

I-15 Wayne P. Armstrong

Comment Letter I-15

Date: 7 August 2017

To: Ashley Smith
Land Use Environmental Planner
5510 Overland Ave. Suite 110
San Diego, CA 92123

From: Wayne P. Armstrong
Professor Emeritus, Palomar College
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Subject: Newland Sierra Project

CC:

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Dear Ashley:

As a retired botany and biology professor at Palomar College for the past 40 years, I am deeply concerned about the proposed Newland Sierra Project in the southern Merriam Mountains. I have conducted numerous surveys of plants and insects (ants) in the ranges bordering Twin Oaks Valley, San Marcos. In addition to some endangered species (e.g. Rainbow Manzanita, *Arctostaphylos rainbowensis*) and some unusual insects, the Merriam Mountains have a diverse flora and fauna and are an important natural corridor for wildlife, including mountain lions and bobcats. An archaeological study was also conducted on this property and was the Master's thesis of Leslie Quintero at San Diego State University in the 1980s.

http://www.calflora.org/cgi-bin/species_query.cgi?where-taxon=Arctostaphylos+rainbowensis

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My main concern relates to how this enormous proposed housing development will affect residents of northern San Diego County, primarily in the San Marcos area.

Water Shortages: As a resident of Twin Oaks Valley, we have been under severe water restrictions and exorbitant water rates. Water is a precious resource and a limiting factor in human population growth. Global warming and climate change may be cyclical, but I don't see any foreseeable change in the coming decades or longer. We just can't afford to have additional enormous housing developments without addressing our critical water needs.

Fire Protection: Like previous attempts to develop this area, the fire danger is extreme. Even with two entrance roads, fires can sweep through the dense chaparral of the Merriam Mountains posing a serious threat to residents and fire fighters. I worked with a fire ecologist for many years and I know how treacherous fires can be when fanned by Santa Ana winds. In my opinion, no housing should be allowed on upland sites in fire areas and all homes should be built and spaced to withstand brush fires, posing an enormous cost increase to potential home buyers.

Traffic: Deer Springs Road is already congested during rush hours when commuters try to bypass the Escondido interchange and go directly to San Marcos via Deer Springs and Twin Oaks Valley Roads. At least twice a day, Deer Springs has gridlock traffic from I-15 to Twin Oaks Valley Road. An additional 2,135 homes will make the traffic in rural Twin Oaks Valley deplorable and unavoidable. The nearby country roads in this lovely part of San Diego County just cannot support this increase in traffic congestion.

In conclusion, I urge you to vote against the Newland Sierra Project, it is inconsistent with the County's General Plan. It will have a dramatic negative impact on traffic, water, wildlife and fire danger, not to mention condemnation of property to widen roads, noise from years of construction, grading, blasting and rock crushing as well as extensive dust from all of these operations. This proposed development is a planned community the size of small city and it just doesn't fit in this rural area in the southern Merriam Mountains of San Diego County.

Sincerely,

Wayne P. Armstrong
Professor Emeritus, Palomar College

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