

Winding Down

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As the rebuilding of fire-ravaged Kennedy Meadows Lodge continues toward its projected July 4 reopening, another significant date has come and gone. Monday was the final day for organizations to apply to the Stewardship Council to own the 244 acres on which the historic pack station and resorts rests. Seventeen applied.

As part of PG&E's bankruptcy agreement, the utility must relinquish more than 140,000 acres of property, including Kennedy Meadows, in 22 counties. The Stewardship Council, formed in 2004 to oversee the divestiture, will review the applicants and make a recommendation to the state's Public Utilities Commission.

Resort owner Matt Bloom's lease on the property runs through 2013. Fire destroyed the 66-year-old main lodge and several other buildings Oct. 1. Bloom began rebuilding the lodge in April, and the rest of the resort opened on schedule in May. Bloom clearly wants the land go to an entity other than the United States Forest Service, which issues his back country operating permit but does not control the land. The Forest Service imposes strict rules regarding buildings and businesses on government lands.

A swarm of public support likely expedited the rebuilding process, and Tuolumne County building officials have been cooperative, Bloom said. The Stewardship Council, meanwhile, heard from those with an opinion about who -- or what -- should become Bloom's landlord as the council prepares to endorse a new owner this year and transfer the deed sometime in 2010.

"Kennedy Meadows is a very special place," said Jayne Battey, the Stewardship Council's executive director. "We've received just under 1,000 letters. What most people wanted us to know was how important the recreational experience has been to them."