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Survey: Most oppose Conaway Ranch plan*By Elisabeth Sherwin/Enterprise staff writer*

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A survey underwritten by the owners of the Conaway Ranch found that opposition to the county's efforts to acquire the property ranges from 50 to 73 percentage points countywide depending on the question asked.

At 39 percentage points, Davis residents support the county's acquisition attempt more than residents in any other Yolo County city. A town hall meeting called by the ranch owners, the Conaway Preservation Group, will be held in Davis on Thursday, Aug. 11, with the time and place to be announced.

On Friday, Yolo County Supervisor Mike McGowan said he could not comment on the specifics of the poll because he had not seen it.

But McGowan made clear that even if county voters did not support the board's action to buy the ranch, he was still convinced it was the right thing to do.

"We need to do the right thing regardless," he said. "In the long run people will appreciate what we are trying to do or our grandchildren will. We are doing the right thing for the right reasons and I cannot imagine a scenario that would dissuade me."

McGowan said people should know by now that Yolo County electeds past and present are committed to protecting agricultural land and open space. Real estate investors do not share that commitment.

"Yolo County can pass the test of good stewardship over and over," he added firmly.

"There's a reason why national parks are not owned by private entities," he said.

McGowan complained that Steve Gidaro, the managing partner of the CPG, gathered together a group of real estate investors -- who have no credentials as environmentalists -- in order to buy the ranch. Members of the group include John Reynen, Carl Panattoni and Jack Sweigert. Tovey Geizentanner is the group's spokesman.

"These people couldn't find Yolo County on a map," McGowan said.

Public relations problem

But McGowan did concede that the county has a public relations problem on its hands, which the poll indirectly quantified.

"Of course the public relations aspect concerns me," McGowan said. "The county is not telling its story well, but I don't think the press has done an adequate job delving into the issues raised."

(The Enterprise has asked CPG's Gidaro for an interview on three occasions and has not been successful to date.)

McGowan predicted the ranch owners will mount a sophisticated public relations campaign between now and Aug. 23 when a Yolo County Superior Court judge will rule on whether the county has a right to take the Conaway Ranch.

Geizentanner says the CPG is committed to retaining status quo at the ranch and the real



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issue is not development but the question of public ownership vs. private ownership. He says the ranch's owners can make money off their investment without building homes on the land.

"There are new ways to make money off land," he said, citing conservation easements, mitigation credits, natural gas leases, agricultural leases and limited water sales to neighbors.

LOCAL LINKS IN THIS SECTION

"We can assume zebras don't change their stripes," McGowan said.

Lenzi to run for district attorney

Poll took place in June

Survey: Most oppose Conaway Ranch plan

In terms of the poll, 600 likely voters in the county were surveyed by the Evans/McDonough opinion research firm between June 19-22. The firm claims a margin of error of plus or minus four percentage points.

Victim likely dead for days

All telephone survey respondents were read an initial description of the ranch issue, followed by a question asking whether they support or oppose the county's efforts to win ownership of the ranch from the Conaway Preservation Group.

Police seek help in finding missing exchange student

This is what they were read:

Living the dream

"Conaway Ranch is a 17,300-acre piece of land in Yolo County, in the triangle formed by the cities of Woodland, Davis and West Sacramento. More than two-thirds of the ranch is in a federal floodplain, and nearly half is in the Yolo Bypass. Currently, the privately owned Conaway Ranch is leased to local farmers and a duck club. Yolo County is interested in owning and managing Conaway Ranch, but the owners are not interested in selling. Recently, Yolo County decided to use its power of eminent domain to seize the Conaway Ranch from the current owner, the Conaway Preservation Group, who does not want to sell the ranch. Eminent domain, or condemnation, allows the government to take private property for public use for fair market value without the consent of the owner, which is usually hotly contested."

Woman slain in Woodland

Family picks up pieces

No new Conaway answers

After being given this information and asked whether they support or oppose the county's action, support countywide came from 15 percent with almost three-quarters (73 percent) in opposition.

