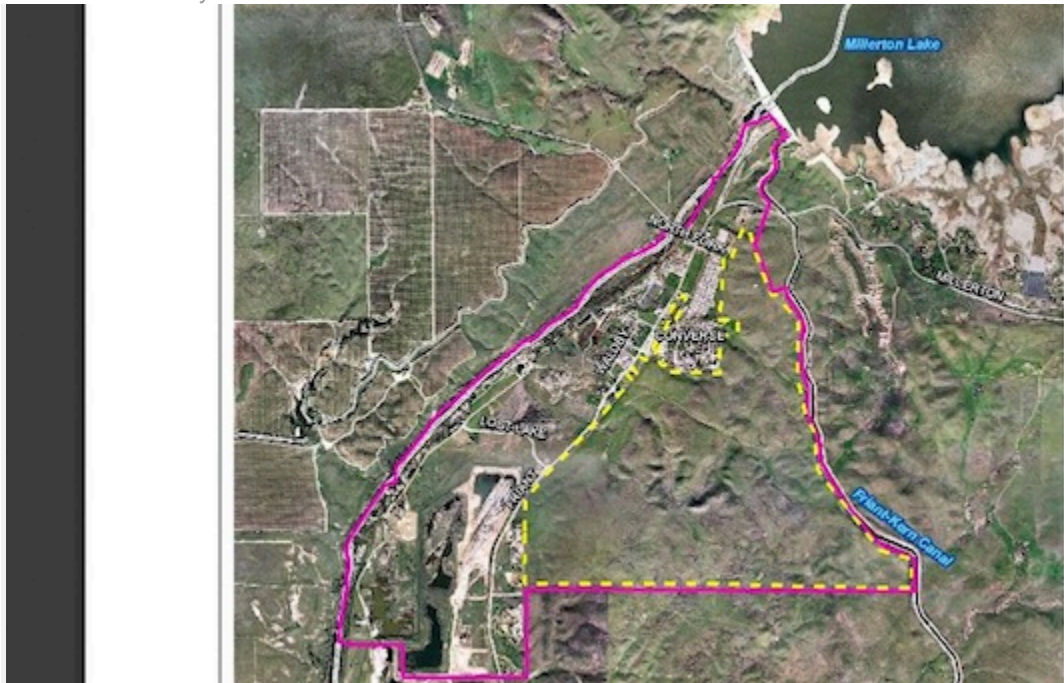


Settlement gives 2,270-home Friant Ranch green light

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Written by Gabriel Dillard



The Friant Ranch development area is bounded in yellow in this map.

A legal settlement has helped clear the way for Friant Ranch, an "active senior" master-planned community that would include up to 2,270 homes near Millerton Lake.

Friant Ranch and the San Joaquin River Parkway & Conservation Trust announced the settlement today that resolves an environmental challenge over Fresno County's February 2011 approval of the project. The City of Fresno and the Sierra Club also filed challenges that were thrown out by a judge at the end of 2012, said Dennis Bacopulos, Friant Ranch operating manager.

Bacopulos added that the judge found valid concerns lodged by the Trust regarding environmental impacts to the area near Lost Lake Park. Friant Ranch and the trust have been in discussions for the last year to resolve those impacts, capping five years of environmental analysis. The project was first proposed in 2003.

The solution: a one-time fee of about \$500 for each home that will be built at Friant Ranch. The fee is expected to generate more than \$1.1 million for the park fund to be used for improvements and maintenance at Lost Lake Park and the San Joaquin River Parkway.

"It is our intention that this settlement agreement will provide a model for local governments, developers and communities to work together to ensure responsible stewardship of our public parks," said Dave Koehler, the trust's executive director, in a statement.

The 480-acre project — southwest of Millerton Lake bounded to the west by Friant Road and the east by the Friant-Kern Canal — will include a 16-acre recreation and fitness center, 13 miles of walking and biking trails and an 18-acre commercial/retail center. It will be geared toward "Baby Boomer active adults" aged 55-plus.

"This will be a first-of-its-kind project for Fresno County that we believe will appeal to aging Baby Boomers and help retain their wisdom and spending," Bacopulos said.

The City of Fresno and Sierra Club both appealed the judge's decision on their environmental challenges. An appeals court has yet to rule on those appeals. But Bacopulos said infrastructure planning work continues. He said a groundbreaking could come as early as next year. The project would be built out over 10 years.

In that 10-year span, Friant Ranch construction is expected to generate \$918 million in economic output for the Fresno County economy. Construction is expected to generate employment for about 660 workers annually.

At full build-out, annual county revenue from various taxes, licenses and permits is expected to exceed the costs of services to be provided by the county by \$2.6 to \$2.9 million.

The Bigelow/Silkwood ranching family has owned the Friant Ranch property for more than 90 years.