THE BLACKLIST: Tejon Ranch wages war on science and public comment

By Patric Hedlund, TME

The phone rang the day after Kathleen Weinstein of the Pine Mountain community returned from a magical trip to Spain and France with her husband, Mel. They had reserved tickets for an event on July 1 at the Tejon Ranch Conservancy. It involved a challenging hike—a good opportunity to work off some of those delicious Parisian pastries.

Then it came to her. Her friend told her that the Tejon Ranch Company would not allow her on the ranch property because “she said negative things about the ranch.”

The call was from an acquaintance who works for the Conservancy. As a couple, the Weinsteins had been discussing donating money to the nonprofit Tejon Ranch Conservancy.

But what she heard in the phone call last Thursday was a shock. Her friend told her that the Tejon Ranch Company would not allow her on the ranch property because “she said negative things about the ranch.”

Then it came to her.

She had participated in the comment phase of the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) process for the Tejon Ranch Centennial project. CEQA mandates that the public be invited to submit comments, questions and concerns about proposed land developments, so all impacts of the proposed project are examined thoroughly before permits for building are granted.

**Public Health Concerns**

Weinstein had joined in an analysis of the Centennial Environmental Impact Report (EIR) with the TriCounty Watchdogs, a citizens’ group that asked questions about issues such as valley fever risks to residents and construction workers, and about adequate long-term water supplies for Centennial’s proposed 19,333 new homes (a possible 50,000 to 70,000 new people), surrounded by industrial parks and commercial developments between Gorman and Neenach.

Asking these questions is what appears to have gotten Kathleen Weinstein, a retired nurse with concerns about public health, banned from the Tejon Ranch Conservancy.

Lucinda McDade, Executive Director of Rancho Santa Ana Botanic Garden (RSABG) was contacted Saturday to ask if she’d heard of a Tejon Ranch blacklist. She replied, “I was indirectly informed that the Botanic Garden was on the ‘banned’ list by my colleague, Travis Columbus.”

**The Eriogonum Society**

“Travis was planning to take a field trip to Tejon Ranch with a group of people who are serious enthusiasts of buckwheats (there are many native California species and a very cool one on the Ranch—genus Eriogonum). [He] was informed—not very many days before the trip—that The Eriogonum Society is banned due to its affiliation with California Native Plant Society.”

**The Blacklist Gag Order**

The Mountain Enterprise has now acquired records that appear to reveal a blacklist, part of a systematic attempt to gag citizens and send a message to scientists to keep them from participating in the CEQA comment process regarding Centennial. The Nixon-style “enemies list” is coming from Tejon Ranch Company management, and is being conveyed through orders given to Tejon Ranch Conservancy scientists.

McDade wrote to the Conservancy: “I’d like to protest Rancho Santa Ana Botanic Garden’s inclusion on this list. RSABG is most emphatically not an advocacy group. We have taken no position on the [Centennial] project nor will we take one. We research, document, learn and teach; we do not advocate,” the executive director wrote.

Her own words make it very clear that there is an intentional chilling effect in Tejon Ranch’s message to the very scientists who are most knowledgeable about Tejon Ranch’s natural resources: “Don’t speak up. Don’t share scientific information with Los Angeles County. Stay silent...or else....”

**California Native Plant Society**

“This McCarthy-like witchhunt [tactic] of blacklisting individuals started in June, as far as I know,” said Nick Jensen, Ph.D., Conservation Analyst for CNPS. Jensen says he loves Tejon Ranch and has been helping with scientific research projects for the Conservancy for several years.

The Tejon Ranch side of the Western Antelope Valley habitat still supports wild antelope, grazing on rare grasses and that unique Tehachapi buckwheat (Eriogonum callistum).

Jensen is also a member of the California Native Plant Society (CNPS). He has volunteered to lead public tours of the Conservancy as a docent. A partial title of his doctoral thesis is “A floristic study of Tejon Ranch....”

The CNPS is a group of professional botanists and...
THE BLACKLIST:
Tejon Ranch wages war on science and public comment

Continued from page 1
California native plant enthusiasts. The group joined in to analyze the impact of the Centennial project on the heritage grasslands of the Western Antelope Valley. Their partner in developing that analysis is the Center for Biological Diversity (CBD).

