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News Release

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San Pasqual Band and the California AG Each Sue City of Poway for Not Following CEQA After Multiple Ancestors and Tribal Cultural Artifacts Were Found at Hidden Valley Ranch Site

[San Diego, CA — April 21, 2026] The **San Pasqual Band of Mission Indians** today announced it has [filed a lawsuit](#) against the City of Poway in the County of San Diego Central Division Court. The suit contends that the City violated the [California Environmental Quality Act](#) (CEQA) by failing to respond appropriately to significant discoveries of ancestral burial sites, grave goods, and significant tribal cultural resources during the construction of the “Hidden Valley Ranch” luxury housing project. California Attorney General Rob Bonta also [filed suit](#) Monday against the City of Poway for CEQA violations related to the discoveries at the Hidden Valley site.

On the very first day developer Shea Homes began clearing and site preparation for the Hidden Valley Ranch project in October 2025, Tribal monitors found the bone of an ancestor protruding from the earth, and other important cultural resources on the site.

Then in March 2026, two more ancestors were discovered in separate places on the property. In addition to the ancestors, thousands of tribal cultural resources (referred to in the lawsuit filing as “grave goods” because of their association with burials) and other culturally significant items were also found throughout the site, confirming it was a village. The San Pasqual Band of Mission Indians now believes the site is a tribal funerary complex and sacred place.

“The San Pasqual Band of Mission Indians, a federally recognized and sovereign Indian nation, seeks to protect San Pasqual Valley and its People - ‘Emuu Kallkall - Pamuu - Ewiiy Hellyaa - Paawii - which incorporates the City of Poway in San Diego County, California,

part of our ancestral and reservation lands," said **Steve Cope**, Chairman of the San Pasqual Band of Mission Indians. "San Pasqual Valley is a cultural heritage resource comprised of Tribal ceremonial and funerary sites, and a living, interdependent ecosystem that connects us through our ancestors' deep time and deep space practices of movement, pause, and return. These suits do not seek to stop the project, but to ensure full consideration and redress of its adverse impacts, including on our heritage, ancestors, funerary items, environmental integrity, and culturally and religiously important resources throughout the area. As we pursue these aims, San Pasqual is committed to fulfilling our sacred duties to our ancestors and to finding a fair and reasonable resolution for all parties."

"The circumstances here are extraordinary," said the Tribe's attorney **Michele Fahley**. "Ancestral human remains have been found on the property three times, and important tribal cultural resources have also been unearthed. Despite this, the City of Poway did not reopen CEQA or consult with the San Pasqual Band regarding these discoveries. In 2003, the City certified an EIR for this project, but left the ground undisturbed for over two decades. Then when Shea Homes acquired the land and started preparing for construction, area Tribes started raising concerns."

In 2003, long before the ancestors and grave goods were found on the Project site, an environmental impact report (EIR) had been prepared for the previous landowner. But under CEQA, such significant changes in circumstances and/or new information can trigger additional procedural requirements, including that lead agencies revise prior environmental analysis, delay or withhold discretionary approvals, and adopt feasible and enforceable mitigation measures to lessen a project's harmful impacts on environmental and/or tribal cultural resources.

After the unanticipated and highly consequential discoveries at the Hidden Valley Ranch site came to light starting in 2025, the City of Poway did not engage with the San Pasqual Band or other Kumeyaay tribes, nor did it consider revising the 2003 EIR. The San Pasqual Band's lawsuit argues that:

The City violated CEQA by failing to account for the significant discoveries of ancestral human remains, grave goods, and a historical resource in its subsequent discretionary approvals, including its unlawful deferral of mitigation and its approval of the tree removal permit. The Tribe therefore seeks a writ of mandate and declaratory and injunctive relief requiring the City to assess the Project's environmental impacts under CEQA—specifically, the impacts on the Tribe's ancestral human remains, grave goods, a historical resource, and significant tribal cultural resources located on the Project site, many of which the Tribe knows remain undisturbed. The Tribe further seeks an order requiring the City to comply with CEQA, to meaningfully consult with the Tribe regarding the Project, and to develop appropriate, enforceable, and culturally sensitive mitigation measures, including long-term preservation of the ancestors and their associated burial belongings.

The San Pasqual Band is one of 12 sovereign Native American Tribes recognized in the Southern California region, and which comprise the Kumeyaay Nation, an Indigenous people who have called San Diego County home since time immemorial. The Nation's ancestral lands range from Baja in Mexico into San Diego and Imperial Counties, from the Pacific Ocean to the mountains and desert and include the Hidden Valley Ranch site. The Kumeyaay Nation protects its ancestors in California through a consortium body of which San Pasqual is a member.

NOTE TO EDITORS AND PRODUCERS: Steve Cope, attorney Michele Fahley, and other sources knowledgeable about the lawsuit are available for comment and interviews. For further information, please contact Piliialoha Estall, piliialoha@eyaayahuunpr.com, 619-643-1772