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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Contact: Garry Brown, Director, Orange County Coastkeeper 714-850-1965

LEGAL SETTLEMENT TO BENEFIT AREA WATERWAYS

(Agreement funds wetland restoration, establishes an education program on the hazards of stormwater runoff from construction sites.)

A lawsuit filed last year against a Big Bear developer has been settled, with provisions being put in place to protect area wetlands and educate the public on the hazards of water runoff from construction sites.

Inland Empire Waterkeeper sued Corman-Leigh Communities in February, 2006, alleging that the developer had violated the Federal Clean Water Act and its state permit to discharge storm water from its construction site at the Maple Ridge Property in Big Bear, next to Baldwin Lake.

After being notified by a local resident, Inland Empire Waterkeeper went to the Maple Ridge site and found very serious and significant runoff and erosion problems. A substantial amount of sediment and mud had inundated some of the lots and many of the streets below the project site and had actually discharged into Baldwin Lake – all violations of the Statewide Construction Permit and Federal Clean Water Act.

Corman-Leigh made attempts to correct the problems and made progress, but the next rain showed the site continued to be out of compliance.

Subsequent investigations conducted by Inland Empire Waterkeeper led to several other suits against Corman-Leigh developments throughout the Inland Empire, with similar violations found in Lake Elsinore, Menifee and Hemet.

The settlement agreement will bring direct benefits to Baldwin Lake and Lake Elsinore, both of which have been impacted by runoff from Corman-Leigh projects, said Garry Brown, executive director of Orange County Coastkeeper, the parent organization of Inland Empire Waterkeeper.

“Additionally,” he said, “funds will be invested into an educational program focusing on ‘low-impact development,’ which is the term for a list of design features for new development that will result in more irrigation and storm water being infiltrated into the ground on site, and less volume of urban runoff discharging from development projects into the community.”

The settlement, reached earlier this year, requires Corman-Leigh to implement a Storm Water Pollution Prevention Plan for all its construction sites and to demonstrate practices that improve the quality and reduce the volume of water runoff from their sites. In addition, Corman-Leigh has agreed to provide a total of \$50,000 for wetland restoration:

- \$25,000 to the Lake Elsinore San Jacinto Watershed Authority for wetland restoration and rearing pond construction.
- \$25,000 to the Natural Heritage Foundation in Big Bear for restoration of wetlands and empondments for endangered stickleback and migratory birds at Baldwin Lake

Corman-Leigh will also work with Inland Empire Waterkeeper and its parent organization, Orange County Coastkeeper, to educate the Inland Empire's development community on the importance of following Low Impact Development guidelines to control pollutants at their source and reduce stormwater runoff from construction sites.

Inland Empire Waterkeeper is a nonprofit organization founded in 2005 to protect and preserve the Upper Santa Ana River Watershed advocacy, education, restoration and enforcement. It is affiliated with Orange County Coastkeeper, which was founded in 1999. For more information, visit www.iewaterkeeper.org or www.coastkeeper.org

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