

8 hillside homes may harm views in Catalinas

Doug Kreutz Arizona Daily Star | Posted: Sunday, August 1, 2010 12:00 am

They will be homes of the highest order - literally - and they almost certainly will impact the view from a popular vista point on the Catalina Highway northeast of Tucson.

A land-development firm is offering several 3.3-acre homesites for sale near the Babad Do'ag Vista at the 2.6-mile point on the scenic highway.

"We have eight parcels available on that dramatic hillside leading to Mount Lemmon," said Jim Vincent, a land specialist with the Carlier Co.

"These parcels have literally the best views in Tucson," Vincent said. "It's almost like looking out from Windy Point" higher in the Catalina Mountains.

Vincent said some of the parcels "are adjacent to the (Babad Do'ag) lookout, just south of it." The vista point is on national forest land - slightly north of a forest boundary with private land.

Home construction so near the vista point would affect the view and could give rise to unsanctioned "social trails" in the area, said Heidi Schewel, spokeswoman for the U.S. Forest Service.

Sightseers at the overlook - and hikers on the nearby Babad Do'ag Trail - now look down over an expanse of desert vegetation toward the Tucson valley and distant horizons.

"It not possible to say how the view will be affected without knowing what's intended" by home builders, Schewel said. "It could be that people will be looking out over the tops of some homes."

Schewel said unauthorized trails sometimes show up when homes are built close to national forest boundaries.

"We have homes right along the forest boundary in other areas, and one impact we notice is social trails running from home areas onto the forest," she said. "That's a possible negative impact. These are trails not sanctioned by the Forest Service - created by the people using them."

Vincent said prices for the parcels range from \$159,000 to \$210,000 - "and one just sold." He said the parcels were valued at \$400,000 to \$500,000 before the recession caused land and home prices to plummet.

A description on the Carlier Co.'s website describes one of the homesites this way: "Perched high atop the Catalina Foothills, this SR-3.31-acres lot rests high above all other residential communities within the northeast region of Tucson. ... The Catalina Highway and entrance to

the Babad Do'ag Trail directly to the north places you on privacy and sanctity's doorstep for a true high desert, country living experience."

One longtime user of the vista point said the future homeowners' gain will amount to a loss for those who visit Babad Do'ag.

"I've stopped there many times over the years and enjoyed the views," said Rod Mondt, protected-lands program coordinator for the Sky Island Alliance conservation group.

"It seems a shame that the viewshed will be altered. All the energy and effort to create that pullout will be undermined effectively by all those homes."

DID YOU KNOW

Babad Do'ag means "Frog Mountain" in the Tohono O'odham language. It's the tribe's traditional name for the Catalina Mountains.

Contact reporter Doug Kreutz at dkreutz@azstarnet.com or at 573-4192.

