



For Immediate Release, January 6, 2022 (*updated January 7, 2022*)

Contact: Peter Broderick, Center for Biological Diversity, (503) 283-5474 x 421,
pbroderick@biologicaldiversity.org
Liv O’Keeffe, California Native Plant Society, (916) 447-2677 x 202,
lokeeffe@cnpns.org

California Court Orders Lake County to Set Aside Approval of Mega-Resort

Supervisors Failed to Consider Community Wildfire Evacuation for Guenoc Valley Project

LAKE COUNTY, *Calif.*— A judge has [ruled](#) that Lake County must set aside its approval of an ultra-luxury development in Northern California’s Guenoc Valley because it failed to consider the effect on community safety and wildfire evacuation from bringing thousands of new residents and visitors to the highly fire-prone area.

The ruling, issued Tuesday in response to a Center for Biological Diversity lawsuit, prohibits the massive resort from moving forward. The undeveloped 16,000-acre project site contains oak woodlands, wildlife corridors and habitat for sensitive wildlife species, including golden eagles, [foothill yellow-legged frogs](#) and [western pond turtles](#).

“The court recognized that Lake County failed in one of its most important jobs, which was to consider how dangerous development in the path of fire can increase risks to surrounding communities,” said Peter Broderick, a Center attorney. “Given the fire threats facing California, I hope decisionmakers and developers come to see how absolutely crucial it is to consider evacuation challenges when building projects this risky. No developer should be allowed to make it harder for people to escape deadly fires.”

In 2020 the board of supervisors [approved](#) the sprawling resort and residential development on the property, which has a long history of wildfires and has burned repeatedly. A month after the county approved the project, the deadly LNU Lightning Complex fires tore through the property, causing evacuations and damage in the area. Many fires are ignited by human sources, and low-density development increases fire risk.

The Center [sued](#) the county, declaring that the environmental review for the project violated the California Environmental Quality Act. In 2021 the state attorney general joined the lawsuit against the county, citing wildfire and other environmental concerns.

Tuesday's ruling from Lake County Superior Court confirmed that the county's findings on wildfire evacuation routes were not supported by substantial evidence and its environmental review did not comply with CEQA. The decision noted that a significant number of wildfire-related deaths in California occur during attempts to evacuate.

"The recent history of wildfires has taught us that we need to be prepared for the next disaster," Broderick said. "Part of that preparation is making sound land-use decisions and only approving developments that adequately address, not worsen, wildfire risks. Building in California's fire-prone wildlands is dangerous for people and terrible for our imperiled wildlife."

"The judge's ruling emphasizes that farflung developments like Guenoc are problematic for public safety in much the same way they are environmentally destructive," said Nick Jensen, conservation program director for the California Native Plant Society, which joined the Center in suing the county. "It is time to rethink projects like this in light of California's ambitious efforts to conserve land and combat climate change."

The Center for Biological Diversity is a national, nonprofit conservation organization with more than 1.7 million members and online activists dedicated to the protection of endangered species and wild places.

The California Native Plant Society is a nonprofit organization working to save and celebrate California's native plants and places via plant science, advocacy, education, and horticulture.