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GROUPS FILE COMPLAINT AGAINST LAND ANNEXATION

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Two valley activist groups are continuing their fight against a planned land annexation by the Chumash Indians.

Last week, Preservation of Los Olivos (POLO) and Preservation of Santa Ynez (POSY) filed a complaint for declaratory and injunctive relief, naming the U.S. Department of the Interior and Secretary Gale A. Norton as defendants. The motion was filed by Theodore B. Olson, of Gibson, Dunn & Crutcher LLP, in the U.S. District Court of Los Angeles.

The groups are asking the federal court to reverse the decision of the Interior Board of Indian Affairs, which decided to allow the Chumash to annex 6.9 acres of land into trust.

The tribe wants to build a museum, cultural center and commercial center on the land.

The BIA told the group that it had no standing to appeal the decision. But in its federal complaint, the groups noted: "Although plaintiffs alleged significant environmental, aesthetic and economic harms in their administrative appeal of the BIA decision taking the property into trust, the IBIA wrongly deprived the plaintiffs of their right to be heard on the merits by dismissing their appeal for lack of standing."

The complaint asks that POLO and POSY be given the opportunity "to be heard on the merits of their administrative appeal."

POSY president John Bowen said the group "strongly opposes the land being taken into trust because trust land is exempt from state and local control and regulations. If the 6.9-acre parcel is allowed to be placed into federal trust status, the implications of this decision will be far reaching and could become the precedent for a routine 'buy/annex/build' land policy. Indeed, the application for another 5.8-acre parcel was already in process on the heels of the approval of the 6.9-acre property. This is just the beginning."

The groups' complaint is on www.polosyv.org.