said they were compelled to sue because of numerous adverse impacts of the Santa Margarita Ranch Project approved by the County on December 23. They also asserted that the project is incompatible with nearly three dozen separate goals, policies, standards, and regulations in the County's General Plan and Land Use Ordinance, and in violation of the California Environmental Quality Act and the state Planning and Zoning Law.

"The conduct of the Board of Supervisors in permitting this project was nothing less than outrageous," said North County Watch President Sue Harvey. "It just may be that the County has never acted with greater disregard for the law or the public process, or with greater disdain for the obligations of public office. We have no intention of letting this decision stand or watching the town of Santa Margarita irreparably changed. The board blatantly ignored overwhelming evidence of the devastating impacts the project would have on pristine oak woodlands, wildlife habitat, cultural resources and prime agricultural land provided in countless letters and hours of testimony from state and federal agency officials, the County Agriculture Commissioner, Air Pollution Control District, and Planning Commission, and the County's own planning staff."

Harvey said that North County Watch also strongly opposes how the project was rushed through the process during three last-minute meetings before development-friendly lame duck board to be brought before the outgoing board majority for an 11th-hour vote, noting that: "True to its reputation, the Board brushed aside the strong recommendations of government officials at every level, overruled the careful findings of the Planning Commission, and approved the Project at the last possible moment before the new Board took office in January 2009. The Board even did so in reliance on findings prepared in large part by the Project applicant, at the last moment, with hardly any time for public or staff review."

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The Endangered Habitats League is co-petitioner in the suit with North County Watch. Charging the County with “a betrayal of the public trust and an abuse of discretion in their rush to approve a sprawling subdivision in sensitive habitat,” Michael Fitts, of the Endangered Habitats League, noted that the County made legal action inevitable when it certified an Environmental Impact Report that failed to comply with the California Environmental Quality Act and adopted findings of approval for the Project that are unsupported by the evidence.

The groups’ legal petition states that “certification of the EIR, approval of the vesting tentative tract map, and approval of the conditional use permit for the Project must be set aside.”

North County Watch is a local non-profit, non-partisan organization that is committed to balanced and responsible development in and around the northern portion of San Luis Obispo County with the purpose of promoting economic and environmental policies that maintain and enhance the uniqueness of our community. The Endangered Habitats League is dedicated to the protection of diverse ecosystems of Southern California and to sensitive and sustainable land use for the benefit of all the region’s inhabitants.