CBD was one of the environmental groups approached over 11 years ago by Tejon Ranch’s former management to negotiate the secret 2008 “Big Green” truce. CBD decided it was not wise to keep so much from the public, so it refused to sign the second round of confidentiality agreements and withdrew as a party to the negotiations.

In the years since, the Center for Biological Diversity has filed lawsuits against Tejon Ranch Company, challenging the state’s transfer of public assets to private gain with the Kern Water Bank, for instance.

The 2008 accord between the Tejon Ranch Company and the Big Greens—Sierra Club, Audubon California, the Planning and Conservation League, the Natural Resources Defense Council, and the Endangered Habitats League—gave birth to the Tejon Ranch Conservancy. It was applauded by former Governor Schwarzenegger and former Tejon Ranch CEO Bob Stine as a breakthrough win-win partnership between developers and environmentalists.

A full 240,000 acres of Tejon Ranch land was to be under Conservancy management for study and preservation. The public was told the Conservancy would be an independent, science-driven research and preservation group.

That was the public relations spin that brought Tejon Ranch’s stockholders into position to receive a passthrough of $15.8 million in public taxpayer funds from California’s Wildlife Conservation Board in 2010. The WCB distributes state funds for wildlife habitat acquisition. It gave the money to the Conservancy, which passed it to Tejon Ranch Company, to preserve 62,000 acres for wildlife corridors between habitat islands managed by the Conservancy.

In addition to money, the developers got the promise that their Big Green partners would stand mute through the CEQA call for comments for Tejon Mountain Village, the Grapevine development and Centennial.

Those groups are carefully complying with their end of the deal. But under Tejon Ranch’s current CEO, Greg Bielli, the corporation now appears to have little patience with the fact that other concerned citizens and scientific groups are not obligated to comply with the same “no comment” pact as the Big Greens.

Public access was linked to the taxpayers’ $15.8 million. Yet Conservancy scientists and public access personnel are now ordered to bar people from access if they submit a negative comment on Centennial.

Conservancy President and CEO Bob Reid said he follows Tejon Ranch employees’ orders about access to Conservancy lands and events. On June 21, 2018 at 9:22 a.m. Antone “Tony”
Continued from page 3

Mattias—Natural Resources and Stewardship Liaison for Tejon Ranch Company—sent an email to Tim Bulone, on the Conservancy support staff. It was about an access request for visitors coming to the Conservancy for dinner and a tour. The email string tells the tale.

Greetings: You Are Banned

Subject: Lucy Clark / Clyde Golden. The message: “Tim, I would suggest that you look up the current CNPS [California Native Plant Society]—Kern Chapter website for Members and Contacts. Both folks are listed.”

Mike Campeau, Vice President of Tejon Ranch Operations, was copied in on the note. He is also a member of the Tejon Ranch Conservancy Board of Directors.

At 9:49 a.m. he wrote: “Tim, You will need to inform Lucy Clark and Clyde Golden that due to their association with CNPS they will not be able to attend the dinner or the tour.”

At 9:53 a.m. Tim Bulone cc’d this note to Bob Reid.

At 10:20 a.m. Bob Reid wrote: “Dear Lucy and Clyde, Unfortunately the Tejon Ranch Company has denied an access permit (their email below) for your attendance at the upcoming Ranch Round Up and Tour, due to your affiliation with CNPS.

“Our apologies for any inconvenience. Please feel free to call me if you would like to discuss.” He signed it, Bob Reid, President and CEO, Tejon Ranch Conservancy.

Access Permits

In an interview this week, Reid explained, “Tejon Ranch Company is the landowner and controls the access permit process. The Conservancy has to get an access permit for anyone who comes on the property. If access is denied by Tejon Ranch Company, it is out of the Conservancy’s hands. This is part of the overall ranch-wide agreement, which provides for requests for access permits.”

Seeking Comment

We contacted Tony Mattias for a comment about banning people from Conservancy events because of being associated with a CEQA comment on Centennial.

“You need to talk to Barry Zoeller, of Tejon Ranch Public Relations,” he said, then hung up. Barry Zoeller’s voice-mail said he is on vacation this week. The receptionist said no one is covering the post in his absence.

We left a voice message and sent emails for Mike Campeau, Zoeller, Mattias and Tejon Ranch CEO Greg Bielli. We also called Bielli’s office and left a message on his administrative assistant’s voicemail—all during the early part of the business day on Tuesday.

