

Beetle, flower halt pet cemetery move

Developer hopes to work around endangered species

By JEANENE HARLICK
SENTINEL STAFF WRITER

SCOTTS VALLEY — The local couple trying to buy the Pine Knoll pet cemetery hopes to work around an endangered beetle and rare flower to build a school on the property, the couple's real estate agent said Wednesday.

Botanists surveying the 1.5-acre Scotts Valley property discovered it was home

to the Mount Hermon June beetle and Ben Lomond spineflower, which are both federally designated endangered species.

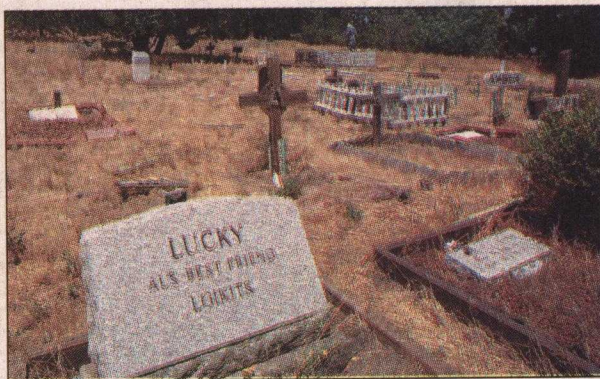
Larry Hattis, an agent with Thunderbird Real Estate, said the Sims Road property is in escrow and that the buyers and SPCA are trying to work out a deal that addresses the site's biotic concerns.

"Just because a parcel has biotic issues

doesn't mean it's not buildable," he said. "These are very common issues that come up on almost any property you want to develop that's out in the country."

Hattis expects the buyers to make a decision within the next 10 days. The interested party has lived in the county for many years, he said.

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Two endangered species have been found at the SPCA cemetery on Simms Road, slowing a proposed sale.

Dan Coyro/
Sentinel file

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Cemetery

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"They're not developers trying to rape the land, they're trying to do the right thing," he said. "They would like to do something to give back to the community, instead of build some McMansion."

Last month, the Santa Cruz Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals decided to dig

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AGENT

up the cemetery's 350 graves and sell the property to pay off \$229,000 in debts to area governments. The debt comes from animal license fees the agency failed to hand over to the county and local cities.

The agency had planned to dig up graves in mid-July.

The property also had become expensive to maintain because people were using it as a dumping ground for dead animals, said Lisa Carter, a member of the SPCA board of directors. In addition, the property's insurance rates are high because cemetery trees have caused damage to neighboring properties, Carter said.

"It wasn't an easy decision to want to sell a pet cemetery, but we've had to spend more and more money just to maintain it," she said.

If the plan goes through, unclaimed remains will be sent to Monterey Bay Memorial Park, a pet cemetery near Prunedale.

Back at SPCA headquarters on Seventh Avenue Wednesday, staff were preparing for a grim Thursday. Though a newly-formed joint government agency — dubbed the Santa Cruz County Animal Services Authority — is supposed to take over shelter services today, no lease had been signed as of 5 p.m. Wednesday. The county and area cities had planned to leasing the facility temporarily until the shelter's sale was finalized in the fall.

Negotiations stalled Monday when the SPCA faxed the county, which is heading negotiations, a long list of non-negotiable lease terms. Those terms included a \$25,000 monthly rent and promises never to rezone the property and to "forget" the \$715,000 in taxpayer dollars the county auditor claims the SPCA misused.

While those three terms are unacceptable, many others were fine, said county spokesperson Dinah Phillips. The Santa Cruz County Animal Services Authority planned to hand the SPCA a counter-proposal Wednesday evening, she said.

The new animal authority also is lining up boarding homes and veterinarian clinics that could take stray animals until lease negotiations are complete, she said.

"They will absolutely not euthanize any adoptable animals because of this," Phillips said.

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