

# Spirit of the Sage Council

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## Native American Group Seeks Lawsuit To Protect Big Tujunga Wash

Spirit of the Sage Council, a non-profit conservation group based in Pasadena, CA., has announced today that they will pursue a legal challenge to the Los Angeles City Council's approval of a massive land development project in the Big Tujunga Wash.

The Red Tail Golf Course development is one in a series of golf course proposals that have been opposed by the Sage Council and indigenous Shoshone Gabrielino Nation, along with numerous other conservation groups, including the Sierra Club and National Audubon Society.

Conservation groups are not the only ones opposed to the destruction of the Big Tujunga Wash. The California Department of Fish & Game and the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service have also made strong recommendations that the area should be protected for endangered plants and wildlife. The California Department of Fish & Game has previously joined the Sage Council and other groups in appealing the City Planning Commission's recommendation to the City Council for reconsideration.

"The Sage Council will do everything in our power to protect the Big Tujunga Wash and the sacredness of all life there," stated Leeona Klippstein, the Sage Council's conservation programs director. "We believed that there are numerous issues and substantial new circumstances that must be addressed by the City and Developer. The City must not rely on the Army Corps of Engineers to dictate the changes to the project design."

The Sage Council claims that the changes in the federal jurisdictional waters triggers the need for the City to require that the developer prepare a new Environmental Impact Report.

"There was a lot of talk at today's hearing about federal waters, but the City completely ignored the fact that the water rights are controlled and owned by the City (a.k.a Pueblo de los Angeles) and the people," continued Klippstein. "The Public Trust Doctrine requires the City to protect the Big Tujunga Wash as not only a public trust water resource, but to also protect the cultural and biological resources. The public trust must be upheld and not overturned by land pirates waving the flag of corporate dominance."

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The Spirit of the Sage Council currently has three other lawsuits in the courts against decisions made by City Council's and County Board of Supervisors in approving controversial land developments. The City of Los Angeles and Roman Catholic Church have been challenged by the Sage Council over the construction of a Cathedral on a known Native American burial site.

Likewise the City of Calimesa has also been sued for recently approving the 6,700-acre "Oak Valley" golf course and residential development. The "Oak Valley" property was acquired by the Hunt brothers, known silver baron family of Texas, for a song of a price from the Resolution Trust Corporation that brokered the sales of lands acquired by the federal government in failed Savings and Loan Banks.

A small but strong Southland conservation group, the Sage Council is not intimidated by corporate land holders. The third lawsuit in San Bernardino County seeks to stop the expansion of the Mitsubishi Mining Corporations limestone quarry in the National Forest overlooking Lucerne Valley. Five endangered plant species and the desert bighorn sheep are threatened by the mining expansion.

Last year the Sage Council was the lead plaintiff in a legal challenge to the Clinton Administration's new Endangered Species Act policies. The case in the D.C. federal district court successfully forced the government to allow public comment on the policy change known as "No Surprises."

Chief Ya'anna - Vera Rocha, of the Shoshone Gabrielino Nation, is the Sage Council's co-founder and is being represented by Lisa Oshiro, a staff attorney with the non-profit California Indian Legal Services, of Escondido, CA.. "These are the last intact sacred lands of our people. Tujung(n)a is a ancestral village site that must be protected for the wild ones, ancient ones, and all those that follow us into the future. We are alive, the Earth is alive, and we will continue to fight for life." stated Chief Ya'anna.

"The Sage Council follows our heart and the beauty way of life. We fight out of love for this beautiful and sacred place on the planet. I believe that is all that anyone can do - give a voice and hand to the wild ones. At the local and national level, our volunteer organization has led the way in protecting endangered wildlife and sacred lands." stated Klippstein.