

No Plans To Close 'Gateway To Big Basin'

By Bill Neubauer
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A nationwide effort to expand Big Basin Redwoods State Park to the sea does not include plans to close Boulder Creek's famed "Gateway to Big Basin," park and conservation officials told the Boulder Creek-Brookdale Businessmen's Association Wednesday night.

The California Department of Parks and Recreation does wish to get control of and to close the Highway 236 entrance to the park from the Skyline Boulevard-Saratoga Road junction, park officials said, and the department would like to establish a check-in station at the Big Basin Road entrance and charge fees to park visitors.

But closure of the Big Basin entrance is not contemplated the business group was assured, if Highway 236 is closed and the park is expanded in the Waddell Creek area to the ocean.

Speakers were Ranger Tony Trigeiro, park area director and Big Basin park superintendent;

Charles Mehlert, assistant superintendent for the Fourth District of the California Department of Parks and Recreation; and Claude Look, chairman of the Executive Committee of the Sempervirens Fund of Conservation Associates.

Boulder Creek business people and San Lorenzo Valley Chamber of Commerce members have been concerned over rumors that the Big Basin Road entrance out of Boulder Creek would be closed if the attempted park expansion were accomplished.

Most of the park's 700,000 annual visitors go through Boulder Creek, and many contribute tourist dollars to the town's business economy.

According to conservationist Look, the nationwide effort is being made to obtain funds for purchase of the old Theodore Hoover ranch from the McLean family, 160 acres from the Locatelli family adjacent to the edge of present park boundaries, and other acreage from the McCrary and Anderson families.

If the land is obtained, the park would stretch from Castle Rock through Big Basin to the beaches.

Look said the purchase is contemplated through donated private funds and matching state funds.

He stressed, however, that the conservation group is interested in preserving a wilderness area and that the group would restrict use of the area to that purpose.

Carl Conelly, a local real estate broker and SLV Chamber of Commerce director who sparked local investigation of the rumored Big Basin Road closure plans, pressed for assurance that all SLV entrances to the park would not be wiped out if the park expansion is made.

Look said that commercial exploitation of the wilderness area would be restricted by the conservative group.

Trigeiro and Mehlert stressed that the park is primarily interested in closing the Highway 236 entrance to obtain control of park traffic flow and use. The

park has problems with undesirables and also with persons who just drive in and take over camping facilities as they wish.

The fees the park would obtain are of secondary interest, the park officials said.

Conelly commented that it seemed unfair to him the park could not now charge fees because the Highway 236-Big Basin Road route through the park is part of the state highway system.

"I don't know of any other state park that cannot charge a nominal fee," Conelly said. "I see no reason for the park to be asked to carry some 700,000 free-loaders. The fees would permit the park to develop trails and other facilities it probably can't afford to develop now under the present arrangement."

The business group urged the park officials to work up a map showing expansion plans, closure of Highway 236 and other related matters and to mail this along with a letter of intent to keep the Big Basin entrance open to group president Robert Slawinski and to the SLV Cham-

ber of Commerce.

Efforts of the local business groups to get support for Highway 236 closure were promised by Conelly and others.

The Highway 236 closure first came up in 1964 when the state highway division asked the county board of supervisors to take the road over. The supervisors said no. In 1968 both the Santa Cruz planning commission and the department of public works were asked to support state highway division plans to turn the road over to the state parks and recreation department. The transfer was opposed by both groups, primarily because of fees the park might then be able to charge.

Conelly and other SLV Chamber directors have gone on record as seeing nothing wrong with charging fees to park visitors.

"I cheerfully pay a dollar or more to visit other state parks," Conelly said at a CofC meeting last year. "These parks are magnificent state assets and certainly should be supported by their users."