

## Poll backs Conaway foes

*By Elisabeth Sherwin/Enterprise staff writer*

The Family Water Alliance, an organization that opposes the county's efforts to buy the Conaway Ranch by eminent domain, released a public opinion survey this week that shows its displeasure is shared by 71 percent of county voters.

The survey also found that voters overwhelmingly (88 percent) disapproved of the Supreme Court decision in the *Kelo v. New London* ruling, which allows government to seize private property for economic development.

The survey was based on 585 likely voters in Yolo County and was conducted March 1-5. It has a margin of error of plus or minus 4 percentage points.

The county won the right to purchase the sprawling 17,300-acre ranch between Davis and Woodland in court last November. A jury trial is coming up to set the value of the property, which could be \$50 million to \$60 million or higher.

The strongest opposition to the county's action came from voters in the supervisorial districts held by Supervisors Duane Chamberlain (District 5, 82 percent opposed) and Frank Sieferman Jr. (District 3, 81 percent opposed).

Opposition also is great among Supervisor Mike McGowan's constituents in West Sacramento (District 1, 76 percent opposed).

Davis is opposed to the eminent domain action, too, according to the survey. In Supervisor Helen Thomson's 2nd District, 56 percent were opposed and in Supervisor Mariko Yamada's 4th District, 64 percent were opposed.

This morning, Thomson dismissed the survey, which she described as "hogwash."

Also this morning, Sieferman said the comments he is getting from people face-to-face in his district are quite different from the sentiments reflected in the survey.

"What they got is not what I got," Sieferman said. "The majority of the people in my district tell me they want to see open space preserved and they want to see the water stay in the county."

The survey was conducted by Evans/McDonough, the same firm that conducted a survey for the Conaway Ranch owners in 2005, which found opposition to the county's efforts to acquire the property by eminent domain ranged from 50 to 73 percentage points countywide depending on the question

asked.

To read the March survey analysis, go to [www.calpropertyrights.com](http://www.calpropertyrights.com).

“This information should serve notice to four of the five Yolo County supervisors who have supported this taking,” said Jeffery Sutton of the Family Water Alliance in Maxwell. “They are proceeding in the face of strong opposition voiced by their constituents.”

Supervisor Chamberlain is the one member of the five-person board who does not support the county’s effort.

Sutton said the Family Water Alliance continues to oppose the take, which is seen as a direct attack on private property rights, water rights and agriculture.

“This action sets a troubling precedent that all farmland and water rights are subject to seizure at the whim of local government,” Sutton said.

But Supervisor Thomson responded strongly to the survey’s negative finding.

“I think it’s hogwash,” she said. Thomson and McGowan are the two supervisors appointed to deal with the Conaway issue.

Thomson said she felt confident enough to dismiss the survey results because of who did the survey and because of what people in the 2nd District are telling her.

In response to another question following what the survey called a campaign simulation exercise, Thomson’s Davis district was the most supportive of the eminent domain action with 53 percent supporting it and 42 percent opposed. Her district is the only one with majority support for the county’s efforts, depending on the question asked.

“I go to the market, campus, downtown, social events and people tell me: ‘Helen, we’re with you, we support you,’ ” Thomson said.

Thomson added that attempts to acquire the ranch are moving forward. A pretrial settlement conference is set for Thursday.

“Mike (McGowan) and I will both be there,” she said.

Thomson says every time she drives to Sacramento over the Interstate 5 bridge over the Sacramento River she is reminded that the county is doing the right thing.

“Look at the Natomas basin today and you see nothing but rooftops,” she said. “Twenty-five years ago it was open undeveloped rice fields like the Conaway Ranch is now.”

Last summer, the county conducted a postcard survey, which found countywide support of about 87 percent.

“It was a direct mail piece with a response card,” said Beth Gabor, public information officer for the county. “The response card asked whether the recipient did or did not support the county’s efforts to protect Conaway Ranch from future development.”

That unscientific survey found countywide support at 87 percent, 9 percent not in support and 4 percent undecided.

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