



The Web Site of The Sacramento Bee

This story is taken from [News](#) at sacbee.com.

Yolo gets key victory on Conaway Ranch

State Supreme Court declines to review the county's use of its eminent domain power

By Ed Fletcher -- Bee Staff Writer

Published 2:15 am PDT Thursday, April 13, 2006

The state Supreme Court cleared the way for Yolo County to continue its acquisition of Conaway Ranch through eminent domain by deciding Wednesday not to review the county's legal authority to take the property.

The county began pushing to acquire the water-and habitat-rich 17,300-acre ranch a few miles west of downtown Sacramento through eminent domain after talks with the property owners broke down.

"This is another victory for the residents of our county," Yolo County Board of Supervisors Chairman Frank Siefertman Jr. said of the court decision in a prepared statement.

The decision without a court fight counts as a win for the county but does not provide finality to the legal questions raised by the attorneys representing the property owners.

Lawyers representing the Conaway Preservation Group, the ownership group led by developer Steve Gidaro, argued in their court brief that a vague fear of future development is not enough to justify seizing private land.

But Siefertman characterized the decision as a victory against sprawl.

"We will continue to fight against rampant development and sprawl and the wholesale diversion of Yolo County water to Southern California," his statement said.

The decision comes as a second round of court-mandated settlement talks is to take place today. Should no settlement be reached, a trial to determine the value of the land is set to begin June 13, said Stuart Somach, an attorney representing the county. Since the courts have not ruled on the merits of the case, both sides could appeal the trial outcome.

"We are hopeful a compromise can be reached to keep the property in private ownership but achieve the goals everyone espouses," said Tovey Giezentanner, a spokesman for the property owners.

An open letter to Yolo County's Board of Supervisors, signed by 13 current and former Yolo County public officials, echoes that sentiment and asks the county to abandon the eminent domain action.

The letter, sent to media outlets by Giezentanner, cites two sources that called the property's management team "good neighbors" and pushes for a compromise that keeps the land in private hands but compensates its owners for preserving the land.

The list of signatories includes Woodland Mayor and supervisorial candidate Matt Rexroad and former state Sen. Jim Nielsen.

Through a clerical mistake, the eminent domain proceedings began on all but 1,100 acres of the ranch. Should the county want that property as well, it would have to pursue it separately.

About the writer:

- The Bee's Ed Fletcher can be reached at (916) 321-1269 or efletcher@sacbee.com.

Go to: [Sacbee](#) / [Back to story](#)

This article is protected by copyright and should not be printed or distributed for anything except personal use.
The Sacramento Bee, 2100 Q St., P.O. Box 15779, Sacramento, CA 95852
Phone: (916) 321-1000

[Copyright © The Sacramento Bee](#)