



Greyhound Rock is a wild and beautiful place, exposed to the winds and relentless ocean.

Pete Amos/Sentinel

Battles waged over this spot of land

By STEVE SHENDER
Sentinel Staff Writer

APTOS — Porter-Sesnon. Rarely has so much political and emotional freight been packed into four syllables.

Bounded by Highway 1 on the north, New Brighton Beach State Park on the west, Seacliff on the east and Monterey Bay on the south, the 66-acre Porter-Sesnon property has become a cause célèbre among county land-use issues.

And sometimes, it seems that preservation of the property's grassy meadow and surrounding woodlands from development has become the holy grail for local environmentalists.

For more than six years, they have battled to foil the plans of Palo Alto developer Ryland Kelley, who wants to build a 468-unit hotel/conference center, a three-hall performing-arts complex, shops, restaurants and playing fields on the land.

The Porter-Sesnon property is billed by its defenders as the last significant piece of open, undeveloped real estate on the Santa Cruz County coast.

But what makes it so attractive? Why is its fate so much more important, and more significant, than that of the open coastal bluff land to the south — the Seascape "benchlands" — where a proposal to construct another hotel/conference center/shopping complex has not even drawn a murmur of protest from the same environmentalists?

PORTER-SESNON is pretty, but with its close proximity to the hum of traffic on Highway 1, and its unobstructed views of the tall, white, flagpole-style radio towers of KNZS and the rooftops of the not-too-distant Seacliff subdivision, it's not exactly the forest of Nisene Marks.

So why does a mention of the words, "development" and "Porter-Sesnon" in the same sentence start environmental juices flowing? Maybe it's just that in Santa Cruz County, Porter-Sesnon is the holy land. People have been fighting over it for so long that the reasons don't matter anymore.

Kelley's Wingspread project isn't the first development proposal to spark a fight over Porter-Sesnon.

Seventeen years ago, Besco Corp., a San Leandro development outfit, proposed to build 718 clustered townhouse units on the property. Ranging in size from 1,000 to 1,500 square feet, the units were to sell for \$17,000 to \$25,000.

The company's plans for the \$15-million project called for 56 percent of the land to be left in open space.

At the time the development proposal was unveiled, in April 1970, Besco officials confidently predicted that model units would be ready for inspection by the following Labor Day.

But nine months later, after a series of rebuffs from the Soquel Elementary School District, the county Planning Commission and the Board of Supervisors, and running

battles with local residents opposed to the project, the developers abandoned the proposal.

Besco's only ally in the county was the city of Capitola. The city approved the Besco development "in principle" and sought to annex the Porter-Sesnon property, but its annexation bid was rejected by the county's Local Agency Formation Commission.

THREE years later, Cabrillo College floated a development proposal of its own for the Porter-Sesnon land. The proposal called for construction of a restaurant, bar, limited shopping facilities and a performance hall on the site. Cabrillo Community Services Dean Tim Welch described the college's proposed development plan as a "miniature Golden Gate Park."

College officials asked the county to allocate \$1,125,000 in federal revenue-sharing money to buy the property from its owner, the University of California. Cabrillo officials proposed that the county develop the park facility, which would then be operated by the college.

But supervisors rejected the proposal, saying they had better things to do with their revenue-sharing funds.

It was another five years before Kelley came along, leased the property from UC, and started the Wingspread ball rolling.

Today, Welch works for Kelley, and a former Kelley employee, Vickie Powell-Murray, leads the fight against her ex-boss' grand design for Porter-Sesnon.

So why does a mention of the words, 'development' and 'Porter-Sesnon' in the same sentence start environmental juices flowing?

In the spring of the ninth year of Kelley's quest for final county approval of the project, as wildflowers make their annual appearance amid the green grasses of Porter-Sesnon's still-pristine meadow, the battle rages on.