



## Kennedy Meadows plans discussed

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The Union Democrat

The owner of Kennedy Meadows publicly vowed Tuesday to rebuild the popular high-country resort's main lodge by next summer.

The historic lodge, along with seven cabins and several smaller buildings, burned to the ground last week in an apparent chimney flue fire.

Kennedy Meadows operator Matt Bloom said he plans on cleaning up the resort this fall and organizing a plan for reconstruction this winter. Bloom anticipates starting construction once the winter snow melts.

Built in 1941, the lodge housed a store, lobby, restaurant and 13 guest rooms.

"I think it will be impressive how fast we will get a new one built," Bloom said.

Bloom, wearing blue jeans and a black cowboy hat, spoke briefly during a press conference held Tuesday afternoon in downtown Sonora.

"We'll be there next summer," he said to applause from the dozens in attendance.

County supervisor Teri Murrison, whose district includes Kennedy Meadows, said she called the press conference together to update the public and answer questions.

"We have people who cried when they heard about it, and there's people who are worried about its future," she said of the resort.

Kennedy Meadows, 57 miles east of Sonora, serves about 21,000 visitors a year.

The resort has long been a popular destination for those seeking back country mule and horse packing trips.

PG&E leases the land to Bloom, who runs the pack station and resort area.

But under the terms of a PG&E bankruptcy settlement, the Kennedy Meadows site will be handed over to a government agency or nonprofit group for stewardship.

A possible candidate for ownership of the property is the U.S. Forest Service, as Kennedy Meadows is surrounded by Stanislaus National Forest land.

Another potential recipient of the land is the Tuolumne County Resource Conservation District.

An organization called the Stewardship Council will make recommendations to PG&E and the California Public Utilities Commission regarding which agency should get the land and how it should be used.

Stewardship Council spokeswoman Michele Hannegan said the process to determine a new land owner is still being developed and it is not known when a final decision will be made.

"What is determined is that we are supporting traditional economic uses," meaning there's the potential for a pack station to remain at the resort, Hannegan said.

Meanwhile, PG&E spokeswoman Janet Walther said Tuesday that PG&E will cooperate with Bloom on rebuilding the resort.

"Our focus is we're just going to work with Matt," Walther said.

Igniting in the early morning hours of Oct. 1, the fire destroyed the main lodge, seven cabins, a laundry house, public bath house, restroom, tool shed, generator shed, storage shed and water heater building.

The estimated damage: \$1.5 million.

An employee's dog named Maggie died in the blaze. All employees, guests and livestock were unharmed except for two minor burn injuries suffered by Bloom and his uncle.

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