



Santa Clarita Organization for Planning and the Environment

SCOPE

December News 2012

Newhall Ranch Attorneys attempt to remove Judge who ruled against them on Newhall Ranch

In an October decision by Superior Court Judge Ann Jones ruled for the Center for Biological Diversity and four other plaintiffs, including SCOPE. Now Newhall's attorneys are attempting to have the Judge removed claiming she is biased ([read more here](#)). If this tactic succeeds, what Judge would be safe from attacks by powerful corporations that disagree with their decisions? Will Judges ever be able to rule for the public without facing character attacks?

The original case was filed by the environmental groups in January 2011, challenging the legitimacy of the permit to alter the Santa Clara River granted for Newhall Ranch by the California Department of Fish and Game. Environmental groups have fought for years to protect [the Santa Clara River](#), Los Angeles County's last free-flowing river, from the impacts of this massive 21,000 unit proposal in an undeveloped farming area along the river. You can read the decision and other details on the SCOPE [website](#).

Castaic Lake Water Agency proceeds with the purchase of Valencia Water Company, without public input

In a surprise move just before the Christmas holiday, the Castaic Lake Water Agency Board voted to spend \$73.8 million to purchase Valencia Water Co. from Newhall Land and Development, its parent company and owner.

Although a small number of Board members had apparently been working on the deal behind closed doors for close to a year, others had not even had time to read the documents. The surprise special meeting, held with only 24 hour notice allowed no time for the public to weigh in on this huge expenditure of water agency funds.

Why the rush? Apparently the funds had to be received by Newhall Land before the end of the year. No further explanation for the haste and lack of transparency was disclosed by the General Manager or the few knowledgeable Board members.

Among several deal points for the purchase was that Castaic Lake Water Agency would promise to provide water for Newhall Ranch and other Lennar developments, some outside the current CLWA and Valencia Water Co borders. All required Water Supply Assessments would continue to be approved by Valencia Water Company for Lennar/Newhall developments.

The financial presentation noted that several planned CLWA capital projects would have to be delayed to accommodate the expenditure. Their engineer said that the two wells closed due to perchlorate and volatile organic compound (VOC) pollution had no effect on the company's

value.

Some members of the public objected that this purchase is a re-run of CLWA's 1999 purchase of Santa Clarita Water Company. Made without the proper legal authority, the purchase ran into legal trouble and was only authorized after a legislative change that required the establishment of strict boundaries. The Valencia Water company purchase once again violates the law by not adhering to the established boundary rules.

Others have raised concerns over increased water rates and the inefficiencies of a water monopoly if the acquisition holds. They noted that Santa Clarita water customers experienced numerous rate hikes after CLWA acquired that company.

With an open process, perhaps the public would have had the opportunity to bring this water district back into the public domain with a publicly elected board.

County Approves SCV General Plan update with "Over-Riding Considerations" for Climate Change and Greenhouse Gases

Under the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) an Agency may ignore environmental problems by making a finding that the project's approval provides major benefits that "over-ride" detrimental impacts, thus allowing the project to proceed anyway. On November 27th, the County took this action in order to approve the Santa Clarita Area Plan update known as [One Valley One Vision](#) with "over-riding considerations" in several areas including biology, noise, air pollution, and perhaps most notably, climate change.

Speaking at the Board of Supervisor's meeting, SCOPE's president Lynne Plambeck told the Board "We find it appalling that this plan would be approved with over-riding considerations for greenhouse gases and climate change.... What are you doing to future generations? How can you make findings of over-riding considerations and say there is an economic benefit to have us face social collapse due to temperature and sea level rise?" The same question should be also be asked in regards to public health and air pollution.

The Plan also changes the Hillside Management Ordinance, allowing greater density in some hillside areas and makes changes to significant ecological areas in the Santa Clarita Valley.

Note: All of us can help individually to reduce our carbon footprint and slow climate change. Here's how to calculate your [household carbon footprint](#) along with suggestions for lowering it.

Last Minute Closed Door Attacks on the California Environment Quality Act Fail in the State Legislature - Citizen's Rights to Speak Up on Local Planning Issues Protected

The California Environmental Quality Act, passed in the 1970's, has ensured for decades that residents have a say in how their communities are developed. It makes sure that environmental problems are thoroughly investigated and mitigation is required to help reduce any unwanted impacts. Developers have long tried to change or get around the required reviews that can cause changes or delays to a project opposed by the community. This year, at least, these efforts failed and Citizen's rights remain intact.

But watch out in 2013! Proposals backed by developers include substantially reducing public comment and eliminating the public's right to bring suit when the law is not followed.

We hope to provide a forum on CEQA and public process early next year. If you would like to participate in this important effort to protect CEQA contact exec@scope.org. Read more about this vital law on our [blog](#).





City of Santa Clarita for its 25 Years of Service for the Environment

Santa Clarita Organization for Planning and the Environment is an all-volunteer group of mostly Santa Clarita Valley residents. We formed in 1987 to monitor local projects from a community perspective as well as promote and educate on local environmental issues, especially the

Santa Clara River.

We've accomplished some great things over the years from ensuring that schools and libraries are adequate to serve new growth in 1993 to helping a local girl scout obtain her silver badge by getting signs for the Santa Clara River last year. Two and a half decades of speaking up for our local environment, the Santa Clara River and our oak heritage is no small matter. Thank you SCOPE members for making this happen!



SCOPE wishes you a Happy New Year!



As we enter a new year, we need your help more than ever.

This year SCOPE celebrates its 25th birthday. It is unusual for a small community group to achieve such longevity. We have all of you to thank for that. We know that it is

because you care for our valley, our river and our community that you have donated your money and your time to our efforts.

Over the past 25 years, the Santa Clara River has been a central focus of our work, just as it is the central focus of our community. It provides our water supply, a beautiful natural area in the center of our City and a recreational delight to the many that cycle or walk along its banks. It functions as a wildlife corridor for species movement between the mountain ranges and remains home to many endangered plants and animals. While other areas in Los Angeles County have paved over and destroyed their rivers, the Santa Clara remains our own unique and special treasure because our community cares .

Still, over the last 25 years, pressure from housing development has forced banking and narrowing of the river and intensive development of its floodplains. Our community efforts have helped to reduce the impacts from such development. Recent decisions will bring even greater pressures from massive development proposals.

Now we need your help more than ever. At a time when our society is faced with so many challenges, here is something you can do that will benefit everyone in Southern California and especially you and your family.



We hope you will consider a generous donation.

You can download our membership/donation form [here](#).

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