

## **Environmental groups and Alameda County agree on development project**

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PLEASANTON -- On a recent morning, Ralph Kanz scoured the banks of the Arroyo Mocho looking for an elusive plant that some call a weed and blame for the delay of a multimillion development project.

After 20 minutes of searching, Kanz found the faded green of a San Joaquin spearscale sprouting from cracked clay-like soil just yards south of the Staples Ranch development.

The conservation director for the Alameda Creek Alliance, Kanz has spent the past two years defending the plant against Alameda County and its plans to build a 124-acre project here on the eastern edge of the city. Located south of Interstate 580 and west of El Charro Road, the project will include an auto mall, retirement community, shopping center and two parks.

Kanz's legal battles with the county and the delays have upset a group of seniors who hope to move into the retirement community. The group rallied recently at city hall with signs reading "Me vs. the weed" and have met with city officials over the delay. The seniors, who number over 1,000, have been waiting for the retirement community since 2006 and have dealt with nine different delays.

The spearscale, considered a rare and endangered plant by the California Native Plant Society, is found from Glenn County to Tulare County in the Central Valley, but seems concentrated in Bay Area counties, according to the Wildlife Heritage Foundation.

But, "We are losing habitat that supports many species," Kanz said. "This has been more about habitat than an individual species."

The habitat that hosts the San Joaquin spearscale is a mix of alkaline soils (salt based) and vernal pools that house not only the spearscale but the threatened California tiger salamander, California red-legged frog and pond turtle.

On Thursday, the Alameda Creek Alliance and the Center for Biological Diversity and the county agreed to a deal that will have the county pay up to \$925,000 for habitat restoration and mitigation at the site.

"There are going to be impacts to the spearscale," said Kanz about the development. "But we also want to see the habitat values of the Arroyo improved and enhanced as much as possible."

The Arroyo Mocho is a series of waterways that eventually joins with Alameda Creek and flows through Fremont into San Francisco Bay.

County officials believe the agreement is the last hurdle in its quest to develop the land, which could net the county at least \$58 million.

The county plans to annex the land into Pleasanton. Pleasanton's city council is expected to hear and possibly adopt the environmental reports related to the project on Tuesday.

"The stars do seemed to be aligned," said Patrick Cashman, director of the Alameda County Surplus Property Authority.

Problems for the project arose in February 2009 when the council included the extension of Stoneridge Drive into the Staples Ranch development. The decision resulted in a lawsuit from the two environmental groups, claiming the proper studies to mitigate the extension of the road over the Arroyo Mocho were not done.

The decision sparked a legal battle that appeared to end earlier this year with a settlement and the city agreeing to conduct an environmental impact report for the road extension. The project hit another hurdle in June when the council was set to hear the report, but that action was delayed because the public was not notified of the meeting in a way that was agreed to in the settlement.

"This settles it," Kanz said. "We are done and on to the next thing."