



## Two Kennedy Meadows Proposals Made

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By JAMES DAMSCHRODER

Two very different proposals for the management of 240 acres surrounding Kennedy Meadows Resort and Pack Station are now in front of the Stewardship Council for review.

A proposal by the U.S. Forest Service and a joint proposal from Tuolumne County and the Tuolumne County Resource Conservation District cement the main players looking to oversee the land.

The Stewardship Council was formed to divvy up 140,000 acres of land across 22 California counties, including the 240-acre Kennedy Meadows plot, as part of a Pacific Gas and Electric Co. bankruptcy agreement.

The Kennedy Meadows plot's future will be the first from the land buffet to be doled out, said Mary Adelzadeh, the Kennedy Meadows land conservation manager for the Stewardship Council.

The council encouraged a joint proposal when the list of eligible groups was narrowed from 16 to five in September, but instead they got two proposals with several visions in each.

In one option of the Forest Service's proposal, the Forest Service would split the Kennedy parcel, so that they control all of the land except the acreage the pack resort is on, which would be kept under local ownership and management. The other option proposes that the Forest Service control the entire 240 acres, and the pack resort would run under a special use permit.

In the first option of the joint proposal by the county and TCRCD, the resource district would hold the title of the land and the county would have a conservation easement — which creates an agreement between the two parties restricting development and uses on which they agree. The second option is reversed, where the county would hold the entitlement and the TCRCD would have a conservation easement.

There's a third option where the county and TCRCD would hold joint entitlement of the property, and the Mother Lode Land Trust would have a conservation easement.

"This is the kind of thing we were designed for," TCRCD Vice President Ty Wivell said, adding that the conservation district prefers the first option where they would manage the land.

Wivell said the conservation district would manage the land most effectively because federal regulations burden the Forest Service and local regulations hamper the county.

“We’ve got more flexibility,” he said.

Wivell said painting all cabins the same color was an example of the type of unneeded regulations, with which the Forest Service would burden the pack station.

“We understand the traditions there,” he said. “It’s a beautiful place. The rocks, pine, air and ambiance — when you step into this place, it’s like stepping back into time.”

Through the process, some have expressed concerns the cherished land and resort would be ruined by government bureaucracy if the Forest Service gained control.

“The size of the bureaucracy with the federal government would be a big deal,” said Matt Bloom, the pack station’s owner.

Bloom, who’s been vocal with his fear that the Forest Service would limit the pack station’s ability to operate, said he supports the TCRCD in their bid to control the land.

“There’s no need for the Forest Service to own this land,” he said.

Some of his fear is the possibility that the Forest Service would put restraints on the number of horses allowed on the trails leading into the Emigrant Wilderness from the resort.

Some local environment groups have said the horses on the trail need to be regulated.

“The horses trash the trails with so much manure you can’t walk without stepping in it,” said John Buckley, executive director of Central Sierra Environmental Resource Center.

Karen Caldwell, park ranger for the Summit Ranger District, said that she’s heard the outcry to keep Kennedy Meadows under local management but disagrees with some of the complaints.

“We’re absolutely committed to the resort,” she said. “It’s absolutely compatible and appropriate to our vision.”

Changes could be made limiting horses on the trail because of the manure, she said, but not enough information is known about the area right now.

“Whoever gets it would need to do surveys to find what the land’s existing condition is,” she said.

A Stewardship Council evaluation team is reviewing the proposals. On Feb. 11, the groups will present their proposals to the Stewardship Council Board of Directors.

The Stewardship Council staff will make a recommendation to the board, hopefully, by Apr. 30, said Adelzadeh, of the Stewardship Council. The board then will make a final decision.

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“It’s tough,” Adelzadeh said about the process. “The job of the evaluation team is to find who will be the best stewards of the land. Right now, there’s no predetermination about the groups.”