

Buck's Lake a "pilot project" in land-use effort

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It's one of four "pilot projects" of the Stewardship Council, a nonprofit corporation charged with enhancing public use of 40,000 acres of land, up and down the state, that belongs to PG&E.

Council staff held a meeting in Chico Thursday to get input on how planning for the use of land at Buck's Lake should proceed.

The 40,000 acres has been divided into 47 planning units, lying mostly in watersheds of the Sierra Nevada and Cascades, from Kern to Shasta counties.

At the meeting, Jayne Battey, the council's executive director, said the organization is walking into new territory with its pilot projects on four of the planning units, including Buck's Lake. The idea is to learn from working on those units how best to go about enhancing public use of all 140,000 acres, she said.

Buck's Lake, a reservoir in Plumas County, is a popular recreation destination for many north-valley residents. The council's Buck's Lake Planning Unit consists of about 2,000 acres around the reservoir.

The Stewardship Council was formed several years ago, after PG&E went bankrupt. Concerned that the power company might sell some of its property to developers, the bankruptcy court ruled that 140,000 acres of its land must be protected permanently for public benefit. The council was created to make that happen.

It aims to find ways to enhance land use in keeping with six "beneficial public values," which are outdoor recreation, sustainable forestry, agriculture, natural-resource protection, open-space preservation and protection of historic and cultural resources.

About 70 people attended Thursday's meeting. It was held in the Bell Memorial Union at Chico State University.

Many of those who attended own cabins at Buck's Lake that stand on land leased from PG&E. Representatives of public agencies and Indian tribes were also present.

Battey said the council wants to work collaboratively with everyone who has an interest in Buck's Lake. Those attending the meeting were asked how they thought that could best be done and what obstacles might hinder the process.

Some said it could be difficult to identify all interested parties and get them together at meetings. Others said there was potential for a trust gap between ordinary people and the staff and directors of the council.

People with cabins at the lake wonder if the council is really serious about collaboration, they said. Several people said they feared if the people decided changes weren't needed at Buck's Lake, the council would not accept that decision.

At a meeting in Chico last year, many cabin owners from Buck's Lake and Philbrook Lake, which is in another planning unit, expressed fear they might lose their cabins as the council made changes.

Eric Ward of Elk Grove, who was at Thursday's meeting, told the Enterprise-Record he thought the cabin owners no longer worry much about losing their vacation homes. But they are afraid of being hurt by changes, he said.

His family has owned its cabin at Buck's Lake for 70 years, said Ward, who is a board member of the Buck's Lake Homeowners Association. "We want to be heard as an association."

The three other pilot projects are McArthur Swamp in the Pit-McCloud River watershed, Kennedy Meadows in Tuolumne County, and Doyle Springs in the Kern-Tule River watershed.

Closer to Chico, the council is planning for PG&E land in Butte Creek Canyon, on the Paradise ridge, along Deer Creek, in the Feather River Canyon and near Oroville.

Among the proposals that have been discussed are opening access for whitewater enthusiasts, developing day-use areas, building campsites, and developing new trails and fixing up existing ones.

There are two parts to the council's program: land management and promoting outdoor experiences for youngsters.

Batthey said about half of the 140,000 acres is available to be donated to nonprofit organizations that would manage it for public benefit. Groups that are interested in owning donated parcels are signing up with the council. Decisions on donations will be made later.

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