



Legislation Text

File #: 24-0593, **Version:** 1

Parks, a division of the Chief Administrative Office, recommending the Board consider options for the use of 62.2 acres of county-owned open space land, located in Coloma at Cronan Ranch off Pedro Hill Rd and Highway 49, identified as Assessor Parcel Number 104-530-10-100, and provide direction to staff to bring forward a resolution to declare the property exempt surplus and appoint a real estate negotiator on behalf of the County to enter into negotiations with the U.S. Department of Interior Bureau of Land Management for the transfer of said property.

FUNDING: N/A

DISCUSSION / BACKGROUND

El Dorado County owns a 62.2 acre parcel of land (APN #104-530-10-100) in the Coloma Area south of Highway 49, surrounded by the Cronan Ranch Regional Trails area to the West, South, and East. The U.S. Department of Interior Bureau of Land Management (BLM) owns the surrounding land which includes a parking area off Pedro Hill Rd and 12-miles of ranching roads which are now maintained non-motorized multi-use trails. A trail bisects the property and leads to the "Down and Up Trail", "East Ridge Trail," and "Hidden Valley Cutoff." The trails are accessible to bicycles, equestrians, and hikers.

The County purchased the land on May 11, 2004 via a "contribution of \$280,000 from the \$1.7 million pool of unspent funds allocated to El Dorado County from a State bond measure for development of local recreation (Proposition 40), to be used for the acquisition and development of a Regional Trails Park on the South Fork of the American River." On July 20, 2004, Board of Supervisors approved an increase to the acquisition acreage from 40 acres to 62 acres. At the time, the intent was that the land be developed for an equestrian center, trail staging area, and trail system.

On June 16, 2014, Foothill Associates prepared a Proposed Scope of Work for the Cronan Ranch Concept Plan project, based on input received during the 2014 Parks and Trails Master Plan effort. Community input at the time suggested an equestrian arena, overnight camping, covered picnic area, restrooms, play structures, and disc golf. There was no concept plan developed at that time. Twenty years later, the County has not developed any of the 62 acres at Cronan Ranch, and no conceptual or master plans for the County parcel have been prepared or adopted.

Although the County has no plan for the parcel, there may be an opportunity in the future to develop the property according to the original intent. The Parks Element of the General Plan, Chapter 9.2.2.7 page 192, says that "The County shall strongly encourage the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) to divest itself of all lands that are not environmentally sensitive within the County to provide ownership so the County can reap the benefits therefrom". Although a portion of this land is environmentally sensitive, a large portion of it could be suitable for recreation. In 2022, the Coloma Lotus Advisory Committee (CLAC) formed an ad hoc committee to receive input on potential uses of the County owned 62.2 acres at Cronan Ranch and facilitated discussion for stakeholder groups. On November 2, 2023, CLAC received an update from the Cronan Ranch Ad Hoc Committee who presented two separate plans for the property (Legistar Item 23-2063). Both plans presented layouts for the parcel

allowing for a bicycle skills park, interpretive trail and protection of biologically sensitive areas, equestrian parking, arena, and round pen. On November 16, 2023, Parks and Recreation Commission received the presentations and discussed the apparent incongruity of the two uses being developed on the same site. Any development of the site by the County would require identifying funding for a series of park planning and development steps, including further public outreach, environmental studies and review, and a master plan for the site, and identifying funding for development. Funding would also need to be identified for site development, operations, and maintenance.

Related to the efforts of CLAC to explore options, staff, along with the Chair of the Parks and Recreation Commission and CLAC met with BLM regarding the future ownership and uses of the County parcel and solutions to overcrowded parking at the trailhead. The Cronan Ranch Management Plan (2007) addresses multi-use (hiking, biking, and equestrian) trails as the primary use of the land. The plan mentions the County-owned land acquired with Prop 40 funding, and that Cronan Ranch will be managed in a fashion that recognizes human needs through a partnership with the BLM, El Dorado County, the community, and other relevant agencies. The plan also states that Cronan Ranch will be managed to preserve open space for public use and to restore and enhance plant and wildlife habitats. Due to the popularity of the Cronan Ranch trails, BLM presented staff with the possibility of purchasing the County-owned parcel in order to reconfigure and expand the parking area. BLM proposed the continued management and use of the property as open space in accordance with the Cronan Management Plan, meaning that no active recreation uses would likely be developed in the event of a transfer in ownership. On December 21, 2023, Parks and Recreation Commission moved to recommend the Board of Supervisors explore BLM acquisition of the subject parcel at Cronan Ranch. Should the parcel be sold, the Commission also recommended that any funds resulting from this acquisition be applied to develop Capital Projects on the existing park lands in the County.

Transfer of the property to BLM would be more feasible than sale. Per Government Code Sections 54220-54234, the Surplus Land Act, prior to taking any action to dispose of property, the land must be declared as either surplus or exempt surplus land. The Property may be determined to be exempt surplus pursuant to California Government Code section 54221(f)(1)(D) as surplus land that a local agency is transferring to another local, state, or federal agency. The transfer of the land to BLM would relieve the County of any obligations for maintenance or operations at the site and would continue the current use as passive open space with an expanded parking area under operation by BLM.

ALTERNATIVES

Alternative 1: The Board could direct staff to explore developing the site, which would require a series of park planning and development steps, including further public outreach, environmental studies and review, a master plan for the site, and identifying funding for development. Given the number of current projects and lack of available funding, direction to pursue this option in the near future is infeasible.

Alternative 2: The Board could direct staff to move forward with neither option, continue to hold on to the property for continued use as open space currently, but with the option to develop the parcel as a park or for other recreation use in the future.

PRIOR BOARD ACTION

Legistar Item 23-1954 - November 2, 2023 - Coloma Lotus Advisory Committee received

presentations on Cronan Ranch from the Cronan Ranch Ad Hoc Committee
Legistar Item 23-2063 - November 6, 2023 - Parks & Recreation Commission received presentations on Cronan Ranch
Legistar Item 23-2236 - December 21, 2023 - Parks & Recreation Commission reviewed options for property at Cronan Ranch

OTHER DEPARTMENT / AGENCY INVOLVEMENT

County Counsel

CAO RECOMMENDATION / COMMENTS

Approve as recommended.

FINANCIAL IMPACT

N/A

CLERK OF THE BOARD FOLLOW UP ACTIONS

N/A

STRATEGIC PLAN COMPONENT

N/A

CONTACT

Jennifer Franich, Deputy Chief Administrative Officer