Parameters

In the interview, Reid explained that the Tejon Ranch Conservancy board has 12 members—four appointed by Tejon Ranch Company, four appointed by the five original “Big Green” Resource groups and four independent board members, selected by the board at large—and to my knowledge, the current independent board members do not have any connection to Tejon Ranch,” the Conservancy CEO said.

Is Reid uncomfortable with the notion of banning scientists and members of the public based on participation in the Centennial CEQA process?

“I have no comment,” Reid replied. “That is between Tejon Ranch Company and the individual they are questioning. We are never involved in the CEQA or permitting. That is at arm’s length.... It is part of our arrangement we have in place with the ranch. We have no opinion on the issue.”

Does he feel that the scientific credibility of the Conservancy, plus access to research grants, may be compromised if the only scientists that are allowed to come on the land are those willing to report only what Tejon Ranch wants to hear?

Bob Reid seemed comfortable saying again that he can’t comment. He repeated, “We have an access process with the landowner. We don’t have any authority to question that. I really can’t say anything more than that. These are parameters we work within.”

Banning Talk of Research

Nick Jensen sees it this way: “TRC is trying to take these punitive actions against anybody who is tangentially associated with anybody who is opposing the development. “It is private land, but Tejon Ranch did enter into a conservation agreement that has a provision to ensure public access to the land that is conserved. To ban people based on their speaking publicly about the results of their research...well, if it is not illegal, it is against the spirit of the agreement and it is a slap in the face to the public” [which paid the $15.8 million for access and wildlife easements].

Don’t Share With County

Because the California Native Plant Society shared botanical research information with the Center for Biological Diversity, and co-signed a letter submitted to Los Angeles County during the CEQA Environmental Impact Report comment period, it appears that members of the CNPS and even people who have worked with them as part of other, separate, organizations (such as the Rancho Santa Ana Botanic Garden) are now being “disinvited” from Conservation events and banned from Tejon Ranch land—even those areas that the taxpayers of California paid $15.8 million to Tejon Ranch Company to establish, Jensen summarized.

Tejon Ranch Company Is Not Local Anymore

Dan Gluesenkamp, Executive Director for the California Native Plant Society, was just sitting down at a restaurant with his wife and children Monday when we reached him.

We asked about the spreading reports of a blacklist created by Tejon Ranch executives.

We also asked about the practice of ordering Conservancy staff, including its CEO, to drop a bomb on Conservancy donors and scientific colleagues by telling them they are being banned from Conservancy activities if they express any contrary opinion about the wisdom of Tejon Ranch’s Centennial Project.

As his family ordered lunch, Gluesenkamp didn’t have time to mince words.

“Tejon Ranch Corporation is not local anymore,” he said. “The California Native Plant Society has had some concerns about Tejon Ranch Company projects and has tried to work with them to improve the projects.

“We could do that with the old management. They shared our values. We could work things out with them.

“But the people who are in charge now are pretty ruthless. They are not Californians. They do not share our values. They do not want to work things through.

“Blacklist? Congratulations. You are on to something there.”

Tejon Ranch Company did not return our calls and emails before we went to press. When they do, we will follow up with their comments.
Is First Amendment Obsolete in Tejon Ranch’s Piece of California? There should be consequences for undermining the CEQA process

Tejon Ranch’s logo is often accompanied by the claim that the company is “Preserving California’s Legacy.” Apparently, Tejon’s version of California’s legacy does not include the First Amendment to the United States Constitution.

As Fourth of July flags were flying this week and the nation was celebrating the birthday of its Declaration of Independence from the oppression of Britain’s King George III, The Mountain Enterprise was astonished to acquire a list with names of scientists who have been banned by order of Tejon’s corporate executives from engaging in scientific research on lands under management of the allegedly independent Tejon Ranch Conservancy.

The legal comment process required by the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) appears to be under attack by Tejon Ranch Company. It is seeking to suppress public participation in the CEQA comment protocol.

In addition, the spirit of the 2008 accord that created an independent Tejon Ranch Conservancy is being violated by heavy-handed bully tactics employed by the executives and the board of Tejon Ranch Company.

Conservancy scientists who had been promised that they are part of an independent, nonprofit organization with a mission to focus on research, learning and conservation are instead being enlisted as henchmen by the developer to suppress freedom of scientific research and freedom of association. They are being converted into enforcers of the Tejon Ranch blacklist.

