

Groups ask Army to consider critters

- DUBLIN: Environmentalists fear redevelopment plan may hurt Camp Parks wildlife

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By Sophia Kazmi
STAFF WRITER

Local environmental groups are asking the Army to consider its four-legged and winged residents as it plans for future development at Camp Parks.

The Army is looking to trade about 187 acres of its land along Dublin Boulevard with a developer in exchange for the developer to perform much needed building improvements on the base. Federal law prohibits the Army from selling the land to raise funds for improvements.

But, in addition to the troops stationed there, western burrowing owls, the threatened California red-legged frog and the California tiger salamander also call Camp Parks home. Those creatures have sought refuge in the mostly vacant 2,000-acre reserved forces training ground as development boomed elsewhere in the Tri-Valley.

Burrowing owls are ground dwelling birds that grow to about 10 inches tall, with round heads and no ear tufts. They are found in many areas in North and South America.

Draft environmental reports on the proposed redevelopment plan state that the loss of the burrowing owl's habitat at Camp Parks would be significant and irreplaceable.

Rich Cimino, conservation chairman of the Audubon Society of Eastern Alameda County, said the society and other groups want to work with the Army and California Department of Fish and Game to form a "partnership where we can keep threatened and endangered species in Alameda County."

Cimino said they fear a deal that would allow a developer to buy land credit elsewhere to make up for any lost habitat at Camp Parks.

"On-site mitigation is what we want," said Cimino, who said they want to make sure the Camp Parks critters stay at Camp Parks.

Jeff Miller, director of the Alameda Creek Alliance, said in statement that his group is asking the Army to delay the land transfer until public hearings are held on environmental concerns.

Miller also asked the City of Dublin for a signed commitment that includes citizen input on the deed transfer and for the city to pledge to protect the burrowing owls and other species.

Miller said in January, when the Army hosted developers who wanted to learn more about the land swap opportunity, Mayor Janet Lockhart showed five proposed plans for the area -- none of which, he said, discussed habitat for the threatened and endangered species.

Lockhart said that the city can do nothing about the speed of the review process at this time.

"It's not our process," Lockhart said. "It's the federal government's process."

She said that once a developer brings plans forward to the city, then the city will require the developer to go through all the necessary environmental reviews.

The proposed Camp Parks land swap is not part of the city's General Plan, so many studies will have to be conducted on how future development on the property -- located across from the Dublin/Pleasanton BART station -- will affect the city in terms of traffic and the environment.

The Army estimates that it will select a master developer in June.