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Project may get a ticket to ride

El Dorado supervisors are receptive to buying 40 acres for an equestrian trails park.

By Cathy Locke -- Bee Staff Writer - (Published May 9, 2004)

A proposal to purchase 40 acres near Pilot Hill for an equestrian center and regional trails park received a favorable reception from the El Dorado County Board of Supervisors.

Supervisor Charlie Paine last week recommended allocating \$280,000 in state park bond revenue to acquire and develop a regional trails park on part of the Cronin Ranch. The board took no action, pending review by the Parks and Recreation Commission, and continued the discussion to 10 a.m. Tuesday.

Several board members, however, expressed support for working with the American River Conservancy to acquire the property. Paine said Supervisor Jack Sweeney had volunteered his services as a surveyor to stake out the 40 acres that the county would purchase from the conservancy.

"It's a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity," said Donna McMaster, president of the ColomaLotus Chamber of Commerce, in urging the board to buy the land. The chamber board unanimously endorsed the plan, she said.

The American River Conservancy seeks to raise \$2.5 million by June 30 to purchase the last two parcels of the Cronin Ranch for the American River Trail, which would run from Folsom Lake to Highway 49. The parcels also would be an important link in a long-range plan for a trail extending from Sutter's Fort in Sacramento to Sutter's Mill in Coloma.

Under Paine's proposal, \$180,000 would be used to purchase 40 acres off Pedro Hill Road and Highway 49 for development as an equestrian center and staging area. The remaining \$100,000 would be in the form of a grant to the conservancy to acquire the adjoining property and to design and construct the trail system.

The county would receive title to the 40 acres through a boundary-line adjustment.

The only opposition to the proposal came from the Taxpayers Association of El Dorado County, which objected to allocating county funds to a nonprofit organization for discretionary use. The association argued that the funds should remain under the control of county Parks and Recreation.

Paine said the 40 acres would be owned and controlled by the county.

Julie Bourriague, president of the Divide Horsemen's Association based in Cool, said equestrian trails are in great demand, and horse owners are willing to work with other groups to develop multiuse trails. An equestrian center would boost the local economy, she said.

"This is a gift," Bourriague said of the opportunity to acquire the Cronin Ranch land. "It basically fell out

of the sky."

Mike Bean, a mountain biker and member of the county's trails advisory committee, said the 40-acre site would be an ideal staging area. Located off Pedro Hill Road, it would provide easy access while allowing vehicles to get off Highway 49.

Acquisition of the remaining Cronin Ranch parcels, he said, would significantly increase trail capacity in the county.

Supervisor Helen Baumann reminded board members that two other park projects - Bass Lake Regional Park and Pollock Pines Park - are under way. In discussing Sweeney's request last month to help fund improvements to Placerville's swimming pool, she noted, the board was adamant that such requests should be reviewed by the Parks and Recreation Commission.

Paine said he agreed but added that the county faces a June 30 deadline for the Cronin Ranch site. "We may not be able to purchase it after that," he said.

Supervisor David Solaro endorsed Paine's proposal and the American River Conservancy's efforts. "I happen to think that conservancies are a great thing," he said.

Solaro said the county must commit to preserving open space and public access to maintain the quality of life.

"This is exactly the right time and the right partnership," he said.

About the Writer

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