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County mulls reorganization

Supervisors delay action on plan to split General Services Department's duties.

By Cathy Locke - Bee Staff Writer

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Pilots as well as river recreation and trails enthusiasts protested a proposal to transfer responsibility for airports, trails and river management from El Dorado County's General Services to other departments.

Laura Gill, county chief administrative officer, outlined a plan last week to "take the 'general' out of General Services" by narrowing the scope of its responsibilities.

The department once existed to serve other county departments, but over the years its functions have expanded to include airport operations, parks and recreation, oversight of the county museum, central stores and the county print shop. The department also has experienced considerable turnover in directors in recent years, prompting the Board of Supervisors to call for a reorganization plan.

Gill said she sought to distinguish between activities that serve other county departments and those that primarily serve the public.

"If it's internal, it stays with General Services," she said of her proposal. "If it's external, I tried to find another department where that function could exist."

The Oct. 2 presentation, Gill said, was intended to elicit board comment and direction.

Under the proposal, General Services would become an "asset management" department responsible for parks and grounds maintenance, custodial services, fleet management and cemeteries. It also would handle planning and construction of county facilities and parks.

Among what Gill identified as ancillary services currently provided by General Services, airport operations and trails construction would be transferred to the Department of Transportation; the museum would become part of the county library system; river recreation would be overseen by the Environmental Management Department; central stores would be assigned to the purchasing division; and the print shop would come under the purview of Information Technologies.

Gill said the reorganization would not result in a loss of jobs. But employees and the public voiced concern.

Claudette Colwell, a pilot, said she and her husband moved to Placerville in 1988 because of the Placerville Airport.

"Most of the time, the airport has been under the auspices of General Services, and it has flourished," she said. "For a short time, it was under (the Department of Transportation), and those were the dark years. We were lost in a very large department and nothing happened."

Trails advocates said they also feared that their interests would be given lower priority by transportation staff members, arguing that trails are recreational facilities that have more in common with parks than roads.

Gill said the Department of Transportation oversees trails construction in the Tahoe Basin and has been involved in building bridges along the Rubicon Trail, a non-maintained public road popular with four-wheel drive enthusiasts. Other trail projects include development of the Sacramento-Placerville Transportation Corridor and the El Dorado Trail.

Nate Rangel, who operates a whitewater rafting business on the south fork of the American River, questioned transferring river management responsibilities to the Environmental Management

Department.

General Services employees also urged the board not to parcel out current functions to other departments. All could be handled under the General Services umbrella if the department were adequately staffed, they said.

While agreeing that several aspects of the reorganization proposal needed further study, the supervisors directed Gill to proceed with two of the recommendations. They said it made sense to transfer central stores to the purchasing division, and the print shop and records management to Information Technologies.

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