

## **Yolo supes affirm Conaway water buy**

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After a second vote on a nearly identical document, the Yolo County Board of Supervisors approved an agreement with Tri-City Water and Farm, which owns Conaway Ranch.

Sacramento developer Angelo Tsakopoulos' family owns Tri-City, which completed buying a controlling share in the 17,300-acre ranch Dec. 29, after the initial vote occurred Dec. 17. The result of the vote was 3-2.

Supervisors Jim Provenza and Duane Chamberlain were the dissenting votes both times. Provenza had said the first vote happened without much public notice on the issue, leading him and the Citizens Alliance for Regional Environmental Sustainability to question whether the vote violated the Brown Act.

The second vote held Tuesday had the same result. However, Supervisor Don Saylor was the third vote instead of former Supervisor Helen Thomson, who retired at the end of 2010. Thomson spoke in support of the agreement during the public hearing.

The board had given the community 10 days to review the deal. During the first meeting, the agreement was released to the public less than 24 hours before the meeting, although notice of the special session came a few days prior.

The agreement approved Tuesday was similar to December's deal, except the new one included information about how environmental review is not required under the California Environmental Quality Act until projects are proposed.

The deal proposes 4,000 acres be used for a seasonal flood plain on the east end of the property, which could be a key player in the Bay Delta Conservation Plan. The plan could reduce the flow of water through the Sacramento-San Joaquin River Delta and send more to farms and cities, including to Southern California.

One key point Provenza raised during Tuesday's meeting was through the deal, 4,000 acres in conservation easements are exempt from the habitat mitigation moratorium the board passed last October. The moratorium applies to out-of-county developers seeking to resolve environmental problems with projects in other counties.

But Deputy County Counsel Phil Pogledich said the project that would be happening on the 4,000 acres would most likely be done by the state, taking it out of the county's control.

The deal also stated it expected 12,000 acres to continue to be used for agriculture. As part of the agreement, the county could receive as much as \$2 million in out-of-county water transfers and other payments.

The main issue State Sen. Lois Wolk, D-Davis, had with the agreement was the conservation easement. She was representing herself and Assemblywoman Mariko Yamada, D-Davis, at the meeting.

Wolk said with the land being restored to seasonal flood habitat, it would eliminate agricultural land in that part of the ranch and change the way Yolo Basin Wildlife Area, south of Conaway Ranch, works.

While Wolk had issues with the agreement, she said members of the board should move forward as they saw fit.

Chamberlain said the conservation easement could make it so habitat blocks the west and east sides of Yolo Bypass. This could present issues with the bypass being used as flood control.

"This is one of the worst agreements I've ever seen the county get involved in," he said.

But Tim Taron, Tri-City's lawyer, said the developer didn't have to make an agreement with the county.

Pogledich said the agreement is not "the end-all, be-all" with Yolo County and Conaway Ranch. It opens the door to work on issues further that concern the ranch, including habitat, water and agriculture.