

LARPD Votes to Weigh in On Off Road Park

The Livermore Area Recreation and Park District (LARPD) Board voted last week to support preserving what is referred to as Tesla Park as an open space area.

The 3400 acre site is owned by the State Parks Department. The land was purchased to expand the adjacent Carnegie State Vehicular Recreation Area, an off-road recreation area.

A preferred plan as proposed by the State for the Tesla area that shows areas for use by four-wheel drive trucks, all-terrain vehicles, four-seaters and motorcycle riding trails, as well as gathering and practice areas is undergoing environmental review.

Members of Friends of Tesla Park asked the LARPD board to take three actions. One was to keep Tesla in the district's master plan as an open space park; the second, direct staff to review the draft environmental impact review (DEIR) from the perspective of preservation, and finally, to send a letter to the State Parks Department supporting preservation of Tesla as a non-motorized preserve.

The votes on the first two were unanimous. The final request, asking for the letter, passed by a 3 to 2 vote with Maryalice Faltings and David Hutchinson voting "no."

Faltings, who had asked for a separate vote on each issue, suggested that ar-

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guments presented to the LARPD board in favor of preservation would be more appropriately addressed to the state. "Legally, we have no authority."

Faltings added that she would like to see the site used cooperatively. While, she would not like to see off-road trails go through the old town site or Indian sites, she wanted to maintain a neutral stance. "We are being asked to deny another group the ability to recreate the way they want. I can't square siding with an anti-recreation attitude," she stated.

Board President David Hutchinson said the state has owned the land for 22 years for use as an off-road vehicle park.

Director Beth Wilson said she had held off stating an opinion until she had heard from the public. "I have heard from you loud and clear. I have not heard from the off-road people at all."

Director Steve Goodman, stated, "I don't think this is the right place for off-road. I don't want to sit by and say nothing."

Goodman said of the issue, "I've changed my mind. I'm old school in that I don't like to be told what to do. The state owns the land. You (the speakers) have made a compelling case. The impacts are too great not to support keeping the land in open space."

A series of speakers addressed the board, asking for its support on the three requested actions.

Nancy Rodrigue spoke for Friends of Tesla. She

described the area as biologically rich, serving as a field study area for UC Berkeley students and others. It contains seven threatened or endangered species or their habitat. Fifty-one other listed species can be found close by. Tesla is one of fourteen priority botanical protection areas identified by the Native Plant Society.

According to Rodrigue, the site serves as a critical wildlife corridor linking Mt. Diablo and Mt. Hamilton. In addition, the area offers a window into history. Located on the site is the old mining town of Tesla as well as numerous Native American features.

In talking about the State's preferred concept, Rodrigue noted that a new entrance is planned on the western edge. It will include parking, a technical track, trails and roads and other facilities that will be located next to ranches on Tesla Road. The only access point will be through Livermore and down Tesla Road during one of the busiest times when all of the wineries are open.

The proposed off-road park and the entrance will be closer to downtown Livermore than Brushy Peak, added Rodrigue.

She pointed out that the area is identified in the LARPD master plan as an open space park under the designation of Altamont-Tesla Park or Corral Hollow Preserve.

"The issue is not about whether one supports off-road vehicle use or a need for a place to ride; it's about

whether it is appropriate to allow off-road vehicle use that damages the environment.

"The statement that off-road users paid for the land is false. The vast majority of the land was paid for by the general taxpaying public through gas tax transfers. This is public land, owned by the State Parks Department. This is a proposed project, not a done deal," she stated, adding that this is the third try to gain CEQA approval.

Other speakers who echoed her comments represented the Sierra Club, Livermore Heritage Guild, East Bay Chapter of the Native Plant Society, Tri-Valley Trailblazers, Society of American Indians, Tesla Road Residents Alliance, Friends of Livermore, Ohlone Audubon Society, Livermore Hill Hikers, Friends of the Vineyards, and Friends of the Arroyos and the Alameda Creek Alliance.

SUPERVISORS TO TAKE UP ISSUE

The Alameda County Supervisors' Committee on Transportation and Planning will look at the impacts that the state's proposed Off-Road Vehicle (ORV) park on Tesla Road might have on the county.

The item is set for 9:30 a.m. July 7 at the supervisors meeting room at 1221 Oak St., Oakland.

The ORV park would be located on a 3400-acre site owned by the state and sited almost entirely in Alameda County. The existing Carne-

gie Park for ORVs is located on 1600 acres adjacent to the new proposal. Virtually all of it is situated on land in San Joaquin County.

Many of the area's residents don't want more noise and landscape scarring from off-road vehicles, and have formed organizations aimed at defeating the plan.

One such organization, Friends of Tesla Park, was represented by member Celeste Garamendi at a recent Altamont Landfill Open Space Advisory Committee meeting.

Garamendi said the group would like the full board of supervisors to discuss the proposal, because it will impact traffic in the county by attracting park users throughout the county and taking them through Livermore and out Tesla Road. There are also concerns about wildlife corridor preservation, erosion, and stream pollution.

Shawn Wilson, chief of staff for Supervisor Scott Haggerty, suggested that if people wanted to approach the supervisors, they should begin with the board's Transportation and Planning committee. The panel's members include Supervisor Haggerty, who represents Dublin, Livermore, and unincorporated land near Livermore, and Nate Miley, who represents Pleasanton.