San Diego Legal Agreement Secures Victory for Environment, Housing

Settlement Reduces Wildfire Risk, Promotes Renewables, Protects Endangered Species

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SAN DIEGO — A coalition of environmental nonprofits and the California Attorney General's Office announced a legal settlement today regarding the Otay Ranch Village 13 project that will enhance environmental protections and provide safeguards for endangered species, while simultaneously increasing the opportunity for new housing in the region.

The agreement substantially reduces the footprint of the proposed housing development, preserving approximately 300 additional acres of open space compared to the original plan, and conserving additional habitat of the endangered Quino checkerspot butterfly. While reducing the development footprint by one third, the settlement simultaneously allows the developer flexibility to add additional units. The developer may apply for up to 2,750 housing units (increased from 1,938) within the same building area, allowing for additional housing supply while reducing environmental impacts.

“Endangered Habitats League supports this innovative plan to preserve the most important habitat for the Quino checkerspot butterfly, improve fire safety, effectively mitigate greenhouse gas emissions, but also increase the number of homes provided,” said **Dan Silver, Executive Director of the Endangered Habitats League**. “It shows what can be accomplished when environmentalists and housing developers work together.”

“San Diego is a global epicenter for biological diversity including many animals and plants found nowhere else on Earth,” said **David Hogan, Legal Committee Chair for the San Diego Chapter of Sierra Club**. “This settlement proves that we don’t have to choose between housing and environmental protection. It ensures a better balance of protection of our special nature with homes for people.”

The settlement also requires several measures to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, including:

- Developers will pay at least $15 million towards local greenhouse gas mitigation.
- All new buildings will be built to be 100% electric and will maximize power from solar energy.

“This agreement will allow San Diego residents to breathe a little easier while giving struggling plants and animals in the area a chance to survive,” said **Peter J. Broderick, a senior attorney at the Center for Biological Diversity**. “The realities of a warming planet and an extinction crisis mean we have to build responsibly and with climate resiliency in mind.”

“This agreement protects endangered San Diego thornmint, and acorns and cuttings from rare oaks displaced by the project will be grown out and incorporated into the landscaping of the project,” said **Frank Landis of the California Native Plant Society.** “We look forward to working with the developers to create more resilient and sustainable homes for people and wildlife.”

The revised project will improve wildfire protections by reducing the amount of development edging natural open space, adding exterior fire-suppressing sprinklers in perimeter areas, additional wildfire surveillance cameras, and other

measures. Additionally, the widening of Otay Lakes Road will be accelerated to expedite wildfire evacuations from Otay Ranch Village 13 and neighboring communities.

The environmental plaintiffs included Sierra Club, California Native Plant Society, Center for Biological Diversity, Preserve Wild Santee, California Chaparral Institute, and Endangered Habitats League.

In 2020, San Diego County supervisors approved the Otay Ranch Village 13 project despite the significant wildfire risks and threats to wildlife. The environmental groups sued the county for violating the California Environmental Quality Act and later the Attorney General intervened, joining the environmental groups' lawsuit.

About the Sierra Club

The Sierra Club is America's largest and most influential grassroots environmental organization, with millions of members and supporters. In addition to protecting every person's right to get outdoors and access the healing power of nature, the Sierra Club works to promote clean energy, safeguard the health of our communities, protect wildlife, and preserve our remaining wild places through grassroots activism, public education, lobbying, and legal action. For more information, visit **www.sierraclub.org**.

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