

# Coastland by committee

<sup>Davenport</sup>  
Twenty-nine disparate groups must agree how to manage 7,000-acre property <sup>9-14-94</sup>

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DAVENPORT — Getting \$40 million together to buy the Coast Dairies property might have been the easy part of the deal.

Now a cast of dozens with competing interests will decide how the 7,000-acre property that wraps around Davenport will be used.

Anti-pesticide activists will sit at the same table with farmers who have cultivated the land for generations. Strip miners will be there along with people interested in protecting native

plants. Equestrians and mountain bikers are invited, along with politicians, federal and state officials, school representatives and delegates from the Davenport town association.

"It will definitely be a Santa Cruz process," said Laura Perry of the Land Trust of Santa Cruz County, referring to inclusive and often cumbersome decision-making processes in Santa Cruz. She estimated it would take two years.

"We can expect it to be complex, innovative and interesting for everybody involved. It's a real hair-puller."

Here's the deal: After years of attempts, the

Coast Dairies Ranch was purchased by the Save the Redwoods League last fall and turned over to the Trust for Public Land.

The trust's intention is to manage the property during preparation of a long-term management plan. It plans then to turn ownership over to the federal Bureau of Land Management and the state Department of Parks and Recreation.

Under a contract now being negotiated, those agencies would have to agree to manage the property according to the management plan.

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Shmuel Thaler/Sentinel file

The Coast Dairies property will be handed over to state and federal agencies to manage. But first, 29 local interests running the gamut from environmentalists to strip miners must come up with a management plan.

# Coast dairies

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Devising that plan will be up to the Community Advisory Task Force. Representatives of 29 groups, businesses and other interests have been invited to be on the advisory task force, which holds its first meeting Wednesday.

The task force's recommendations will go to a seven-member steering committee for a final decision, said Santa Cruz County Supervisor Mardi Wormhoudt, who represents the North Coast area.

Wormhoudt likened the process to Vision Santa Cruz, which, after the Loma Prieta earthquake a decade ago, worked on a blueprint for rebuilding downtown Santa Cruz. That process, too, involved dozens of participants.

"There are clearly many, many interests to juggle here," Wormhoudt said.

"But it's just really better to have all those competing interests represented at the table."

The "stakeholders" include neighbors — Big Creek Lumber Co., the RMC Lonestar cement and mining operation, which has property within the affected area, the town of Davenport, and tenants on the property.

Pacific School District is involved, partly because the transition from private to public property will wipe out part of its property-tax base.

Among the other interests represented are equestrian, biking and surfing groups.

The current agricultural tenants — artichoke and Brussels spouts growers who farm about 750 acres — will be involved along with critics of current farming practices.

Most of the property is grazed by cattle.

Livestock owners will share the meeting tables with people involved with habitat restoration. Among the issues to be worked out are how to balance livestock grazing with protection of sensitive species.

The Davenport Resource Service Center will represent farmworkers. Among the issues: Farm labor housing on the land provides sorely needed low-income housing in the county, but state parks officials might not want to manage it.

As part of the planning, consultants will be hired to collect environmental data on the property, investigate options and prepare a final plan.

At the time of the purchase, Coast Dairies was one of the largest remaining sections of privately owned oceanfront land between Oregon and San Simeon.

The property includes more than seven miles of shoreline, seven beaches, six creeks and their watersheds, historic limestone mines, redwood forests and wetlands.

It has tide pools, hawks and steelhead, and many people who are itching to be able to hike, ride horses, ride bikes and picnic on the land.

Once a dairy farm, the North Coast land had been under essentially the same family ownership since 1902. The early Swiss owners returned to their native country in 1913. Since then, the land has been leased to many different tenants.

In 1997, Nevada developer Brian Sweeney bought an option on the property and announced he intended to subdivide it into almost 140 parcels. That set off a scramble among land conservation groups to buy it. The David and Lucile Packard Foundation and the state legislature were among the biggest donors toward the purchase.

*The first meeting of the community advisory task force will be at 7:30 p.m. Wednesday at the First United Methodist Church, 250 California St., in Santa Cruz. It is open to the public.*