



PRESS RELEASE

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For immediate release

A win for public land at Cline Buttes: Private developer withdraws purchase request

On July 29, a private developer withdrew an application to purchase 400 acres of state-owned land at Cline Buttes near Redmond, Oregon. After months of widespread opposition to the proposed public land sale, this withdrawal is a resounding win for Central Oregon communities.

Nearly a year ago, the private developer initiated a request to purchase the Cline Buttes Tract from the Department of State Lands (DSL). Central Land and Cattle Company LLC, the developer of the proposed Thornburgh Resort, applied to purchase these 400 acres of public land, which would expand their current private land holdings in the Cline Buttes area.

The purchase application drew widespread criticism from Central Oregonians, concerned about the future of public access and natural resource impacts on the tract of land.

In March, DSL held a hearing as a part of its due diligence process to determine whether it would sell the land to the developers of the proposed resort. Hundreds of concerned residents testified in writing opposing the land sale. In over two hours of public testimony, every individual opposed the land sale.

During the hearing, Bend City Councilor Anthony Broadman said, "Generations to come will look back at this moment in Oregon's land use history, at the decisions we're making now in rooms all across our state, and ask whether we've upheld Oregon's land use system and honored the land. So I would ask you would consider what we need as a region instead of what a very few want."

Last week, Central Oregon LandWatch submitted a community letter to the Department of States Lands, with 4,764 signatories opposing the sale. 373 local businesses, community groups, and organizations were represented.

"When we heard about this application to convert land from the public trust to private development interests, we knew the community would want a say in the process. The court of public opinion has weighed in on this one. Central Oregonians came together in unequivocal agreement that this proposed land sale was not in line with public interests," said Ben Gordon, executive director of Central Oregon LandWatch.

Despite the outpouring of opposition to the sale, DSL conducted its due diligence to consider the funding potential to supplement the Common School Fund. A third-party appraisal valued the 400 acres at only \$912,000. Currently, the Common School Fund holds roughly \$2.2 billion





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that generates investment revenue, making this \$912,000 from the potential land sale a nominal, one-time contribution to the fund in exchange for public land held in trust. When weighing the limited income potential against the social and environmental benefits this tract holds for residents and wildlife alike, LandWatch advocated for this land to remain public.

DSL takes community input and value into account. The Oregon Constitution charges the department to “manage lands under its jurisdiction with the object of obtaining the greatest benefit for the people of this state, consistent with the conservation of this resource under sound techniques of land management” (Article III, Section 5). When selling any state lands, the department is also required to consider their scenic and recreational value to the public (ORS 273.051).

The 400 acres are currently being leased to the developer, which includes terms that keep the land available for open space and public access.

Because the developer withdrew their application for the purchase of the Cline Buttes Tract, the DSL will not need to issue a final decision. Therefore, the sale has been removed from the upcoming agenda for the State Land Board meeting on August 9.

“While the DSL will not need to announce a final decision, it's clear that Central Oregonians value this area for its public benefit, recreational opportunities, wildlife habitat, and more. That's what won the day. While the applicant could, in theory, initiate another request for purchase down the road, the state has done its research. We now know the land has limited economic potential weighed against far-reaching environmental and social values. It would be a hard sale to justify,” said Ben Gordon.

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