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Environmental group sues San Diego County for Lakeside property approval



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The county's approval of 63 new homes in a very high fire-risk zone in Lakeside has sparked a lawsuit from the Sierra Club.



By: Spencer Soicher

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LAKESIDE, Calif. (KGTV) — An environmental group is suing San Diego County over a plan it approved to build homes in a very high fire-risk area in Lakeside.

The property, known as Green Hills Ranch, is located 100 yards north of Audubon and Adelai Road in Lakeside.

This area is considered a very high fire risk zone by Cal Fire.

Still, the county approved a plan in June to put in 63 single-family homes on the property.

But the Sierra Group says the approval process for Greenhills Ranch was flawed and that information shared by the county about the area's fire risk was inaccurate.

In the court filing, the Sierra Club claims the county told the public the homes would be built in a high fire danger zone, a lower level than a very high fire danger zone.

Dr. Peter Andersen is a member of the Sierra Club's San Diego chapter.

"Fair discussion, discussions among neighbors, discussions among citizens, discussion among public officials can only take place when there's accurate information," Andersen said.

The organization filed the legal action last week, asking the court to step in and vacate any approvals for the project based upon its initial study.

In the court filing, the Sierra Club claims that building homes there could impact greenhouse gas emissions, biological resources, and fire safety, among other issues.

"We want to see robust housing built in San Diego County, but we don't want it

built in the high fire zone of the county," Andersen said.

The Sierra Club writes the county's, "misidentification of the project as only being in a high fire severity zone misled the public."

"In fact, when you locate it on a map, the state fire maps, it's in a very high fire zone," Andersen said.

ABC 10News read through public documents related to the project.

According to a planning commission report, the wildfire evacuation plan concluded the project would not significantly impact evacuation of existing residents in the area.

The wildfire evacuation plan also stated that the project's location has enough emergency services, fire evacuation routes, and water access.

A spokesperson for San Diego County told ABC 10News it can't comment on pending litigation.

But the county spokesperson noted public notices were sent to property owners near the site and fire officials showed up to the county board meeting to answer any questions.

Atlas Real Estate, which submitted the proposal, is also named in the lawsuit. The company said in a statement, "The unanimous vote by the planning commission and (the vote by the San Diego County) Board of Supervisors supports that we've addressed all the concerns that the Sierra Club raised."

Anderson acknowledges there's a housing shortage in San Diego County, but

insists he and the Sierra Club are not being 'NIMBYs,' 'not in my backyarders.'

"Lakeside has a lot of good places for development but not in a wildlife corridor in a high fire zone," he added.

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