


# The San Diego Union

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Editorials/Opinion

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 A Copley Newspaper

## A death sentence

Today the Board of Supervisors will have one last opportunity to safeguard from development a major wildlife habitat and recreational resource. Before the board is the update of the Central Mountain Plan, a 327-square-mile area stretching from Alpine to Mount Laguna, which includes the southern portion of the Cleveland National Forest.

Heeding developers' pleas, the supervisors last October tentatively endorsed 20-acre lot sizes for residential development in the area. In so doing, they ignored recommendations from environmental groups that private land holdings within the forest be zoned for 80-acre lots. They also rejected the county Planning Commission's proposal that individual lot sizes be no larger than 40 acres.

In the 3-2 vote, supervisors Susan Golding and John MacDonald wisely dissented, arguing that 20-acre zoning wasn't sufficient to protect the fragile wildlife corridors that riddle the area. However, they didn't mount much of a campaign to support their position.

While inadequate, the stricter zoning was, at least, a small step in the right direction. However, after one step forward, the board has since taken several steps backward and has eroded its commitment to preserving the forest — even at the 20-acre lot level.

Since October, the board has expanded the Descanso township lines, thereby making adjacent ranch land eligible for development in four-acre to eight-acre parcels. It has removed the scenic designation from lands along I-8 and at the gateway to the park near the junction of I-8 and Highway 79.

The scenic designation would have kept construction 1,000 feet back from the highway. The supervisors also amended the plan to invite

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the establishment of RV parks in the area. And they removed the forest/park designator from county land-use maps, which could endanger efforts to secure federal funds for the purchase and preservation of some of the privately owned parcels in the forest.

In addition, the supervisors have exempted close to 5,000 acres from the stricter zoning because of projects already in the pipeline on parcels that were adjacent to subdivided land. On Dec. 11, they approved a 91-acre, 717-home subdivision near I-8. This was a precedent-setting action because it cleared the way for the first subdivision to be built in the forest. The board took this action despite strong objections from the Planning Commission and the Planning and Environmental Review Board.

These decisions, which have torn the guts out of the board's 20-acre commitment, have been made with little fanfare or public scrutiny. Today, however, the general plan and all these subsequent amendments come before the supervisors for final approval.

It is time for the supervisors to prove they are not beholden to developer interests and are committed to protect the fragile forest lands. They should scrap this plan and approve instead the 80-acre-lot conservation alternative, which has wide public support.

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