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Casino road project gets court go-ahead

Environmental study for interchange is adequate, judge says.

By Cathy Locke - Bee Staff Writer

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Sacramento Superior Court Judge Lloyd Connelly has upheld the state Department of Transportation's environmental review of an interchange project to serve a planned Indian casino off Highway 50 in El Dorado County.

The Shingle Springs Band of Miwok Indians issued a news release Tuesday announcing the legal victory over the citizens group Voices for Rural Living, which challenged the adequacy of the original environmental review and supplemental environmental report.

Connelly last week also threw out a new lawsuit filed by Voices for Rural Living in September, and he rejected the group's request for an injunction to block the project during appeals.

The ruling allows Caltrans and the tribe to prepare for construction of the \$45 million interchange project to provide access to the rancheria, tribal Chairman Nick Fonseca said in the news release.

Stephan Volker, attorney for Voices for Rural Living, said he plans to appeal the decisions.

"With all due respect, we think the court made an error of law," Volker said.

He noted that a state appellate court previously upheld the group's contentions that Caltrans' initial environmental impact report for the interchange violated the California Environmental Quality Act.

The group said the report failed to disclose the project's effect on air quality and failed to consider the alternative of a smaller casino.

The tribe in September reached an agreement with the El Dorado County Board of Supervisors that allows construction of the casino in exchange for at least \$190 million in payments to the county over 20 years.

Fonseca in a written statement said, "We hope that (Voices for Rural Living) will see the light and get on board and support the project like the Board of Supervisors and the residents of El Dorado County."

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