

## County offered chance to purchase Mt. Konocti property

Contributed by Elizabeth Larson  
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LAKE COUNTY &ndash; The County of Lake has been offered the chance of a lifetime &ndash; the first shot at purchasing an important piece of property atop Mt. Konocti.

County Administrative Office Kelly Cox said the Fowler family has offered the county the first chance to purchase a 1,500 acres atop the mountain, an offer in which the county is keenly interested, said Cox.

The Fowler family owns approximately 1,700 acres in two parcels on the mountain, said Peter Windrem, their attorney. The property includes 175 acres on Buckingham Peak, which is the location of Lake County Community Radio/KPFZ's communications tower, as well as those for Lake County Television and Edge Wireless, said Windrem.

The rest of the Fowlers' holding on the mountain include all of its main peaks. Some of the property also runs along Soda Bay and then runs up and over the mountain, down the west side over the &ldquo;horse&rdquo; that appears on the mountainside, and down to a lower walnut orchard, said Windrem.

The Fowlers &ndash; which Windrem said are no relation to businesswoman Kathy Fowler &ndash; have owned the property for more than 50 years.

&ldquo;The property is being sold to divide up an inheritance,&rdquo; said Windrem.

The land has been used for agriculture, said Windrem, and includes a small, four-acre vineyard and walnuts.

&ldquo;The family has had a longtime commitment to preservation of the mountain and it's essentially with that objective in mind that this opportunity is being given,&rdquo; Windrem said.

Windrem said the family doesn't want to sell all of their 1,700 acres. &ldquo;The sale would be structured so that the family would retain the tower site itself.&rdquo;

They also seek to retain a residence and walnut orchard, which Windrem said would be subject to a conservation easement that would prevent further development.

Last month, Cox and officials from other agencies &ndash; including the Bureau of Land Management &ndash; that are interested in taking part in the purchase met to discuss acquiring the land.

Cox told Lake County News that the consensus was that the groups want to pursue buying the Konocti land.

However, time is of the essence.

Windrem said that the Fowlers are giving the county and partner agencies two years to purchase the land.

If they can't complete the deal in that time, the land will go on the open market and be available for private purchase, Windrem said.

The clock, Windrem added, started in December.

He added that there already has been interest in the property from developers with various kinds of development schemes.

Windrem said the family will do everything they can to facilitate the sale to the county and its partners.

The big question that hasn't yet been answered is the asking price.

Windrem said that price hasn't yet been set because an appraisal is being completed right now. That appraisal is expected to be completed sometime in the next month.

Cox said no entity &ndash; either the county or BLM &ndash; can afford the land on its own. &ldquo;It's going to be complicated because there's going to be a lot of agencies involved.&rdquo;

County Public Services Director Kim Clymire &ndash; who also is director of county parks &ndash; is taking the lead on the county side, said Cox. He and Clymire are working together on the project.

Cox said Clymire asked the Board of Supervisors during last summer's budget hearings if they approved of staff time being used to work on the purchase, and the board responded affirmatively.

The property would be used as open space and parkland, said Cox, and would fit in with the county trail system.

&ldquo;To me it is so important that that mountain be preserved,&rdquo; Cox said.

He said there are other privately held properties located between the Fowler property and Clear Lake State Park.

&ldquo;The long-term plan is to try to acquire as much of the mountain as we can,&rdquo; said Cox.

Rich Burns, field manager in the BLM Ukiah office, oversees BLM lands in nine counties besides Lake.

BLM has been interested for some time in purchasing more property on Mt. Konocti, said Burns.

Including the Black Forest's 260 acres, Burns said BLM owns just over 1,000 acres on Mt. Konocti.

Several years ago, shortly before BLM closed on the Black Forest in 2004, BLM was looking at purchasing 400 acres on the east side of Mt. Konocti, a deal which ultimately didn't take place.

Burns said the current effort involves a partnership of government and private interests &ndash; including the Lake County Land Trust &ndash; to put the acquisition together. &ldquo;It would be a consortium of different interests going for it.&rdquo;

BLM already is a substantial landowner in Lake County.

Burns said the agency owns about 122,000 acres in the county, including land in the Cache Creek Wilderness Areas and Cow Mountain Recreation Management Area, and on the west side of Walker Ridge and into Indian Valley.

Cox said the group of partner agencies will meet again soon to continue discussions on the purchase effort.

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