

I-105 Kathleen Dixon

Comment Letter I-105

RESPONSE TO NEWLAND SIERRA PROJECT ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT REPORT (EIR)

Respondent:  
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My husband (George Kampe) and I live on a 10-acre parcel that fronts on the private portion of North Twin Oaks Valley Road, about 1.4 miles north of the proposed Camino Mayor access road to the project site. We chose to live here because of the rural atmosphere and the diversity of fauna and flora of this area. Our opposition to the Newland Sierra Project is focused on two main topics not adequately addressed in the EIR.

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1. Traffic on North Twin Oaks Valley Road and in particular the impact of the Camino Mayor "Access" Road:

The public portion of North Twin Oaks Valley Road between the active rock quarry (Superior Ready Mix-Twin Oaks Quarry) at 28474 North Twin Oaks Valley Road and the intersection with Deer Springs Road is already overused and dangerous. During the week, there are as many as 50 double dump trucks per day traveling through that stretch of road. The road is narrow, and windy, and heavy truck traffic has made the surface bumpy and full of pot-holes. ANY additional traffic on that road will create a high likelihood of a fatal accident. We use that road daily to travel to and from San Marcos and we are already worried.

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The EIR is vague about whether the Camino Mayor Access Road will be available for use during construction and/or after the project is completed. Furthermore, the EIR states that there will be no traffic control at the intersection of Camino Mayor and North Twin Oaks Valley Road. Any car or truck entering North Twin Oaks Valley Road from Camino Mayor would be at risk for a collision with northbound traffic. In addition, if cars or trucks from Newland Sierra are allowed to go northbound from that intersection, they will ultimately come to the private portion of North Twin Oaks Valley Road with no further outlet. We continue to have trouble with unauthorized vehicles on the private portion of the road and several times the gate across the road has been vandalized allowing free access. This problem will only get worse with the use of Camino Mayor. Camino Mayor should not be used as an access road.

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With respect to the use of Camino Mayor as a fire evacuation route, this would only be feasible if it is only used in conjunction with safety personnel (fire or sheriff). As mentioned above, North Twin Oaks Valley Road is narrow and windy, and travel on the road at night or in heavy smoke would be very dangerous. Furthermore, successful evacuation northward requires opening of locked gates. Evacuation southward would require a merge with vehicles using Deer Springs Road for evacuation. I would like to know how the 30 min time frame for evacuation through Camino Mayor was calculated. From my experience with North Twin Oaks Valley Road, I believe that time is a gross underestimate.

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2. The impact of the project on the biological resources of the Twin Oaks Valley, in particular, the diversity and size of the bird populations:

If I look out my kitchen window, I can often see a variety of bird species: the red-tailed hawk circling above, the humming birds sucking the nectar from the succulent blossoms, the quail herding their babies across the driveway, the swallows swooping to their mud nest under the eaves. Out my bedroom window, I can watch the blue-grey gnatcatcher flitting back and forth from his perch in the live oak, and at night I can hear the great

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horned owls hooting to each other. One year the owls made their nest in a tall eucalyptus tree about 100 yards from our house. The air is filled with the mockingbird's varied songs as the roadrunner runs along our dirt roads. We occupy about two acres of our ten-acre property; the remainder is mostly undisturbed and varies from live oaks near the seasonal creek to sage and other native drought-tolerant plants on the hillsides. Yes, we have snakes and lizards, coyotes, bobcats, skunks, raccoons, bunnies, squirrels, gophers (who eat our vegetables), but the birds seem to be the most diverse. On our property, I have seen many of the 86 bird species found on the project site and listed in the EIR report. We need them all. I haven't seen the endangered California gnatcatcher here, but I suspect they are hiding in the thick brush close to the ground on the hillsides.

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I was surprised that the EIR report seemed to focus mainly on a few "endangered" species without addressing the importance of maintaining the species diversity found in the Twin Oaks Valley ecosystem. This year, the coyote population appears to be diminished (perhaps by the drought), and the squirrel and rabbit populations are eating everything in sight...we need the coyotes. We need to provide sufficient habitat for all the native species to thrive not just one that is on a particular list. What are impacts of the project on species diversity?

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The ultimate conclusion in the report: that because of "mitigation" strategies, there will be "no significant impact" of the project on the flora and fauna of the Valley would be laughable if it were not so sad. How can you spend 10 to 15 years blasting, grading, paving, building, etc. without having a lasting impact on the local ecosystem? It is not clear why monitoring the existing species on the project site during development is considered a mitigation. How will that information be used? If nesting birds are being impacted, will the project be shut down and by whom? How will the mitigation proposals in the EIR be enforced? In my sister's neighborhood in Los Angeles there are now only crows, presumably because they have adapted to the intense human activity of that environment...and they have chased all the smaller sweeter birds out. I don't want our valley to become another Los Angeles suburb.

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