



March 21, 2011

Senator Joe Simitian, Chair
Environmental Quality Committee
State Capitol, Room 2205
Sacramento, CA 95814

RE: SB 833 (Vargas) Water Quality Protection in San Diego County – SUPPORT

Dear Chairman Simitian and Committee Members:

On behalf of NRDC (Natural Resources Defense Council), which has 1.3 million members and activists, 250,000 of whom are Californians, we write to support SB 833 by Senator Vargas.

This bill would protect critical drinking water sources and sacred Native American sites in northern San Diego County by making it illegal to operate a landfill within 1,000 feet of those sensitive resources. The bill would apply only to new landfills, and not existing, permitted landfills or any expansion of an existing, permitted landfill.

We support this bill because we have grave concerns about the proposed 300-acre Gregory Canyon Landfill, which would be built on the banks of the San Luis Rey River in northern San Diego County. This is the wrong place for a landfill, as a catastrophic breach of the landfill liner would release toxic pollutants into the river and the aquifers that lie beneath it. These critical sources of drinking water serve tens of thousands of residents and businesses throughout the County and must be protected at all costs. The landfill also would devastate a pristine, undeveloped canyon and destroy acres of critical habitat for several endangered species.

In addition, the landfill would have significant adverse impacts on sacred Native American lands, including Gregory Mountain (Chokla), one of the most important sacred sites of the Luiseño people. As the Pala Band of Mission Indians has said, building this landfill on one of the sides of Chokla would be like dumping millions of tons of garbage next to a cathedral.

State legislation is needed because the landfill's proponents have taken away local decision-makers' ability to protect these important resources. In 1990, the County of San Diego rejected Gregory Canyon as a landfill site for numerous reasons, including significant and irreversible impacts on Native American and biological resources. In response, the landfill's proponents circumvented the County's siting

process by putting a deceptive local initiative on the ballot, which passed because voters in the populous southern part of the County (including San Diego) were convinced the North County needed its own garbage dump.

Since then, however, the once-pressing need for a new landfill in the County has all but disappeared. Waste diversion and recycling rates in the County are at an all-time high, and the County's existing landfills are expanding and using their available space more efficiently. Moreover, the provincial notion that every region needs to have its own garbage dump is outdated, as waste management practices today focus, as they should, on finding the least environmentally damaging yet reasonably cost-effective disposal methods and locations available.

Despite these welcome developments, the permitting process for the Gregory Canyon Landfill continues unabated. SB 833 would resolve this regional problem by preventing the construction and operation of the landfill, which would ensure the protection of drinking water and sacred sites in northern San Diego County.

Please vote "AYE" on SB 833 when it is heard in your committee. Thank you for considering our views.

Sincerely,


Damon Nagami
Staff Attorney


Victoria Rome
California Advocacy Deputy Director

cc: Senator Juan Vargas
Assemblymember Ben Hueso