



THE TAOS NEWS

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Historic subdivision in hands of reviewers

By **Andy Dennison**

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Miranda Canyon Preserve — the most ambitious subdivision in recent Taos County history — has been officially submitted for county, state and federal review.

Packed into three thick binders, the preliminary plat application from The Weimer Properties calls for 150 upscale homes — each on a lot ranging from 10 to 31 acres — spread across 2,200 acres within Miranda Canyon below Picuris Peak. Included in the plan is a 2,000-acre public access open space and recreation area, and several communal facilities, including a campground, stables and community center. “We have met or exceeded every county, state and federal requirement,” said Todd Barbee, agent for the owners who are descendants of 19th-century land baron Alexander Gusdorf.

Packets will go out to 26 state agencies for review. If approved at the state level, the preliminary plat application then will go before the Taos County Planning Commission and a public hearing.

Running south from Llano Quemado hot springs to the top of Picuris Peak, the elongated 5,000-acre Miranda Canyon parcel is surrounded by Carson National Forest land and, on the western boundary, by private land. The Arroyo Miranda approximates the eastern boundary.

Water likely will be one of the hot-button issues for this proposal, to which state agencies must respond by June 19. Each home will have its own domestic well and septic system, plus water recycling and collection covenants.

Downstream residents — some of whom were among parties in a failed legal attempt to reclaim the land for the Cristòbal de la Serna Land Grant—havetold TheTaos

News that the development will reduce groundwater supplies and threaten water quality in Llano Quemado and Ranchos de Taos.

The owners have said that hydrological studies from eight test wells indicate that the project has a minimum 50-year supply of domestic water and will not impact downstream users.

The use of septic systems entered the picture about a year ago, after the El Valle de Los Ranchos Water & Sanitation District rejected a request to tie the project into its regional

sewer system. Barbee said that septic systems became the only option after that decision, and their designs meet all county and state regulations.

The project application calls for eight 30,000-gallon water storage tanks for fire protection, all fed by three dedicated wells.

The developers, headed by Marcia Cunyngham, will limit domestic water use in each home to 0.3 acre-feet per year, which is below the 0.5 acre-feet limit set by the county. In addition, each home will be equipped with rainwater collection systems, and the number of swimming pools will be restricted to 20 percent of the homes.

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Area Residents have also expressed concern over traffic volume on Llano Quemado and Ranchos roadways. Access to the private road system in Miranda Canyon is off County Road C139, also known as Hot Springs Road, Miranda Road and State Road 382.

Barbee has said that the project has taken two years and more than \$1 million to prepare, including innovative conservancy and homeowner governance regulations, and efforts to “tread lightly” on land that includes 32 arroyos, an intermittent stream, dense forests and steep slopes.

The landowners aim to break ground in 2009, if all requirements for construction are met, on their largest holding in Taos County.

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