

# *Big Basin* Taking Land For Big Basin Park Isn't Well Received

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Remember learning in history classes about the days when the government forced the Native Americans off their land?

Nearly 100 residents and landowners of the rugged Last Chance Road area in the Waddell Creek watershed above Davenport got a quick review Tuesday when state officials explained their plans to expand Big Basin Park. And to expand it, the state has to buy some property — whether the owners like it or not.

In 1976, the state legislature raised some \$1.25 million to purchase land in the Last Chance area to add to Big Basin Park, the oldest park in the state park system. The assignment to carry out the legislature's wishes has fallen on employees of the state Parks Department and the state general services office.

Those officials met with property owners during a spirited session at Pacific School in Davenport; of the nearly 100 landowners present, only three indicated their willingness to sell to the state.

Ron Crooks, the man in charge of relocating those tossed off their property by the state, explained that residents whose homes are purchased will be moved to a new location that is "decent, safe and sanitary."

His comment brought hoots from the large segment of the crowd that has eschewed modern conveniences like electricity and flush toilets. "It would be just like San Jose!" yelled one onlooker.

Crooks answered: "The legislature says that people must live in decent, safe and sanitary locations whether they like it or not."

The proposed state parks purchase comprises 1,500 acres, or 79 private parcels. After appropriating the \$1.25 million in 1976, the legislature gave the parks department three years to purchase the land.

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The state has hired an appraiser, who will establish a price for each parcel of improved or unimproved property. If the property owner agrees to sell for that money, the sale is final. Then, the state would offer "relocation assistance," to find the seller a new place to live.

As Crooks explained the process, one resident called out, "You're too generous." Another reacted: "Could you replace sleeping under the stars?"

Crooks continued his explanation, saying that the state would help all residents plan their relocation. He said, "If we can't make a (relocating) plan with your help, we'll make one without your help."

Dick May, a representative of the state Parks Department, told the audience that in some circumstances, the state can grant permission for dwellers to remain on the land. Under that plan, he explained, the landowner is paid for his land on a sliding scale based on life expectancy (the younger you are, the less you get paid), with title to the property going to the state when the owner dies.

May explained that the state legislature wanted to buy the Last Chance area "because of the very fact that houses are there and the potential exists for erosion and pollution." Crooks added, "We're not buying the park for one person, you know, we're buying it for 20 million Californians."

May also explained that the \$1.25 million probably would not be enough to purchase the entire 1,500 acres, so some property owners would be safe.

No member of the legislature was present, but Stephanie Hauck, administrative aide to Assemblyman Henry Mello, D-Watsonville, attended the meeting and said she would pass along a report to Mello.

The landowners were told that acquisition proceedings would begin shortly, and a state-hired appraiser, Jack Nichols, soon will be meeting with landowners.