

Tejon Plan 'win-win'

A proposal to create a 100,000-acre nature preserve on the sprawling Tejon Ranch holds great promise for ranch owners and all Californians.

The 270,000-acre ranch is considered a "national treasure" by those of us who live in its shadows and drive over its ridges as we climb the Grapevine and drop into Southern California.

We forget the ranch is a private company, with its owners entitled to use their land as they see fit – within the restraints of environmental rules.

Primarily devoted to cattle ranching and mineral extraction, the ranch is on the verge of being developed. Approximately 5 percent of the land has been identified for residential and commercial projects.

Without sensitivity to the public's interest in Tejon Ranch and the ranch's environmental value, landowners likely could have identified many more acres for development.

But instead, Tejon Ranch plans have been limited and landowners are taking steps to preserve some of the most diverse portions – diverse in terms of habitat, biology, climate, topography and geography.

Representatives of the Tejon Ranch and the Trust for Public Land will announce today their plans to carve 100,000 acres from the ranch and create a preserve. Land included in the preserve was identified after a two-year scientific study and in consultation with an independent science advisory panel and environmental advisers.

Reed Holderman, executive director of the Trust for Public Land California, says the preserve is equal to the size of Yosemite Valley and twice that of Santa Catalina Island.

Tejon and TPL will pursue the purchase of the land – in fee or through conservation easement – by a public agency or non-profit organization.

"The proposed 100,000-acre nature preserve on Tejon Ranch offers an extraordinary opportunity for protection of California's wildlife heritage," said Natural Resources Defense Council senior attorney Joel Reynolds in Tejon Ranch news release.

Paul Henson of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service called the preserve's design "an excellent model for science-based conservation planning."

The Pacific Crest Trail, a 2,650-mile-long congressionally designated scenic route from the Mexican border to Canada, gains significantly in the plan. The trail will be rerouted through the ranch.

"This reroute of PCT will allow public access and a much improved user experience in this wonderful region of California," said Liz Bergeron, executive director of the Pacific Crest Trail Association.

Cynics will be quick to point out that Tejon Ranch's proposed preserve buys a lot of good will in the environmental community. And this good will is needed to clear the way for its residential and commercial projects.

No doubt this is true. But Californians have watched many of the state's other sprawling ranches covered by homes and businesses without any preservation efforts.

Done correctly, Tejon Ranch's preservation plans can result in a win-win – a big win for many generations of Californians. And a big win for Tejon Ranch – helping gain the acceptance of its development plans.

