

SANTA MONICA MOUNTAINS CONSERVANCY

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November 23, 2009

Agenda Item 10(c)
SMMC
11/8/10

Mr. Jeff Hogan, Senior Planner
City of Santa Clarita
Community Development Department
23920 Valencia Boulevard
Santa Clarita, California 93155

Notice of Preparation Comments
Vista Canyon and Ancillary Annexation Areas
(Fair Oaks Ranch, Sand Canyon, Jakes Way) - Master Case 07-127

Dear Mr. Hogan:

The Santa Monica Mountains Conservancy offers the following comments on the Notice of Preparation of the above referenced Draft Environmental Impact Report (DEIR) to annex approximately 3,500 acres into the City of Santa Clarita. All portions of the proposed annexation area located south of State Route 14 are within the Rim of the Valley Trail Corridor zone.

The primary focus of the DEIR is the 185 acre Vista Canyon Ranch project located just upstream from where the Santa Clara River crosses under State Route 14. The Conservancy herein incorporates its April 27, 2009 pre-DEIR comment letter on the Vista Canyon Ranch project as part of this letter. The Conservancy's concerns about the Vista Canyon Ranch expressed in said letter remain. It is our understanding that the applicant is working with a wildlife biologist to integrate a regionally significant habitat linkage between the San Gabriel Mountains and the Santa Clara River into the project. We hope those efforts include a means for wildlife to get under or over the adjacent Metrolink track system. The DEIR should include at least two alternatives that provide for such safe crossing of the railroad tracks and factor in the high probability that the rail corridor could include high speed rail in the next decade.

A great advantage of the proposed expanded DEIR scope is that it includes private properties located between the Vista Canyon Ranch project and other protected habitat in the Fair Oaks Ranch and Golden Valley projects. Portions of these private properties are critical to make an adequate habitat linkage between the Vista Canyon property that abuts the railroad tracks and the moderate-sized habitat area located in the southeast corner of the Fair Oaks Ranch open space dedication.

The DEIR should address the need for this regional habitat linkage between the Santa Clara River and the San Gabriel Mountains and delineate potential corridor routes and

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particularly chokepoints. For example to achieve adequate width in places, extensive land needs to be protected up to the western side of Rolling Hills Avenue. The corridor design should maximize implementation feasibility by incorporating the existing steep, naturally-vegetated hill system located directly south of the southeast corner of the Vista Canyon Ranch project. Said design should also take advantage of the high quality habitat on that corner of the Vista Canyon Ranch project that leads directly to the Santa Clara River. The DEIR analysis must address how required brush clearance for any adjacent structures will reduce the habitat quality of the wildlife corridor and consider adequate structure setbacks.

For the record the Mountains Recreation and Conservation Authority acquired a 10 acre parcel in the Santa Clara River that abuts the downstream boundary of Vista Canyon Ranch.

If you have any questions, please contact Paul Edelman of our staff at 310-589-3200, ext. 128.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Ron P. Schaffer". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Ron" and last name "Schaffer" clearly distinguishable.

RONALD P. SCHAFER
Chairperson