

Sempervirens asks for water district's help

By Chuck Anderson

Press-Banner

The Sempervirens Fund, facing a deadline to acquire the bucolic and logging-threatened Lompico headwaters and nearby Malosky Creek Forest, is asking the San Lorenzo Valley Water District to buy the Malosky property for \$2.4 million.

Sempervirens has an option to buy both properties for \$5.6 million from timberland owner Roger Burch. The \$2.4 million would go a long way toward financing the purchase before the option on both parcels expires June 30.

To scotch a widespread valley rumor, however, officials of both organizations say there is no plan beyond the Malosky purchase.

Brian Steen, Sempervirens executive director, said he won't ask to borrow additional funds from the water district to complete the Lompico purchase. Jim Mueller, water district manager, agreed that no such plan exists.

"There's no truth at all to that," he said.

The controversy ensued after Sempervirens officials made a presentation to the water district's board of directors April 20 under "oral communications" rather than a specific agenda item.

Some valley residents thought that was a ploy to push through the purchase and a possible loan under the radar, especially since the presentation went considerably beyond usual three-minute time limit during that part of the agenda.

Steen said it hadn't been on the agenda only because the

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fund hadn't received necessary appraisal information until after the deadline for placing items on the agenda. Under state public-meeting law, directors are prohibited from taking action on any topic that isn't on the agenda, except under emergency conditions.

Steen said he asked for the subject to be on the board's Thursday, May 4, agenda. But Mueller said it won't be on the public agenda. It's possible, though, that the board would discuss the proposal behind closed doors, then schedule a meeting later this month to take action.

The 188-acre Malosky Creek Forest land uphill from Ben Lomond and Bonny Doon lies between two water district watershed properties and is part of the watershed. Steen said the property is appraised at \$2.4 million.

So far, the Sempervirens Fund has raised \$225,000 in local contributions toward the land purchase, Steen said, and has applied to 11 foundations and corporations for grants. In addition, the nonprofit has a roster of 8,000 potential donors, most of whom have not yet been heard.

"We'll go ahead and complete the transaction even if we have to take out a short-term loan to do it," Steen said. "We'd pay off the loan with additional fundraising."