Some say “the suits are afraid that scientists are going to find another endangered species when they are out there” [on ranch lands]. It appears now that the most vulnerable endangered species on Tejon Ranch these days are old-fashioned American traditions of free speech and due process.

The Tejon Ranch Company is acting to suppress free exchange of information among scientists and to impede public policymakers from receiving all the facts before adopting Centennial’s Final Environmental Impact Report.

TRC’s manipulation of the CEQA process is in effect lying to the Los Angeles County Regional Planning Commissioners.

By sending out a threat to all young scientists that they must not speak up or their future careers will be damaged by vengeful corporate overlords, Tejon Ranch Company is seeking to suppress public comments. It is hoping to deny full-spectrum information from reaching the commissioners charged with making informed public policy choices. The damage being done to the credibility of the Tejon Ranch Conservancy in the process is stunning.

A theory now circulating among those watching Tejon Ranch Company is that they plan to line up their entitlement portfolio for Grapevine’s 12,000 homes; for the 3,450 Tejon Mountain Village homes (plus resort hotels and commercial areas); and for Centennial’s 19,333 homes (with commercial and industrial zones) to sell the entire property — all the acreage with all the value-added entitlements — to deep-pocket foreign investors from Bahrain, Saudi Arabia or China.

The underlying theory of our democracy celebrated this 4th of July is that free speech leads to free and open debate and that in open exchange of information the best ideas will rise to the top.

Let’s hope that LA’s planning commissioners still believe in these ideals of our democracy, and that they will not be manipulated by Tejon Ranch Company’s cynical tactics.

Let us hope that the L.A. County Regional Planning Commissioners still believe in these ideals of our democracy, and that they will not be manipulated by Tejon Ranch Company’s cynical tactics.
Dear Editor:
July 2, 2018

I love Tejon Ranch. It is a unique part of California, a very special place.

I also love America. I especially love my right to free speech.

In responding to the Centennial Environmental Impact Report, I offended the Tejon Ranch Company. I went on public record against the proposed Centennial plan. I expressed my opinion, based on my own experience of living here and research into TRC’s plans. The Centennial Project is a bad idea for our communities, in my opinion.

But here is the kicker. I was told over the telephone I was not allowed to go on a Tejon Ranch Conservancy event on Sunday, July 1.

I was told by the Conservancy that TRC would not permit me on ranch property because I made negative comments about the ranch’s development plans. I wasn’t told who at TRC made that decision, or what my negative comment was.

While I was disappointed about missing an opportunity to be on the ranch, I was chilled by the implications that I was somehow “blacklisted” because I spoke out against something in an EIR comment.

Is this where we are going in America? Does my solicited opinion threaten the Tejon Ranch Company to the point of retaliation? This is what concerns me most.

Kathleen Weinstein
Pine Mountain community project. Our goal is to clean up illegal dump sites from 190th Street West to 300th Street West.

We will start each morning at 8 a.m. at the Neenach Market. Please bring work gloves, sunscreen, a hat and drinking water. We will tackle illegal dumping along the transitional habitat property at 190th Street West, with illegally dumped construction debris. Several people asked us to clean the creek bed near 245th Street West, all the way up to Avenue A. Volunteers are needed!

Thanks to everyone for their effort to make Neenach a wonderful place to live.

Jeff Zimmerman
Neenach

---

**Recipe for Getting Blacklisted**

Kathleen and Mel Weinstein (along with their furry family member, Reggie) were named the Grand Marshals of the 2018 Lilac Festival Parade for their extraordinary devotion to the Mountain Community. Mel was named Humanitarian of the Year in 2017 by Jizo Peace Center.

---

**Wonderful**

July 2, 2018

Dear Editor:

Volunteers will be cleaning up Neenach on July 10, 11, 12 and 13 in concert with the Oso (Neenach) Town Council, the Los Angeles County Illegal Dumping Task Force and Rural Protection Services (a nonprofit public benefit corporation).

Volunteers are needed to help load bulky items into a roll-off container, to be located at 22847 West Avenue D (Highway 138) at the Neenach Market and Café. Volunteers will also help clean up creek beds, sensitive ecological areas, roadways and the Ripley Woodland State Park area.

We welcome anyone who can assist us with this community effort to make Neenach a wonderful place to live.

Jeff Zimmerman
Neenach