Tracks sleeper hit, killed by train

The survey found opposition equally strong in West Sacramento (84 percent oppose) and Woodland (83 percent oppose). In Winters and Davis, the county's efforts were opposed by six in 10 (62 percent). Three-quarters (74 percent) of the residents in the unincorporated areas opposed the county's action.

Spring Lake springs up

Candidate makes it official

But when the question was asked in a different way, following what the researchers call a campaign simulation exercise with the county argument being put forth, support increases countywide to 32 percent with 58 percent remaining opposed.

Small, low-income dwellings planned

Quotas were set in each of the four incorporated cities in the county in order to insure there were enough interviews to analyze for each area.

Time ripe for markets

Tribe involved

City gets update on park

Respondents were then read the following description of the Rumsey Band of Wintun Indians' involvement in the county's eminent domain action:

Another top Yolo official steps down

"The Rumsey Band of Wintun Indians, which owns the Cache Creek Casino in Yolo County, has agreed to finance the county's eminent domain action to acquire the ranch."

Patching new links to charity

Involvement by the tribe does essentially nothing to shore up support for the county, according to the firm. Following this information, an unchanged 15 percent support the county position, while opposition drops slightly to 67 percent. The strongest opposition remains in Woodland (76 percent), West Sacramento (75 percent), and Winters (74 percent), with 66 percent of the unincorporated voters and 58 percent of Davis voters in opposition.

UCD vets are lucky first to research snake eyes

County honored for conservation

Over the remainder of the survey, a campaign simulation was conducted whereby respondents heard several arguments being used by each side of the issue. According to the research firm, every effort was made to present the issue in a fair and balanced manner, with the arguments being repeated as their proponents have been using them in free and paid media and other public information sources.

Lightning strikes again

Protesters picket primate provisions

Voters favor status quo

Filing period to open for school board seats	The pollsters found that voters in all areas of the county favor preservation of the current uses of Conaway Ranch and maintenance of the status quo. However, even after reading the respondents all the arguments the county is putting forth on why eminent domain should be exercised to purchase Conaway Ranch, just half of respondents (50 percent) favor the action. The poll found that even with their best arguments the county is unable to break the 50 percent barrier.
Victim's family fills courtroom	
Rape, domestic violence center's director leaving	Davis voters are the most supportive of the county's plan with 39 percent supporting and 46 percent opposed. The remaining 15 percent say they are undecided on the matter or don't know the issues.
Davis says it's paying more than its share for homeless services	"I think the most interesting finding is the fact that after all of the county's arguments are offered and all of CPG's arguments are offered, folks in Davis still have 46 percent oppose to 39 percent approve; and the strongly oppose (29 percent) is twice the intensity of strongly support (14 percent)," said Geizentanner, Conaway Preservation Group's spokesman.
Record-setting realty	
2020	"These findings appear to suggest that even if the county promotes its case, more folks in Davis oppose their action than support -- and the intensity of that opposition is twice that of support," he added.
Introduction to Davis 2020	Up or down vote
Wrapped in community; Is the vision for Davis in 2020 infill or spill?	The final question after pro/con arguments were offered was this: Given everything that you have heard, do you support or oppose Yolo County's efforts to condemn the Conaway Ranch?
Changing faces: Davis demographic trends show more diversity by 2020	- Davis -- 46 oppose - Winters -- 57 percent oppose
Charging ahead: UC Davis will make some bold changes in the next five years	- Woodland -- 69 percent oppose - West Sacramento -- 66 percent oppose - Unincorporated county -- 63 percent oppose
Plans contrast for Davis and Woodland schools	"By and large, the voters of Yolo County side with the current owners by a wide margin over the county in the dispute over Conaway Ranch," the polling firm said in its final memo. "They question the necessity of eminent domain for preservation of current land uses, as well as the propriety of the involvement of the Rumsey Band of Wintun Indians."
As farming challenges increase, a new crop of cooperation buds	-- Reach Elisabeth Sherwin at gizmo@dcn.org
Of growing concern: Will Yolo County's plans to preserve open space hold to its roots?	Sunday, July 24, 2005

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Blueprint Project sparks regional dialogue

Meeting needs, avoiding sprawl is a delicate balance

A new blueprint: Region's future hinges on 'bolder' ideas, cooperation

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