

Article Last Updated: 10/18/2005 08:48 AM

Eminent domain foes will appeal to jury

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Foes of the county's attempt to take over the Conaway Ranch announced another attack on Monday - an appeal to the Yolo County grand jury.

In a statement distributed Monday, the California Alliance to Protect Private Property Rights called for the jury to look into a "handshake deal" between the county and the Rumsey Band of Wintun Indians.

The tribe has promised to pay the acquisition price of the land, saying it wants to strengthen its relationships in the county.

However, the alliance statement noted the arrangement was announced just weeks after the county approved an 18-hole golf course component to the tribe's casino/resort. County approval was crucial because land for the course had to be removed from Williamson Act farmland preservation contracts.

Supervisors could not be reached for comment Monday afternoon.

Since the Conaway deal was reached with the tribe, supervisors have repeatedly told skeptics there are no strings attached. Even after a gubernatorial veto prevented the tribe from participating in the management of the ranch, a tribal spokesman reiterated the support.

Yolo County Grand Jury Forewoman Charlotte Beal said Monday she could neither confirm nor deny the jury had received a formal request to investigate the county.

In deciding what to look into, she said the jury will consider whether the investigation is feasible within its term - the final report is usually written in May - and whether the issue is within its purview. She noted that in general, there are added challenges in cases involving multiple governments.

The county's takeover effort faces a critical court date on Nov. 1, when a judge will decide whether the county is justified in using its eminent domain powers to take the 17,300-acre property. After that, a jury would determine the purchase price. The county expects the cost to be near the appraised value of \$50 million, while ranchowners have reportedly sought twice that.

The county is seeking to take the property because it fears the current ownership group, led by Sacramento developer Steve Guidaro, will attempt to develop part of the land or sell the water rights.

The owners, who bought the property after eminent domain proceedings were already under way, have mentioned selling habitat mitigation rights as a possible return on investment.

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