

Keep Baldy
www.keepbaldywild.com

WILD

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

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Court Rules Against Verizon:

Mt. Baldy Residents Halt Hazardous Cell Tower in David vs. Goliath Fight

Mt. Baldy, California – December 19, 2016 – In a 34-page ruling with a level of detail unusual for a case at this stage, a San Bernardino County judge ruled in favor of a group of residents from the mountain community of Mt. Baldy, California, effectively halting a Verizon Wireless planned installation of a cell phone tower in a sensitive mountain habitat. Mt. Baldy Village straddles the county line between Los Angeles County and San Bernardino County in the Angeles National Forest.

The ruling forces Verizon to complete an Environmental Impact Report (EIR) under the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA), refuting company and county claims that the development would not harm the local ecosystem, tribal cultural resources, or have other impacts. Against all odds, this coalition of residents and supporters challenged the cozy relationship between the San Bernardino Planning Commission, County Supervisors, and telecom giant Verizon, scoring a major victory in a longer term fight against the corporate influence of local democracy.

The coalition known as “Keep Baldy Wild” came together over four years ago when plans for the tower were first announced. Community residents and supporters submitted letters, petitions, and scientific evidence to the San Bernardino Planning Commission documenting potential harmful effects and asking the Commission to deny Verizon’s application for a permit to build on the property. The location is unique in the area due to a rare confluence of three natural water sources adjacent to the site. After their request at two hearings of the County Planning Commission and an appeal to the full San Bernardino County Board of Supervisors was denied, Keep Baldy Wild filed a lawsuit against the county for failing to require an EIR from Verizon.

While the ruling does not permanently stop the planned development, it orders the county to prepare a thorough study of potential impacts on a wide array of environmental factors, including migrating and seasonal species. Going forward, the coalition is concerned that Verizon might contract with a firm known to have corporate ties with developers and planners in San Bernardino County. Keep Baldy Wild plans to remain vigilant as the EIR is completed. The coalition has collected records documenting corporate-government alliances between known consultants, County Planners and Supervisors, and Verizon. The coalition is confident that if the report turns out to be free of the conflicts of interest that seem to be prevalent in San Bernardino County, the EIR would recommend relocation of any potential tower to a much safer location.

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Reactions from Stakeholders:

The group's attorney John McClendon stated, "In 27 years of litigating environmental cases, I have never seen a trial court judge provide such a meticulously detailed ruling. Judge Ochoa's ruling reads like an Appellate Court decision and explains why an appeal of it would be futile."

Dr. Gary Stickel, the Tribal Archaeologist for the Gabrieleno Band of Mission Indians / Kizh Nation said that the ruling "acknowledged that Verizon did not conduct a proper environmental impact study in which they were to consider alternate sites to the one favored in Mt. Baldy. I am pleased that the judge mentioned the Kizh Tribe and its full support to keep their sacred mountain of *Joat* (Mt. Baldy) from being desecrated by an unnecessary facility there."

Gerald Braden, a wildlife ecologist who reviewed the Verizon biology report completed by FirstCarbon Solutions / Michael Brandman Associates, stated "The court recognized that San Bernardino County Supervisors and Verizon were trying to subvert the environmental process. In essence, the San Bernardino County Supervisors were putting the influence of Verizon ahead of the interests and well-being of the people they are elected to serve."

Keep Baldy Wild will continue to monitor the progress of the EIR and any plans to build cell phone towers in Mt. Baldy, and will hold county officials accountable.

ABOUT "KEEP BALDY WILD"

Keep Baldy Wild is a coalition of Mt. Baldy residents, environmentalists, tribal leaders, students, community organizations and advocates who are committed to projects and education that support the unique ecosystem of the San Antonio Canyon watershed for current and future generations.

A partial list of endorsements includes:

Mark Hartwig (SB County Fire Chief), Dr. Martin Blank, Cindy Sage, Sage Associates/Co-editor, BioInitiative Report, Peace With Justice of Pomona Valley, Fair Trade Claremont, Julia Bogany Native American Consultant, Latino Roundtable, Dolores Huerta Foundation, Claremont Healing House, Painted Pony Native Arts, Natural Earth, Grow Fontana, Upward (Uniting with Action, Respect & Dignity), Pax Christi, Carrie Rosema Photography, Ashirwad (The Blessings) Restaurant, Mass Electric Co., Pomona College Organic Farm, Eco-Center of the Claremont Colleges, Pitzer College Latino Student Union, Environmentalists of Color (ECo), Men's Blue and White, Claremont Colleges Divestment Campaign, Slow Food Claremont Colleges, Rainbow People Collaborative, Pitzer College Art Collective, CMC Students Environmental Association (SPEAR), Pomona Environmental Action (PEAR).

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