

Coast Dairies plan hits snag

Davenport
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A trust that bought the 7,000-acre Coast Dairies property five years ago with an eye toward placing it in public hands is scrambling to find a new taker for part of the property.

If a "good steward" for the property isn't found, it could be put up for sale.

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The Trust for Public Land had hoped to convey the land to the state and federal government this fall. But the federal Bureau of Land Management, which had agreed to oversee the inland portion of the North Coast property, has now declined to take over agriculture fields and housing that were part of the deal.

The move by the BLM is forcing the trust to find a new manager for about 550 acres, like a nonprofit or government group. The federal agency said it will still oversee

the rest of the inland portion of the land.

"We're still looking for that third organization," said trust spokeswoman Mary Menees.

The California Department of Parks and Recreation is to oversee the coastal portion of the property, which includes about 150 acres of agriculture land.

While work to convey the inland portion, farmland and all, has been ongoing for years, the BLM told the trust last week that after seeing the final management plan, it doesn't have the legal authority to take over the farmland and the tenant housing that goes with it.

"The ag lands and tenancy issue were outside our purview," said Jan Bedrosian, BLM spokeswoman in Sacramento. "We have no background in that."

She said the BLM is continuing its work on the uplands portion of the property that does not include the farmland. The agency is formulating phased-in plan to make that land accessible and is planning a meeting in Davenport next month to discuss it with interested parties.

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The farmland on the property is generally used to grow artichokes and brussels sprouts. There are three leases for irrigated farming on the inland side and three leases for dry farming, which relies rainfall.

The trust has held the property longer than it usually holds land. It still wants to give it away by the end of the year, but wants group to step in for the acreage the BLM won't manage.

"Our options at that point become very difficult," Menees said. "If we can't find a good steward, we'd hate to sell it on the open market."

The trust bought the property in 1998 for \$43 million, using money from various sources, to preserve the open space that had been threatened by development in previous years. The land encompasses the town of Davenport and the RMC Pacific cement plant.

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