



The Web Site of The Sacramento Bee

This story is taken from [Opinion](#) at sacbee.com.

Editorial: A Conaway compromise?

Owners, Yolo should settle beef over ranch

Published 2:15 am PST Monday, December 5, 2005

Conaway Ranch, a magnificent 17,300-acre property that is key to defining a permanent open space buffer between Woodland and Davis, can be purchased by Yolo County under its powers of eminent domain. That is the decision by Yolo County Superior Court Judge Timothy Fall. It should settle the very large question as to whether there is a public necessity to purchase the ranch. That is the legal standard for government to purchase land. And to the judge, Yolo County has met the standard. It would be unfortunate if the county had to actually use this power. There is every reason to expect the county and the ranch owners to settle this dispute.

Both sides have claimed they want the same long-term outcome for Conaway Ranch - to keep it largely as it is today. Not only is it a key greenbelt, it is part of the essential floodway that moves water that has been diverted from the Sacramento River into the Delta via the Yolo Bypass. It is essential for habitat. And it has valuable water rights that are important to Yolo County. The existence of such a large ranch in the 21st century in the center of this region is an extraordinary asset.

If the county and the partnership of ranch owners truly want to work together in good faith to find an agreeable way to manage this asset, there are several possibilities other than legal warfare. One is for the county to purchase the land at a negotiated price with the express intent of reselling most or all of the ranch once it has placed permanent restrictions on the use of the property. That would satisfy a stated concern of the current owners that government is not the ideal long-term manager of the ranch. Another option is for Yolo to compensate the current landowners and allow them to keep operating the ranch, but with permanent restrictions firmly in place, such as no development or sale of water to interests outside Yolo. That would largely satisfy many of the concerns of the county.

A big consideration here is money. What can Yolo afford in terms of Conaway? The Rumsey tribe has offered a loan, but until a deal is done, it is unclear whether there would be any problematic strings attached.

Conaway Ranch has been a controversial use of eminent domain by the county because potential threats to developing the ranch or exploiting its resources were long-term, not immediate. Yolo County has hired an attorney, Stuart Somach, with a reputation for solving complex disputes. This debate is ripe for closure.

Go to: [Sacbee](#) / [Back to story](#)

This article is protected by copyright and should not be printed or distributed for anything except personal use.
The Sacramento Bee, 2100 Q St., P.O. Box 15779, Sacramento, CA 95852
Phone: (916) 321-1000

[Copyright © The Sacramento Bee](#)