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California Native Plant Society Signs Historic Settlement on Newhall Ranch Project

Conservation groups secure major environmental protections as controversial development moves forward.

September 26, 2017, Los Angeles -- The California Native Plant Society (CNPS) has settled a long-running dispute over the Newhall Ranch development project in northwestern Los Angeles County. The agreement with FivePoint Holdings (owner of Newhall Ranch) secures major endangered species protections, conserves thousands of acres of land, and engages CNPS scientists for ongoing rare plant conservation efforts on Newhall Ranch.

CNPS was joined by co-plaintiffs, the Center for Biological Diversity and the Wishtoyo Foundation and its Ventura Coastkeeper program, in signing the settlement in response to growing certainty that the project would move forward in the near future. (Earlier this year, the California Department of Fish and Wildlife [CDFW] certified the Newhall Ranch project’s revised Environmental Impact Report, and LA County Supervisors recently approved a major step, clearing the way for development to begin.)

“With development pending, we wanted to make sure plants got as much protection as possible out of this settlement,” said CNPS Rare Plant Program Manager David Magney who negotiated terms on behalf of the CNPS. CNPS is to receive no funding in this settlement, and actually will provide free scientific consultation.

“Our greatest hope has been that this site remain wild,” he added. “We lost that, but in doing so gained important protection of two rare plant species -- one of which is a California Endangered species; the other, the Newhall sunflower (*Helianthus inexpectatus*), has been found nowhere else in the world but this site.”

The agreement commits almost \$25 million toward conservation measures, including \$8 million to protect and manage the endangered San Fernando Valley spineflower (*Chorizanthe parryi* var. *fernandina*). FivePoint Holdings will set aside thousands of acres along the Santa Clara River, reduce floodplain development, and work with environmental groups to monitor and protect the site’s natural and cultural resources.

The Newhall Ranch terms follow in direct response to a 2015 CA Supreme Court decision in which the justices ruled on behalf of conservation groups against the Newhall Ranch project, citing a failure to uphold laws requiring clear noticing and public participation in the planning process as a major point of concern.

Since the 1990s, CNPS and partner organizations have fought the Newhall development, filing public comment and ultimately litigation in protest over the plan’s egregious violations of the California and



federal Endangered Species Acts and errors in assessing environmental impacts pursuant to California Environmental Quality Act [CEQA] and the National Environmental Policy Act [NEPA]).

“We provided the scientific review and monitoring, and our dedicated Los Angeles region volunteers put in countless hours attending meetings, educating the public, and talking with representatives,” adds Magney, who also was instrumental in successfully listing the spineflower as a California Endangered species.

In addition to land and endangered species conservation measures, CNPS and co-petitioners also secured commitment to include 10,000 solar installations and add 25,000 electric vehicle charges throughout Los Angeles County.

“This sends a big message to developers,” CNPS Executive Director Dan Gluesenkamp said. “Scrap your 1990s sprawl development plans and create something that is up to date with 21st century standards. Not only will this comply with Californians’ environmental expectations, it will make the development more attractive to customers. This Newhall settlement should be seen as a minimum starting point for today’s developers.”

About the California Native Plant Society:

The California Native Plant Society is a statewide organization working to save and celebrate California’s native plants and places via plant science, advocacy, education, and horticulture. CNPS has nearly 10,000 members in 35 chapters throughout California and Baja to promote its mission at the local level.