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State Moves to Preserve Santa Clara River and San Fernando Valley Spineflower

Newhall Ranch permits clear way for historic natural resource preservation

The Department of Fish and Game (DFG) has announced the completion of a 10-year environmental review process of Newhall Ranch and the Santa Clara River.

On Dec. 3, DFG certified the Final Environmental Impact Statement/Environmental Impact Report (FEIS/EIR) for the Newhall Ranch Resource Management and Development Plan (RMDP) and Spineflower Conservation Plan (SCP). DFG also issued a Master Streambed Alteration Agreement and Incidental Take Permits related to the project.

The RMDP and SCP implement landscape-level conservation programs for the protection and preservation of riparian and upland resources, including the San Fernando Valley Spineflower, within the Newhall Ranch Specific Plan area as approved by Los Angeles County in 2003, and on other Newhall Land properties totaling nearly 14,000 acres.

As a result of these plans, approximately 70 percent, or 8,500 acres (13 square miles) of the project area are preserved as natural open space. This includes the Santa Clara River, Newhall Ranch High Country, Salt Creek Corridor, Spineflower Preserves and other areas. The FEIS/EIR and related permits issued by DFG also prescribe 169 mitigation measures affecting biological resources in the area.

“Today’s permit issuance represents the successful completion of a decade-long effort with Newhall Land and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers,” said DFG Director John McCamman. “This process and the resulting EIS/EIR should serve as a model for cooperative efforts among federal, state and local regulatory agencies, and other interested parties.”

Those public agencies and other parties included the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Los Angeles Regional Water Quality Control Board, the State Historic Preservation Office, Caltrans and the County of Los Angeles, as well as local Native American tribes and local and statewide environmental groups.

“Hundreds of people, including biologists, botanists, hydrologists and other scientists, worked together to shape this biologically innovative project, and the end result ensures

the protection of this site's unique natural resources," said Ed Pert, the DFG's South Coast Regional Manager.

Specific details of the project include the following:

Spineflower Conservation Plan

The SCP establishes seven preserves at Newhall Ranch. These 227 acres will save 76 percent of occupied Spineflower habitat, safely buffering this rare plant from adjacent development. DFG has also required an endowment of over \$6 million to fund enhancement, monitoring and other conservation activities to protect the Spineflower in perpetuity.

A unique feature of the approved SCP is funding to protect the only other known occurrence of Spineflower. Newhall Land will provide more than \$1 million in direct costs and endowment funding to the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation for management of the Spineflower population located at the former Ahmanson Ranch property, which is owned by the Santa Monica Mountains Conservancy. Combined with the Ahmanson Ranch endowment, the SCP preserves and protects in perpetuity approximately 86 percent of the state's known populations of Spineflower.

DFG Streambed Jurisdiction and Riparian Resources

The Santa Clara River and adjacent upland habitats are home to three state-listed endangered species—least Bells' vireo, southwestern willow flycatcher, and the western yellow-billed cuckoo—as well as a host of aquatic, bird and mammal species. With the issuance of these permits, DFG ensures that development is avoided on 93 percent of its riparian jurisdiction in the Santa Clara River corridor, and 86 percent of its riparian jurisdiction throughout the site is protected.

When the project is completed, the entire river corridor area within the Newhall Specific Plan area will be protected by a conservation easement. DFG has required the establishment of a funded endowment so this important natural resource will be protected in perpetuity to protect habitat for fish and wildlife resources.

Wildlife Corridors

By preserving the river corridor in perpetuity, the RMDP will protect an important wildlife movement corridor along the river that allows wildlife populations to stay healthy and diverse. In addition, preservation of Newhall Ranch's 5,700 acre High Country will preserve an important regional movement corridor that links the Santa Susana Mountains to the Los Padres National Forest.

Information regarding the Newhall Ranch project, including the Final EIS/EIR, can be found on DFG's website, www.dfg.ca.gov/regions/5/newhall/.

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