

UC land sale comes with old-growth protection

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SANTA CRUZ — The University of California is offering 400 acres of redwoods and meadowland near Boulder Creek up for bid after more than a year spent searching for a public agency to buy the property.

At least \$2 million is being asked for the parcel, which stretches along Kings Creek Road near Highway 9. It includes up to 50 acres of virgin redwoods, thought to be one of the few old-growth stands outside of state parks in Santa Cruz County.

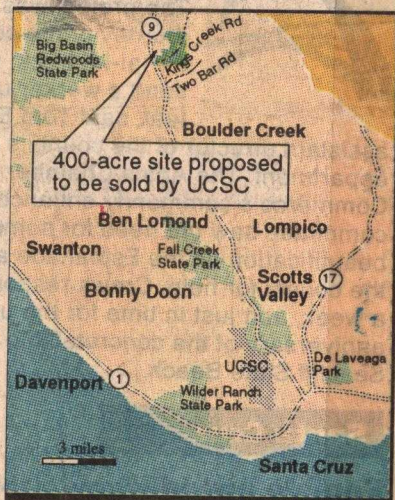
With throwing open the bidding this month, the university has added a new condition on the sale requiring the old-growth redwoods on the land be preserved.

County Supervisor Fred Keeley, who requested the condition, called the steps taken to protect the trees from logging "adequate."

"I feel that the public interest ... has been accomplished," Keeley said Thursday.

But while the preservation of virgin trees may reassure some, it could make the property harder to sell.

"It will reduce its value substantially," said John DeWitt, executive director of the Save-the-Redwoods League. "And I think



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there's probably a lot of logging companies that wouldn't want to tangle on the issue. It could stir up a hornet's nest with people nearby in Boulder Creek."

The land was donated to the UC system in 1942 by Adolph and Mary Miller as a recreational and academic resource for students and staff.

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UC land sale

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For years, the university used the property as a campground. But as the cost of maintaining it climbed and state funding for the campus plunged, the acreage became a financial drain, said Michael Houlemard, UCSC's director of community planning and land development.

When the university first offered the land for sale last year, DeWitt's group and others objected, fearing it would be logged.

To allay those fears, the university offered the land to 15 public agencies and non-profit groups, including the Santa Cruz County Land Trust, state parks and the Nature Conservancy. A lack of money kept those who were most interested from buying it, said Keeley.

Now, even if the land is acquired by a private developer, Keeley said, the new conservation easement will keep the old-growth redwoods protected "in perpetuity." At the same time, he said, the county's zoning for timber and housing on the rest of the acreage is "very, very low density."

In advertising the land, the university estimates a yield of 2.5 million board feet of redwood and Douglas fir timber, the value of which is included in the asking price of the parcel, said Houlemard.

He declined to give the full appraised value of the property, saying it was worth "a little more" than the minimum \$2 million bid.

Sealed bids will be accepted at the Oakland office of the UC Regents until April 28 and will be opened the next day. Any land purchase has to be approved by the regents, Houlemard said.

"I'm glad to see they've included that (conservation) provision, but I'm sorry to see it sold under any circumstances," said DeWitt. "I would like to see them hold on to it. I think that was the intent of the donors."

When the gift was made by the Millers 50 years ago, Houlemard said, the original understanding was the university had a "moral obligation" to maintain the property as a recreational area for 25 years.

Records at the UC Treasurer's Office showed no specific uses were outlined, other than to reserve portions of the land in life trusts for the Millers' family members. The last of those expired in 1967, according to the Treasurer's Office.



Dan Coyro/Sentinel file

UCSC property in Boulder Creek.

In the last dozen years, the property has been operating at a loss, Houlemard said. The campground, with limited water sources, is rarely used, and vandals who have stolen trees from the land have prompted the university to hire a caretaker.

Faculty members whose students do research on redwoods said they've never used the property, relying instead on campus stands, or on the university's preserve in Big Sur. As a possible site for faculty housing, the Miller parcel is considered to be too far away, Houlemard said.

Part of the profits from the sale will be used to pay the debt the land has incurred, Houlemard said. Where the rest will be spent hasn't been decided.

"We're doing everything we can to be as efficient as we can on the campus ... and keep the campus open and accessible," Houlemard said. "It's not cheap. This is a pretty significant resource and it could go far in helping run this campus."