

Once Again, ELF Strikes a Match in San Diego

Rod Coronado

November 2003

The Earth Liberation Front (ELF) has struck against urban sprawl in San Diego County again. On September 19, fires destroyed four luxury homes that were under construction and damaged two others. Authorities believe it was an attempt to burn a row of 10 homes being built in the Carmel Valley and Torrey Highlands area. A banner left at one of the sites read: "Development = Destruction. Stop Raping Nature. The ELF's are mad." No one was injured in the fires, which caused several million dollars in damages.

The developments targeted by the ELF are encroaching on sensitive open space, which provides a wildlife corridor between Carmel Mountain Preserve, Torrey Pines State Park, Los Penasquitos Lagoon and Los Penasquitos Canyon Preserve. These areas are an integrated wildlife system, representing southern California habitats threatened by development.

In 2003, Pardee Homes, one of the developers targeted by the ELF was named by *Builder Magazine* as the "Large Production Homebuilder of the Year" and "America's Best." Pardee owns more than 1,665 acres of land in the Carmel Valley and has received approval for the development of 3,589 residences during the next 15 years.

The other development targeted by the ELF was owned by SheaHomes. It operates divisions in San Diego, Orange County, northern California, Arizona, Colorado and North Carolina, making SheaHomes the largest privately owned building firm in the nation and the 10th largest of all home builders.

The first fire destroyed three SheaHomes units under construction, and a separate fire damaged another house across the street but was quickly put out. Across a ravine, a third fire was reported at the Pardee Homes development. The fires were just a few miles north of the area where the ELF was responsible for a \$50-million arson in August (see *EF!J* September-October 2003).

The latest fires came just before the San Diego Board of County Supervisors met in September to question the county's "smart growth principles." The county threatens to open 20,000 acres of pristine land to the construction of one and two-acre estates as part of its urban development plan for the next 20 years.

More than 500 plant species, 150 types of birds and a large number of reptiles, amphibians and mammals, including mountain lions, live in Penasquitos Canyon—which is the only protected coastal canyon in San Diego County. Penasquitos Canyon boasts a waterfall cascading through volcanic rock, California live oaks that are hundreds of years old and willow-covered stream banks populated by Pacific tree frogs, great blue heron, egrets and mallard ducks.

Though there has been no formal statement issued by the ELF about the most recent actions in San Diego, a communique was released following an anti-development action this Summer. It summed up the belief of many environmentalists: "For too long, we the people have allowed our magnificent forests to be leveled and shipped off, our water to be poisoned. Now greed-driven developers are trying to marginalize the last green spaces and habitat of our unknown Edens." It is clear from both past statements and

the recent actions of the ELF that urban sprawl is a central issue to many underground activists struggling to protect the Earth.

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Earth First! Journal, vol. 24, no. 1 (edited by Rod, Samantha, Sprig, Tinder, and
Turtle). Republished by the Environment & Society Portal.

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