

## Arana Gulch project moves forward

by Ramona Turner

SANTA CRUZ — A San Jose appellate court has given the city's Arana Gulch Master Plan the green light.

Opponents of the plan, which would build paved trails on the 67.7-acre property the city has owned for 15 years, sued to stop the project. The plaintiffs, the California Native Plant Society and the Friends of Arana Gulch, contended that the city violated laws requiring it to adequately consider alternatives to the proposed project. They also claimed the plan would harm the federally endangered Santa Cruz tarplant.

On Thursday, the three-judge panel unanimously ruled against the suit.

"We also find substantial evidence in the administrative record to support the city's actions," wrote Justice Richard McAdams in the court opinion.

Under the plan, the multi-use trails and one bridge -- which would link to Broadway and Frederick Street as part of the Broadway-Brommer trail project -- would provide access to the greenbelt near the Santa Cruz harbor for bicyclists, pedestrians and those with mobility issues. The project calls for a tarplant management plan. Currently, a hodgepodge of dirt trails crisscrosses the property, further endangering the plant's future, according to the city.

Approved in 2006, the plan quickly wound up in court. When the city won the first lawsuit presented in the local courts in 2007, the groups appealed -- and the city won, again.

The plaintiffs could not be reached to comment.

Project supporters are pleased that two courts have ruled in the city's favor.

"City staff are relieved that this ruling has been made," said Chris Schneiter, city Public Works civil engineer.

The next step is to gain approval from the California Coastal Commission, which already has been presented with background information about the proposal, he said. The city also will pursue funding sources, as well as begin restoring the tarplant, he added.

The city has \$1.3 million in federal grants in the bank to pay for the trail component and needs \$2.4 million more to wrap it all up, Schneiter said. That money would come from future federal transportation bills, as well as accessibility grants, he said.

Meanwhile, the city will budget about \$20,000 a year to restore the tarplant, he added.

The city spent "roughly \$150,000 on environmental attorney services and staff time" fighting this case, Schneiter said.

"This money could have been better spent restoring the tarplant," he said.