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Battle Over Fate of San Dieguito River Valley Heats Up

By ANTHONY PERRY, *Times Staff Writer*

Landowners and environmentalists clashed Thursday over development of the lower San Dieguito River Valley as both sides hurled the dirtiest words in the land-use vocabulary: Mission Valley.

Homeowners from nearby communities, joined by representatives of the Del Mar City Council, Sierra Club and Friends of the San Dieguito River Valley, pleaded with the San Diego Planning Commission not to let the valley become like the one to the south: overdeveloped, clogged with traffic and hostage to killer floods.

But landowners responded that they bitterly resent the specter of Mission Valley being used as a scare tactic. They also complained about being shut out of the planning process.

In the end, the commission delayed

making any recommendation, preferring instead to wait for more work by the Planning Department, a task force assembled by the San Diego Assn. of Governments, and a committee formed by Councilwoman Abbe Wolfsheimer.

Specifically, the discussion concerned the 800 acres between Interstate 5 and El Camino Real, bounded on the south by North City West and the north by Via de la Valle. Nearly half the area is vacant and the rest is bean fields and horse ranches.

Alice Goodkind, chairwoman of the 330-member Friends of the San Dieguito River Valley, asked commissioners to keep the area as open space to prevent "the piecemeal development that led to the Mission Valley we have today."

Joanna Lewis, representing 17 home-

owners in Rancho Santa Fe, Solana Beach, Del Mar and San Diego, said that the San Dieguito River Valley represents the last hope for open space in rapidly developing North County.

"I ask on behalf of the children and people who live in North County or visit there or come up to enjoy a balloon ride that you not allow this beautiful valley to be destroyed any further," she said. "Please don't allow another Mission Valley."

Most of the attention has focused on the San Dieguito Trust, which owns 350 acres in the lower valley. The trust is composed of about 20 individuals and groups.

At a public meeting two weeks ago, Roy Collins, project manager for the trust, alarmed homeowners and environmental-

ists by suggesting the trust property might be a good spot for a scientific research and business park, with traffic handled by extending San Dieguito Road to a new interchange with Interstate 5.

Both ideas are anathema to the Friends of the San Dieguito River Valley, which wants the valley retained as a park and wants Via de la Valle to remain the sole east-west road for the valley.

La Jolla architect Judith Munk, one of the trust's officers, said that a scientific research and business park mentioned by Collins is only one possible use for the land and that no formal proposal or zoning request is in the offing.

Rather, she said, the landowners are eager to see the area become a park, as long

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as they are paid for their land rather than having it rendered undevelopable through zoning.

"It has never been suggested by the landowners that we want our 340-plus acres to become Mission Valley," she told the commission. "But we don't like the idea of inverse condemnation that pits landowners vs. environmentalists."

Munk reminded planning commissioners of the considerable environmental credentials of trust officer Roger Revelle, director emeritus of Scripps Institution of Oceanography and considered one of the founding fathers of UC San Diego.

The commission called for more meetings and more discussion between landowners, planners and environmentalists.

Political control of the lower valley is shared by the city and county. The area from Interstate 5 to El Camino Real and beyond to Fairbanks Country Club is within the city limits. From the country club eastward it is unincorporated, and thus under jurisdiction of the county Board of Supervisors.

Many Agencies Involved

Sandag has sought to take the lead in studying whether the San Dieguito River Valley, which runs from Del Mar to Sutherland Reservoir in Ramona, 43 miles away, can be preserved as a park.

But both the city and county continue to work independently of Sandag in considering development projects; the council's Transportation and Land Use Committee, for example, is set to discuss the

San Dieguito River Valley on Monday.

Development in the city's portion of the lower valley is prohibited until 1995, under the Managed Growth Initiative adopted by voters in 1985.

The city Planning Department has recommended that, once development is allowed, up to 105 dwelling units be allowed along the northern edge of the valley along Via de la Valle and that environmentally sensitive areas south of the river be purchased as open space.

Environmentalists found this acceptable but not preferable. They would prefer that the entire area become open space, bean fields or horse ranches.

Only three of seven planning commissioners would express even

a tentative preference among alternatives presented by planning staffers, including two alternatives for more dwelling units and possible commercial use.

Newly appointed commissioners Karl ZoBell and Lynn Benn said they prefer the alternative with maximum open space, if the city can afford it. Commissioner Ralph Pesqueira said he thought the compromise offered by planning staffers made more sense.

ZoBell said that, while he favors more discussion among interested parties, he foresees the same clash whenever the future of the San Dieguito River Valley is discussed.

"I think it would be illusory to suggest that future workshops will provide unanimity of opinion," he said.