

Land Subdivision at Mono No Longer a Threat

Cunningham Property Sold for Protection Purposes

Land Will Be Traded To US Forest Service

by Jen Nissenbaum

In March, Mammoth Mountain Ski Area announced that it had purchased the Cunningham Property, a 120-acre parcel located on the west shore of Mono Lake within the boundary of the Mono Basin National Forest Scenic Area. While plans to subdivide and develop the property with resort homes had been slowly moving forward with Mono County, Mammoth Mountain has said that it will not develop the property.

The Committee is pleased that this largescale development project no longer threatens the west shore of Mono Lake and the integrity of the Scenic Area.

Development is not in Mammoth Mountain's plans. Instead, it hopes to trade the Cunningham property to the Forest Service in exchange for property in the Mammoth Lakes area. Committee Co-Executive Director Geoff McQuilkin

adds, "I've been personally assured by senior management at Mammoth Mountain that their sole goal is to trade the property into public ownership."

Prior to Mammoth Mountain acquiring the Cunningham property, a partial application had been submitted to Mono County to subdivide and build up to 30 resort-style homes on the property. In August 2003, the Forest Service declared this proposal to be detrimental to the integrity of the Scenic Area, which protects lands surrounding the lake. While Scenic Area regulations allow property owners to make modest changes to their properties, the legislation clearly prohibits large-scale alterations such as subdivisions. "The Mono Lake Committee has been closely following this issue for several years," says McQuilkin. "Congress established the Scenic Area 20 years

ago to protect the unique character of the lands surrounding Mono Lake, and the Committee opposes development projects that violate Scenic Area protections."

Mammoth Mountain has indicated its interest in using the Mono Lake property as part of an exchange for Forest Service land beneath the Mammoth Mountain Inn and the associated parking lot. To date, no plans have been submitted to the Forest Service, which has said that any trade proposal will be subject to public review under the National Environmental Policy Act. The Mono Lake Committee supports an open and transparent process for land trades and expects that the Forest Service will lead a public process that assures a positive and responsible outcome at both ends of the land trade.

Fine Print Requires Vigilance

Although the purchase by Mammoth Mountain is complete, there apparently is a provision in the sale that bears watching. The Cunninghams retain an option to purchase the property back at a set price for two years. Mammoth Mountain can—but is not required to—stop such a buy back from happening by paying out additional funds.

At the present time, it seems unlikely that this option will be exercised. Still, it provides a path, however improbable, that could lead to the reactivation of the subdivision proposal. The Committee will monitor the situation and work locally to ensure that permanent protection, not subdivision, is the final outcome for the Cunningham property. ❖



GEOFF MCQUILKIN

Sale signs come down: The Cunningham property has been purchased for trade to the Forest Service. Public ownership will protect the lakeshore property from inappropriate development.