

# Supes OK Spring Canyon Project

The Signal News, August 5, 2004 by Brandon Lowrey

LOS ANGELES — County supervisors have OK'd a development in northern Canyon Country that would include hundreds of homes across the freeway from the site of a proposed Cemex gravel mine, despite warnings that a local utility may not be able to supply water.

"It's a little bit discouraging they keep ignoring us," Newhall County Water District President Lynne Plambeck said Wednesday. "I'm really concerned as to how we're going to provide people in that area."

Between the large amounts of water that the planned Soledad Canyon open-pit Cemex mine would use, and the exceedingly low rainfall, groundwater supplies for the proposed Spring Canyon project aren't likely to get better, Plambeck said.

In addition, environmentalists are saying such a development would ruin a wildlife corridor and cut animals off from the Santa Clara River, which itself could be damaged by the project.

The 542-home development approved by supervisors Tuesday would sit north of state Route 14 and Soledad Canyon Road, between Shadow Pines Boulevard and Agua Dulce Canyon Road. Its construction would require the removal of four oak trees, and it would accommodate two park lots, three open-space lots, and space for a sheriff's substation and a fire station.

Plambeck said local groundwater supplies may not be sufficient.

Three of the four local wells owned by Newhall County Water District don't work, and there isn't enough pipeline capacity to provide state water to the community, Plambeck said.

A pipe that is set to be built in two years may be able to provide state water to the area, but because there won't be enough groundwater, the area will be vulnerable to trouble if other water sources wane or the pipeline's construction is delayed.

"We (at NCWD) are doing everything we can think of from a conservation point of view," Plambeck said. "People in Acton are breaking into fire hydrants to truck in water. ... It's no wonder we're starting to see problems in the Santa Clarita Valley."

Plambeck said her concern is protecting water rights for current SCV residents.

"We'll have to evaluate (the project) when it comes to us," Plambeck said.

Environmentalists are expressing concern that the development would damage the eastern SCV ecosystem.

Kristeen Penrod, executive director of the South Coast Wildlife Coalition, said the proposed development would block a wildlife corridor that links the Castaic and San Gabriel ranges of the Angeles National Forest.

"The conservation community needs to focus its efforts to make sure (the developer) doesn't get (a federal) permit," Penrod said.

The wildlife corridor allows species to move between large blocks of protected area, promoting a genetic mix that keeps wildlife populations healthy.

The conservation director for the Center of Biological Diversity, a non-governmental environmental organization, said the Santa Clara River is on the brink of catastrophe.

“Right now, the whole Santa Clara River ecosystem is in a biological meltdown,” Peter Galvin said.

“Over 100,000 housing units have been permitted in the last several years (near the river). It’s one of the last living rivers in Southern California, but it will not be a living river for much longer if we do not drastically change course.”