



100,000 Tejon acres part of deal

Details of plan with preservation group to be announced today

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More than a third of Tejon Ranch, 100,000 acres out of 270,000, will be part of a deal with a land preservation group, The Californian has learned.

Tejon is expected to announce the deal, involving California's largest, privately owned patch of land, today with the San Francisco-based Trust for Public Land.

By another measure, the agreement involves 156 square miles, or 37 percent of Tejon Ranch Co.'s 422 square miles.

Exact details of the partnership between Tejon and the Trust for Public Land -- whether a sale, donation or other arrangement -- will be given at a news conference today. Officials at both firms did not return numerous phone calls Wednesday.

Allen Lyda, Tejon's chief financial officer, would neither confirm nor deny the acreage involved. He also would not say whether the deal is a sale or donation to the Trust for Public Land. Lyda said rules covering publicly traded companies prevent him from commenting on any specific information.

The Trust for Public Land is a national nonprofit environmental group that works to preserve open space for habitat and recreation. The group claims to have protected 1.4 million acres in 45 states since its founding in 1972. Its board includes a mix of business executives and social and environmental activists.

Due to Tejon Ranch's location and its status as the largest, single private land holding in California, environmentalists see the company's land as a critical wildlife habitat area. It includes an unusual variety of habitats, from hot desert to oak woodlands, snow-capped peaks and coastal scrub. As such, wildlife experts consider the Tejon holdings a critical habitat corridor between the southern Sierra Nevada and coastal mountains.

The Trust for Public Land has apparently shopped the deal around to other environmental groups in search of endorsements. Representatives from several of those groups expect that the 100,000 acres included in the deal is primarily land with limited development potential.

This land still has significant value as wildlife habitat and open space. But Monica Bond, a biologist with the Center for Biological Diversity, said the entire ranch deserves protection, not just those areas that Tejon Ranch can't develop. She said the whole ranch is an irreplaceable habitat corridor.

"If it's true they're donating (or selling) these undevelopable portions, that's just not good enough," Bond said. "The whole thing is an ecologically critical area. We really want to see the entire ranch in preservation. That's our goal and we're going to fight for that."

Some environmental groups are upset that the Trust for Public Land struck a deal with Tejon. They criticize Tejon for developing its land in a piecemeal fashion, making a public assessment of the long-term impacts impossible. They wanted the trust to hold off on a deal until Tejon agreed to release a master plan for all its holdings.

"They want to maximize their land for real estate and we want the land to be maximized for wildlife," said Mary Griffin of the Kern Audubon Society. "We are disappointed the Trust for Public Land is doing this."

Bob Stine, president and chief executive officer of Tejon Ranch, disputed such criticism at a meeting with The Californian editorial board earlier this year.

Stine said the general clamor for a so-called "master plan" is both misleading and erroneous.

As a publicly traded company, Tejon Ranch publishes annual reports detailing its plans, he said. The call to reveal a master plan implies the company is hiding something, he said.

Since 1999, Tejon's annual reports have specified its plans for real estate development. Four projects -- the Tejon Industrial Complex and interchange at the junction of Highway 99 and Interstate 5, the proposed Centennial development of 23,000 homes in Los Angeles County, a possible resort community around Tejon Lake called Tejon Mountain Village and plans for land conservation -- have been in the pages of annual reports since then.

"I think we've been very open about the process as to what the plans are," Stine told the editorial board.

A master plan in the land development business is a complicated and detailed process, Stine said, adding that he was not aware of any master plan that covered more than 80,000 to 90,000 acres.

"We're three times larger," he said.

The four components described in the company's annual reports amount to Tejon's master plan, Stine said. The projects extend about 25 years into the future.

At the February meeting, Stine told the board that Tejon Ranch was talking with "reasonable environmental firms" about a "very, very large number" of acres to be used for conservation activities.

About 40 percent of Tejon's land, he said at the time, is mountainous topography, not well-suited to development.

"We have no plans for the rest of the ranch other than leaving it as it is," Stine told the board. "Reveal: that's what we're doing. There are no secrets."