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Health
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Obituaries
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Conaway Ranch talks break down*By Elisabeth Sherwin/Enterprise staff writer*

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Efforts to negotiate the sale of a 17,000-acre ranch between Davis and Woodland broke down on Wednesday and ranch owners said they may take their case to the voters.

"Discussions initiated by the Conaway Preservation Group to resolve the pending eminent domain action by Yolo County against the Conaway Ranch have broken down," said Tovey Giezentanner, spokesman for the group.

"Yolo County has been unwilling to consider any scenario that would maintain private ownership of the ranch," he added. "Furthermore, it has become increasingly clear that Yolo County is pursuing eminent domain in conjunction with the Rumsey Band of Wintun Indians, a sovereign nation and developer in Yolo County."

Giezentanner said the effort to condemn the Conaway Ranch using money gained from the Cache Creek Casino, a profit-making enterprise in Yolo County, is unacceptable, particularly since the tribe is being asked to join the Joint Powers Authority that may one day run the ranch, if it is sold to the county.

Giezentanner said the 10 private owners of the ranch, led by Sacramento developer Steve Gidaro, will not back down and are, in fact, more determined than previously.

"It's true that other partners who were not involved over the past nine months have gotten up to speed in the last two weeks and are now part of a unified position," he added.

Giezentanner also said the ranch owners are considering how to take their message to the voters and are determining what kind of a countywide or statewide initiative might be most effective.

"We are willing to take our message to the voters of Yolo County and the halls of the U.S. Supreme Court, if necessary, to protect and preserve the Conaway Ranch," he added.

On Aug. 18, Judge Timothy L. Fall of the Yolo Superior Court issued an order staying eminent domain proceedings to allow the parties to engage in serious settlement discussions. The county now returns to court to seek a right-to-take hearing.

"We regret that, despite the best efforts of the county and CPG, we could not reach an agreement during these negotiations," Supervisor Helen Thomson of Davis said. Thomson and Supervisor Mike McGowan of West Sacramento were designated by the Board of Supervisors to engage in the settlement negotiations.

"The county remains steadfast in its mission to protect and preserve the status quo of Conaway Ranch and its valuable resources," she said. "However, these negotiations were not progressing consistent with our public benefit mission and we therefore plan to reinstate our eminent domain court proceedings immediately."

The supervisors said a mail survey conducted last month found that a majority of county residents support their position.

Pursuant to state law, all settlement discussions are confidential.

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