

# Federal Agencies Briefed on Bolsa Chica Agreement

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WASHINGTON—Officials of two federal agencies that will judge a plan for limited development of the Bolsa Chica wetlands said Tuesday that they were impressed by the complex environmental compromise worked out by public officials, preservationists and the developer.

But the officials declined to specifically endorse the proposal, noting that the formal permit-application process had not yet begun.

The compromise, which capped a 15-year controversy over development of the unincorporated area, calls for restoration and protection of 1,100 acres of wetlands while allowing construction of thousands of homes near the Huntington Beach coast.

Officials of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency offered their assessments of the plan after separate meetings with a delegation representing the Bolsa Chica Planning Coalition, the group that worked out the compromise.

Led by Orange County Supervisor Harriett M. Wieder, the delegation spent two days in Washington seeking the support of members of Congress and federal officials.

"It is indeed an unusual circumstance when you have an environmental group, a developer, and state and local agencies all supporting the project," said David G.

Davis, director of the EPA's wetlands protection office.

"I think a lot of significance has to be attached to that," Davis said. "[but] that doesn't mean that that—in and of itself—assures them of a permit."

Said John Hall, chief of regulatory branch operations for the Corps of Engineers: "It does sound like they have reached some kind of consensus. . . . That is unusual. . . . But again, we try to be a neutral weigher and balancer, and reach some kind of independent decision."

Despite the official caution, Wieder termed the trip a success.

"We walked out of there on Cloud Nine," she said of the delegation's visit to Davis' office. "He really felt that what we had done and how we had done it and what we're offering is on the cutting edge."

Virginia S. Albrecht, a Washington attorney representing the developer, Signal Landmark Corp., said: "We were heartened by our talks with both agencies, and we found them to be interested in the process that the coalition has been through. . . . They recognize that the coalition is proposing something that is pretty special."

Under 1972 amendments to the Clean Water Act, the Corps of Engineers must issue a permit for the wetlands filling that would be required for the Bolsa Chica project to proceed. Federal law gives the

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EPA a veto over permits issued by the Corps of Engineers.

Wieder said the coalition plans to submit a formal permit application to the corps by the end of the year. Approval by various local and state agencies, including the California Coastal Commission, also is required.

When Signal Landmark purchased the 1,635-acre parcel in 1970, the corporation planned to develop an extensive waterfront community by dredging a navigable channel through the marsh, building a 1,400-slip marina, and erecting hotels, restaurants and homes.

The unincorporated property along Pacific Coast Highway, south of Warner Avenue, is surrounded by the city of Huntington Beach.

Environmentalists who viewed the plan as a massive assault on one of the few remaining saltwater marshes in Southern California formed an organization called Amigos de Bolsa Chica to fight the plan. Late last year, Wieder persuaded the competing interests and public officials to form the coalition to seek a compromise. The plan was unveiled last May.

Among other things, the proposal calls for construction of an undetermined number of homes on 412 acres of the Signal Landmark property, of which about 80 acres lie in the marshland. Albrecht, the Signal Landmark attorney, said her client has agreed to the minimum level of development necessary to permit the project to proceed.

Accompanying Wieder on the lobbying visit were officials representing Signal Landmark, Amigos de Bolsa Chica, the Huntington Beach City Council and the California State Lands Commission.

