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April 20th 2017

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Sierra Club San Diego is in the process of an extensive review of "Safari Highlands Ranch" - despite finding project "facts" difficult to determine with no Draft EIR available.

What is not difficult to determine is this is a SPRAWL development demonstrating little regard for smart growth, sustainability, community character, or wildlife. Safari Highlands is being pushed by a private development company who is using a back door to leapfrog over County guidelines, by requesting the City of Escondido to annex the land. If the annexation is approved, many of the safeguards designed to protect both the environment and county citizens, could be removed.

We are seeing a 1990's era project attempting to bring urban scale density to rural suburbs and wildlands . . . with all the predictable impacts of mass grading and habitat destruction.

The Safari Highlands development is not included in San Diego's Smart Growth Plan, designed in 2009, to reduce traffic and pollution in the County. It is also NOT included in Escondido's Smart Growth Plan. Smart Growth principles focus on infill development, not expanding urban sprawl into undeveloped areas lacking infrastructure and proximity to public transportation, employment hubs, etc. Safari Highlands Ranch is the antithesis of Smart Growth;

Citizens of Escondido - and much of North County - will be subject to the traffic and air pollution impacts associated with land speculators and their lobbyists up-zoning rural lands.

The property was zoned by the County for 27 homes, prior to the developer attempting to bring in 550 homes to this remote area through an annexation process. This increase of homes, by a factor of 20, sets the stage for what could be years of blasting, and the serious health impacts of silica dust submicron particles being released in the lungs of residents and San Pasqual Union School students. Air Quality – (This is taken from the Escondido Planning Commission's previous report dated 2003.) "Unmitigable cumulative air quality impacts will result regarding the projects major contribution of the anticipated (year 2020) new airborne pollutants in the region. " AND "the basin is in a non-attainment for ozone, and this contribution will constitute a cumulatively significant and unavoidable air quality impact." This statement was made solely due to the increase in vehicle traffic. Residents of RSP would also suffer from dust and particulate matter created during construction from both blasting and rock crushing.

Given that the development area sits on solid granite, the Escondido Planning Commission stated in 2003, "...blasting in solid non-rippable granite rock will be required to install the required infrastructure. These areas will be difficult AT BEST to landscape and will involve several years of growth to achieve coverage. This...impacts wildlife movement...since species will not venture in areas of insufficient vegetative cover..."

Much of the site is identified as a “Biological Resource Core Area” which is “Land that qualifies as an integral component of a viable regional ecosystem...” SHR will violate the County’s adopted preserve and corridor design criteria, which serves as the appropriate baseline to analyze the impacts of annexing into the City. As part of the MSCP, the site provides connectivity to other major blocks of open space that facilitate habitat migration. Grading and development in this area will impede wildlife movement through the site, with serious consequences for all area wildlife. A previous attempt to develop this area was deemed to be “significant and unmitigable” by the Escondido Planning Commission in 2003. The Escondido Planning Commission also stated “The impact to biological resources within the PAMA and the disruption of connectivity to the PAMA will not be consistent with the MSCP as evidenced by correspondence from Country staff and resource agencies.”

At this point in the process, Sierra Club San Diego is in resolute opposition to the Safari Highlands Ranch development. Sierra Club San Diego awaits the Draft Environmental Impact report. We look forward to developing community engagement on this project.

George Courser
Sierra Club San Diego
Conservation Committee Chair