

From: [Jack Thompson](#)
To: [Jerryl Soriano](#)
Subject: RE: Rancho Royale Specific Plan at Mission Creek
Date: Monday, February 20, 2017 3:30:12 PM

City Council

City of Desert Hot Springs

65-950 Pierson Blvd.

Desert Hot Springs, CA 92240

February 10, 2017

RE: The Wildlands Conservancy's Opposition to Extension of Time for Tentative Tract Maps 35009 and 35448 in the Rancho Royale Specific Plan

Honorable Mayor Matas and City Council Members,

The Wildlands Conservancy (TWC) urges you to confirm the Planning Commission's vote to deny the extension of time for Tentative Tract Maps 35009 and 35448 from the Rancho Royale Specific Plan. We believe the circumstances under which this development was originally considered have changed significantly with the establishment of Sand to Snow National Monument and that permitting a high density, 2,200-unit housing development on 481-acres adjacent to the newly established Sand to Snow National Monument would be a tragic mistake, one that would blight and endanger precious landscape the City of Desert Hot Springs recently fought so hard to protect.

To orient those who may be unfamiliar with the location of the Tentative Tract Maps 35009 and 35448, they are on the west side of Route 62, at the intersection of Route 62 and Mission Creek Road. This location serves as one of the premier access points into Sand to Snow National Monument for visitors and residents of Desert Hot Springs. It is from this access point that one sees the stunning juxtaposition of features that gives Sand to Snow National Monument its name—rolling desert hills leading to snow covered peaks, with Mount San Gorgonio (the tallest peak in Southern California) standing above all others. Access to Sand to Snow National Monument from Mission Creek Road is made convenient and free to the public through TWC's Mission Creek Preserve, which lies just a few miles away. Mission Creek Preserve is open to the public year round and provides free camping, free access to dog friendly trails and has served as a free outdoor classroom for TWC led school field trips that have served thousands of children from Desert Hot Springs.

Founded in 1995, TWC is a California based nonprofit dedicated to preserving the beauty and biodiversity of the earth and to providing programs so that children may know the wonder and joy of nature. The Wildlands Conservancy currently provides more free outdoor education opportunities to school children than any other nonprofit in California, and operates the largest nonprofit preserve system on the west coast. In addition to Mission Creek, our local preserve system includes Oak Glen, Whitewater and Pioneertown Mountains Preserves. Like Mission Creek, these preserves are open to the public, year round, free of charge.

The City of Desert Hot Springs provided a clear and unifying voice when it advocated for the establishment of Sand to Snow National Monument. The City's call to action was joined by a crescendo of public voices that finally moved the President's hand in February of 2016. When Sand to Snow was established, it validated what many of us have known for some years—that our desert's beauty, cultural and natural history are worthy of national recognition and protection. We believe it speaks volumes about the significance of Mission Creek that when Sand to Snow National Monument was designated, with dozens of stunning locations to choose from in Sand to Snow, former Interior Secretary Sally Jewell chose Mission Creek as the location to hike and celebrate with our community members.

Mission Creek was also chosen by elected officials that included Senator Diane Feinstein, and former Representative Mary Bono as the location to celebrate the 10-year anniversary of the landmark California Desert Protection Act of 1994, an Act that protected millions of acres of land for public benefit including world famous Death Valley and Joshua Tree National Parks.

These are proud moments for the City of Desert Hot Springs and we urge you to think hard on the responsibility we all share in protecting a place as precious as Mission Creek and Sand to Snow National Monument. Not only does Sand to Snow protect the heroic beauty that surrounds Desert Hot Springs as well as the Mission Creek watershed, which is a critical water source for the city, it is set to become a key component in the City's tourist economy. What will the decision to put a high-density housing development at the feet of our beautiful monument say about us, and how we viewed the land and the future? Our experience in land conservation shows us that high-density housing developments that border rural landscapes bring an alarming increase in illegal shooting, dumping, off highway vehicle trespassing, as well as an increase in wildfire. We ask that you please give careful consideration to the very idea of incentivizing high-density development where the city borders the lands that the city relies on for access to wilderness for its citizens and tourists.

The Wildlands Conservancy is deeply grateful for the City of Desert Hot Springs' critical support in establishing the Sand to Snow National Monument and we believe that the recommendation by the City's Planning Commission to not extend the expiration of the Tentative Tract Maps 35009 and 35448 is the correct one. We believe all extensions for these tract maps should comply with CEQA and that a Subsequent Environmental Impact Report is necessary to evaluate this project.

Thank you very much for your time, please feel free to contact me with any questions you might have.

Respectfully,

Jack Thompson

Desert Regional Director

The Wildlands Conservancy

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Jack Thompson

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