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Tejon Ranch Deal Destroys Critical Habitat for California Condor, Paves Way for Largest Development Ever Proposed in California

LOS ANGELES— Tejon Ranch Corporation and several environmental organizations announced a deal today that may pave the way for massive development in the Tehachapi Mountains north of Los Angeles. The deal allows for unprecedented [destruction](#) of federally designated critical habitat for the endangered [California condor](#) to make way for thousands of luxury vacation estates. It also greenlights a behemoth city on the last wild edge of Los Angeles County.

“While there are a few aspects of today’s accord we can celebrate, including the potential acquisition of 49,000 acres for a state park, this deal contains numerous ‘poison pill’ provisions, including the development of Tejon Mountain Village in the heart of condor critical habitat and Centennial, the largest single development ever to be proposed in California,” said Peter Galvin, conservation director at the Center for Biological Diversity. “We know that the environmental groups who have negotiated the accord did so with the best of intentions, but the Center for Biological Diversity could not sign off on this highly flawed agreement. Virtually all of the areas to be acquired or managed under the conservation easement are undevelopable anyway. On paper the deal sounds good, but a close examination shows that very little is gained biologically and far too much is sacrificed.”

“While Tejon claims to have pulled development off the important northern ridges, this pullback is illusory. The fact remains that development will still occur in active, occupied condor critical habitat. The heart of condor country is designated as critical habitat for a reason: the science clearly shows that it is essential to the survival and recovery of the species,” said Adam Keats, urban wildlands program director at the Center. “It cannot and should not be sacrificed.”

The deal would allow the building of Tejon Mountain Village, a luxury vacation resort in the wild and rugged highlands of the Tehachapi mountains, designated as critical habitat by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to protect condors. The designation imposes strong protections on the land, and its habitat qualities cannot be harmed or “adversely modified.” Housing developments are completely incompatible with this designation.

The agreement also allows the leapfrog sprawl development known as Centennial. Located in rolling native grasslands and wildflower fields on the northern border of Los Angeles County off Interstate 5, this development would

add extreme pressures to the region, already gridlocked in development-related traffic and choking in pollution and congestion. The 11,600-acre city would house 70,000 or more automobile commuters, expose residents to severe wildfire threats, and destroy irreplaceable native habitat and wildlife linkages.

The Center has a different vision for Tejon Ranch: [Tejon-Tehachapi Park](#). “Tejon Ranch is a true gem of California and can never be replaced,” said Ilene Anderson, staff biologist at the Center. “Once these sprawl cities are built, they will further fragment Southern California from the rest of the state. Coupled with the hit that condor will take, this agreement deals away one of the greatest environmental opportunities that California has ever seen. And it will be lost forever.”

Tejon Ranch covers over 270,000 acres of wilderness at the crossroads of Northern and Southern California. The Mojave Desert, the southern Sierra Nevada Mountains, the great central valley and the southern forests all converge on Tejon Ranch — the only place in California where four ecoregions come together.

“This deal does a disservice to the wildlands and wildlife of Tejon, to the people of Southern California who will suffer the consequences of overdevelopment, and to all Californians, who will pay the price,” said Keats. “We can and must demand better. We live in a world too fragile to allow this kind of sacrifice. Now is the time to say enough is enough.”

Preserving Tejon Ranch as a new national or state park would protect a bounty of native plant and animal communities, cultural and historic features, and scenic vistas. See <http://www.savetejonranch.org>.