

Rancho Guejito is every San Diegan's legacy

North County Times - Letters to the Editor

March 2, 1008

By Phil Pryde

The North County Times is to be commended for its recent editorial (Feb. 19, "[North County's sleeping giant](#)") supporting the preservation of Rancho Guejito. It is truly a jewel in the best possible setting, rural San Diego County.

More importantly, it's the last jewel of its type that we possess. All of the other coastal-slope land grants from San Diego's Mexican era have either undergone urban development or are now a military facility (Camp Pendleton). Rancho Guejito alone still recalls and preserves the image and history of our county as it was 200 years ago.

The NCT correctly notes that development of the rancho would entail serious transportation problems, such as poor access corridors, very long commutes, and wasted financial and petroleum resources.

In addition to the points you present, another major development concern is water. Where do the prospective developers believe they can secure an adequate water supply, given that the San Diego County Water Authority is unlikely to extend its service area to include Rancho Guejito? Most current climate change models suggest a more arid San Diego County in the future, not a good trend if your development has to depend on groundwater.

Conservation groups such as the Audubon Society also point out that the Rancho Guejito watershed has long been recognized as one of the prime wintering and breeding territories for hawks and other birds of prey in all of Southern California. Deer, mountain lions, and a wide array of other mammals and reptiles also call it home. It represents a critical connecting corridor between the Hellhole Canyon Open Space Preserve to the west and the San Dieguito River Park and Cleveland National Forest to the east.

Nor should the cultural values of the rancho be overlooked. It contains significant archaeological sites, some of which are considered sacred to the Luiseno and Kumeyaay peoples.

Preserving Rancho Guejito should be a high priority of everyone in the county. Our governmental institutions need to take leadership roles here. Perhaps most importantly, the county of San Diego, in its current general plan revision process, needs to designate this rural area as very low density and resist every effort by the developer to get general plan or zoning amendments. County Supervisor Bill Horn, who represents this area, is to be commended for his support for preserving this historic area.

But cities are also involved. The cities of Escondido and San Diego need to say no to the developers' schemes to annex the rancho so as to get urban services extended to it. The Local Agency Formation Commission likewise needs to turn down any annexation requests. And the

County Water Authority must reaffirm its wise policy of not extending its service area to provide increasingly scarce imported water to pie-in-the-sky leapfrog developments.

Rancho Guejito is a remarkably beautiful and significant piece of our regional heritage that cries out to be left undeveloped. Most county residents appear to agree. It's an area we can't afford not to preserve.

Isn't it ironic that every major open space preserve, no matter how belittled at the time it was acquired, a hundred years later is almost always viewed as brilliant, far-sighted planning?

Let's make sure our grandchildren have the opportunity to view the splendid Rancho Guejito in this manner.

Philip R. Pryde is the past president of the San Diego Audubon Society.