

November 10, 2021  
Agenda Item 14C

EAST CONTRA COSTA

# Con Fire agrees to annex Fire Protection District

**By Tony Hicks**

*Bay City News Foundation*

The Contra Costa Fire Protection District will annex the East Contra Costa Fire Protection District, both districts announced Monday.

Each district's board of directors approved the move, which now must be submitted to the Contra Costa Local Agency Formation Commission for formal approval.

The move will bring 128,000 residents of eastern Contra Costa County under the purview of the

larger district. The move is expected to take four to six months, followed by the operational and administrative consolidation of the two districts.

"I am so excited and proud of the teamwork that has brought us to this point," Diane Burgis, the District 3 supervisor on the county Board of Supervisors, said in a statement. "With the Contra Costa County Board of Supervisors acting as the Con Fire board unanimously approving the request to formally apply for annexation of ECCFPD, and the

ECCFPD board voting unanimously to move forward, we are a giant step closer to providing improved fire and rescue services in East Contra Costa County."

The move is expected to help what East Contra Costa Fire Protection District Board President Brian Oftedal said historically has been an underfunded district.

"Annexation will improve response times, open fire stations and provide a paramedic level of service for our communities," Oftedal said in a statement.

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# 11th-hour water agency bid for massive Bay Area cattle ranch fell short

\$63.5 million value for huge Bay Area cattle ranch was below asking prices



California Outdoor Properties

The main Livermore-area ranch house and headquarters complex of N3 Cattle Co., a 50,500-acre ranch that occupies parts of Alameda County, Santa Clara County, San Joaquin County and Stanislaus County. The final price for a vast cattle ranch that was the largest land offering ever in California wound up at less than the list price, a moving target that eluded government agency attempts to buy the mammoth property.

By **GEORGE AVALOS** | [gavalos@bayareanewsgroup.com](mailto:gavalos@bayareanewsgroup.com) | Bay Area News Group

PUBLISHED: October 26, 2021 at 11:10 a.m. | UPDATED: October 27, 2021 at 2:05 p.m.



LIVERMORE — The final price for a vast cattle ranch wound up at less than the list price, a moving target that eluded government attempts to buy the mammoth property — including an 11th-hour bid by a local water agency.

The Alameda County Water District, 17 state lawmakers, state officials and land conservancy groups were among the government, public agency and special-interest organizations that were involved in an effort to put the mammoth ranch lands into public ownership such as a water district property or a new state park.

Now, through a \$63.5 million series of purchases on Oct. 22 in four different counties — that's how huge this property is — two private organizations that are both headed by Danville-based business executive and rancher William Brown have become the new owner of the N3 Cattle Co. ranch.

The ranch sprawls over 50,500 acres in Santa Clara County, Alameda County, San Joaquin County and Stanislaus County.

"This was an extraordinary lost opportunity," said John Weed, one of the five members of the board of directors of the Alameda County Water District.

It never became clear whether state or regional government officials managed to fashion a purchase offer that would be near either the original asking price of \$72 million in July 2019 or a reduced price of \$68 million that was disclosed in April 2020.

"I am disappointed to not be able to acquire this great property," said Sen. Steven Glazer (D-Contra Costa), whose district includes sections of Contra Costa County and Alameda County. "This had great potential." Glazer was one of the 17 lawmakers who had pressed the governor to pursue the transformation of the site into a state park.

Despite considerable talk, discussions and maneuvers by state and regional government entities, the Alameda County Water District appears to be the only such government entity to actually place a bid for the 50,500-acre property.

"Alameda County Water District made several attempts to acquire the property, including submitting a backup offer," said Sharene Gonzales, a spokesperson for the Fremont-based water agency.

However, even that gambit came only after it became known in July 2021 that the N3 Cattle Co. ranch was in escrow to be purchased. At that point, the asking price had been cut to \$68 million.



In January 2020, the state government, under a proposal that Gov. Gavin Newsom floated, appeared willing to pony up as much as \$20 million to buy and create a new state park.

Around that same time, the Nature Conservancy and the Trust for Public Lands claimed they had cobbled together \$30 million for the purchase of the property.

“A very attractive package was put together,” Sen. Glazer said. “We made a very serious effort.”

If those funds were pooled, at \$50 million, that was still 21% below the ultimate purchase price and 26% below the last known asking price of \$68 million. The senator, however, didn’t disclose the dollar value of the state package.

Here’s what the Brown-led groups paid in the four counties that contain the cattle ranch lands, according to public documents filed on Oct. 22 in the quartet of jurisdictions:

- Santa Clara County. \$24.8 million, 19,935 acres, approximately \$1,243 an acre.
- Alameda County. \$21.3 million, 16,880 acres, \$1,265 an acre.
- San Joaquin County. \$11.7 million, 9,095 acres, \$1,285 an acre.
- Stanislaus County. \$5.7 million, 4,590 acres, \$1,240 an acre.

The properties are now owned by William Brown Foundation and WEB Ranch — the WEB would correspond to William Edward Brown’s full name.

William Brown Foundation paid \$53.4 million in cash for property purchases in all four counties, the public records show. WEB Ranch paid \$10.1 million for parcels in Santa Clara County and Alameda County.

WEB Ranch also obtained \$8 million in financing for its purchases in Alameda County and Santa Clara County, loan documents filed in the two counties show. American AgCredit, which specializes in financing for farmers and ranchers, provided the loan.

With the property in private ownership, state officials will be left to wonder what sort of a public park the cattle ranch might have become.

And Alameda County Water District officials may also have to ponder the what-ifs of the two-year odyssey of the largest land purchase in California.



“We hopefully will be able to work with Mr. Brown to reduce flood risk and allow a greater water supply,” said Weed, the water district board member.

The state recently accomplished the purchase of the 3,000-acre Tesla Park site near Livermore to ensure that those parcels can become state-controlled open space rather than turn into a site for offroad vehicles, Sen. Glazer noted.

Yet at 4.7 square miles, that East Bay purchase is only a small fraction of the 79 square miles represented by the immense N3 Cattle property.

“We continue to look for ways to protect open space for the benefit of nature and people,” Sen. Glazer said.

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## George Avalos | Business reporter

George Avalos is a business reporter for the Bay Area News Group.

[gavalos@bayareanewsgroup.com](mailto:gavalos@bayareanewsgroup.com)

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