

SANTA MONICA MOUNTAINS CONSERVANCY

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*Via Facsimile*

July 8, 1997

Mr. George Carvalho
City Manager
City of Santa Clarita
23920 Valencia Boulevard
Santa Clarita, CA 91355

Newhall Ranch Open Space Dedication

Dear George:

In a recent staff summary prepared for the City Council on the status of the Newhall Ranch project, the question of public open space dedication was listed as resolved by the promise of developer to donate an open space easement to Los Angeles County. In our view, none of the fundamental issues were resolved by Newhall's cosmetic gesture.

A major selling point of Newhall Ranch has been the public benefits, not the least of which is 4,000 acres of open space and the trails and recreational amenities that not only this development, but the entire Santa Clarita Valley will demand in the early years of the 21st Century. But as Newhall is now proposing it, the legal entitlement will accrue to the developer upon approval of the Development Agreement, but the public benefits, i.e., when real people can actually enjoy its trails, scenic vistas, and open spaces, will wait until *the next generation*. That's right. Somewhere ten to fifteen years hence will the first Santa Clarita Valley resident be able to legally set foot on the Newhall Ranch open space exercising his or her right on *quasi-public* land. Meanwhile the Development Agreement, which vests Newhall's development rights will be approved *this year*.

Equally important as timing, is the provision of appropriate open space management. Between land acquired by the Santa Monica Mountains Conservancy and its joint powers partners, and County dedicated land within the Santa Clarita Woodlands, an equal amount of open space has already been set aside as will be eventually dedicated by Newhall. This existing open space is serving the needs of nature *and* people. Mentryville will soon open as an historical setting for interpretation of turn-of-the-century oil pioneers, trails are already open throughout the 3,000 acre Chevron acquisition.

These existing trails will stop short at Newhall's boundary. A private organization, operating

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from Sacramento—without public hearings or public accountability—will actually control the land and decide who and under what circumstances the public will actually get to benefit from the pretty pictures in Newhall's brochures.

No, George, the open space issue is far from settled. Newhall may have assured that they would not be able to break-faith and bulldoze the open space (by donating a conservation easement to Los Angeles County), but they have done *nothing* to advance actual use and public enjoyment of the 4,000 acre open space that is touted as a prime reason for approving the largest single development in Los Angeles County history.

The private Center for Natural Lands Management, headquartered out of Sacramento, that Newhall has slated to actually *own and control* the open space may be qualified to do the biological research called for in the EIR, but it takes real-world experience, legal authority, seasoned park rangers, and dedicated volunteers to actually make an open space usable by the public. That is the issue at stake and it is not resolved by Newhall's most recent moves.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Joe Edmiston", written in black ink. The signature is fluid and somewhat stylized, with a large loop at the end.

JOSEPH T. EDMISTON, AICP
Executive Director