



County May Get Kennedy Property

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Tuolumne County has been recommended by Stewardship Council staff to hold title to the 240 acres surrounding Kennedy Meadows Resort and Pack Station.

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

The Kennedy Meadows plot is the first of the land buffet to have a recommendation.

The recommendation will come before the Stewardship Council Board of Directors at a June 10 meeting, where the final decision could be made.

"This is the first step," said Bronwyn Hogan, Stewardship Council communications manager.

Hogan said that the board still has to accept the recommendation, and then negotiations would begin between affected parties, which could take up to two years before the land is actually transferred.

"We're hopeful a final decision could possibly be adopted at the meeting," Hogan said.

In February, a proposal from the U.S. Forest Service and a joint proposal from Tuolumne County, Tuolumne County Resource Conservation District and Mother Lode Land Trust were turned in for review to the Stewardship Council.

In the staff's recommendation, the county would hold title to the land, while the Mother Lode Land Trust would hold a conservation easement — which creates an agreement between the two parties restricting development and uses on the land. The resource district was only listed in the recommendation as a "participant in the land management."

"Our first preference was TCRCD" said Matt Bloom, owner of Kennedy Meadows Resort and Pack Station. "But we are happy it will be under local control."

In a town hall meeting in Sonora last summer, the most common sentiment was to keep Kennedy Meadows “just how it is.” Through the process, a local group or local government were often cited as a way to fulfill this sentiment.

“The size of the bureaucracy with the federal government would be a big deal,” Bloom said. “There’s no need for the Forest Service to own this land.”

There was a perception that the Forest Service could put restraints on the number of horses allowed on the trails leading into the Emigrant Wilderness from the resort if they gained title to the land.

But Jerry Snyder, Stanislaus National Forest spokesman, said that if the Forest Service were named the donee, the management of pack horses in the wilderness would not change.

He explained that the Forest Service already controls the surrounding Emigrant Wilderness, and the pack station has a contract with the Forest Service for the management of horses in the wilderness.

Karen Caldwell, park ranger for the Summit District ranger, disagreed with the assertion that the Forest Service couldn’t keep Kennedy Meadows “just how it is.”

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

If the county is selected at the June 10 board meeting, the next step would be to enter into a lengthy due diligence and negotiation process between the county, PG&E, the resort and Stewardship Council, County Administrator Craig Pedro said.

From there, a land conservation plan would be developed, which would have a public review process, said Mary Adelzadeh, the Stewardship Council regional land conservation manager.

The matter will be discussed at the Tuolumne County Board of Supervisors meeting Tuesday