

Yosemite's boundaries may increase by 1,575 acres

By Michael Doyle, McClatchy Newspapers

WASHINGTON – Yosemite National Park in California would grow by 1,575 acres under a bill seeking traction on Capitol Hill.

Written by a Democrat and backed by local Republicans, the Yosemite expansion legislation could have a leg up on some of the myriad other national park bills being shopped around Congress. But in an environment where public lands ownership also can push political buttons, advocates still have their work cut out for them.

“This is a challenging Congress to move things through,” Laurie Wayburn, president and co-chief executive officer of the San Francisco-based Pacific Forest Trust, said Tuesday. She added, though, that “this is one of those rare, common-ground movements. Yosemite has a very special place in Californians’ hearts.”

The legislation introduced last month by Rep. Jim Costa, D-Calif., authorizes the National Park Service to expand Yosemite's western boundary through the addition of several adjacent Mariposa County parcels. The park service could buy the designated land, located near an existing resort development called Yosemite West; in theory, the agency also could accept donated property or acquire it through a land swap.

The Pacific Forest Trust currently owns about half of the 1,575 acres covered by the bill, and a consortium of medical professionals owns the other half. The non-profit trust bought its share about seven years ago with the long-term goal of conveying it to Yosemite, Wayburn said. The doctors had bought the land as an investment, potentially for development.

The landowners' anticipated scenario now is that federal Land and Water Conservation Fund dollars would be used to buy both parcels once the National Park Service secured its authorization, Wayburn said.

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