

Alameda County, environmental groups sue to stop expansion of Carnegie off-road park



Dirt bike riders at the Carnegie State Vehicular Recreation Area on Corral Hollow Road east of Livermore.

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LIVERMORE — Alameda County and environmental groups are suing to stop the expansion of the Carnegie off-road recreational park east of Livermore.

Brian Washington, of the Alameda County counsel's office, confirmed Monday the Board of Supervisors authorized the lawsuit last week.

In October, the state's Off-Highway Motor Vehicle Park Commission agreed to expand the 1,551-acre Carnegie off-road park into 3,100 acres of land the state bought in 1998. The decision capped a dispute growing for more than a decade, and angered environmental groups such as Friends of Tesla Park, the Center for Biological Diversity and Alameda Creek Alliance, who jointly filed a lawsuit petition last week separate from the county's.



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Environmentalists said it's wrong to build trails for motorized vehicles into an area that has habitat for rare species, including the California red-legged frog and San Joaquin kit foxes, sacred cultural sites for Native Americans, scenic hillsides and remnants of a coal mining area. Expansion opponents want to turn the area into a preserve that they've tentatively dubbed Tesla Park.

"It would be a travesty to allow Tesla's incredible wildlands and cultural and historical resources to be destroyed by off-highway vehicles," said Nancy Rodrigue of Friends of Tesla Park.

Washington said the county's lawsuit focused on the inadequacies of the environmental impact documents, and that the report did not consider an adequate range of alternatives.

Similarly, Friends of Tesla Park's lawsuit argues that environmental documents did not properly disclose and analyze negative environmental impacts, including harm to wildlife, hillside erosion and damage to cultural resources.

The city of Livermore, the Sierra Club and Save Mount Diablo opposed the project as well. Livermore City Attorney Jason Alcala said Monday the city does not have plans to file its own lawsuit.

East Bay Regional Parks District, which has the Tesla area in its master plan, has not yet made a decision to join the lawsuit, said spokeswoman Carolyn Jones.

Ayn Wieskamp, a board member who represents the Livermore area, said she was happy to hear that Alameda County filed a lawsuit. She said the location for the expansion was not appropriate.

“We have no objections to them doing their off-road vehicle endeavors ... they just need to choose the right place,” Wieskamp said.

The decision by the state commission pleased off-road vehicle advocates, who said the expansion would benefit the growing number of users of dirt bikes, ATV’s and other motorized vehicles meant for trails.

Gus Meyner, a longtime, off-road, dirt-bike rider from San Jose, said in October larger buffer zones would protect wildlife habitat.

“You can protect the environment and have areas for riding,” said Meyner. “Riders want to protect the environment. We ride to enjoy the outdoors. We are not hooligans, as the opposition to this project has tried to portray us.”

Meyner and others said the expansion will improve opportunities to “get kids out from behind their computers to enjoy the outdoors” and steer dirt-bike riders into legal places instead of unauthorized ones.