



**Aubrey Dunn, State Land Commissioner
State of New Mexico**

In Case You Missed It:

Cochiti's 'church' is back in pueblo hands via trade

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Cochiti Pueblo Gov. Nicholas Garcia gives Land Commissioner Aubrey Dunn a pueblo drum during a ceremony celebrating completion of a major land trade between the State Land Office and the pueblo. (Mark Oswald/Albuquerque Journal)

SANTA FE, N.M. — Out of bad things, good things can come.

That was theme as state Land Commissioner Aubrey Dunn and leaders of Cochiti Pueblo celebrated the completion of a trade under which thousands of acres of ancestral land are returning to the pueblo.

In exchange for what had been state trust land near Cochiti, the Land Office acquired the Garrett's Desert Inn property in downtown Santa Fe, across Old Santa Fe Trail from the Land Office headquarters. The pueblo purchased the 2.7-acre hotel site from Santa Fe's Catron family specifically for the land swap.

On Thursday at the Land Office, papers were signed, Pueblo Gov. Nicholas Garcia gave Dunn a pueblo drum and Dunn presented Garcia with a silver-topped cane, specially made by artist Monica Gutierrez in the style of the historic Lincoln Canes given to New Mexico's pueblos in the 19th century as symbols of their sovereignty.



Cochiti Pueblo leaders sprinkled corn meal on a special cane held by Cochiti Gov. Nicholas Garcia that state Land Commissioner Aubrey Dunn presented Thursday to commemorate a land trade with Cochiti Pueblo. (Mark Oswald/Albuquerque Journal)

Former Cochiti Gov. Joseph Henry Suina, who spoke in both English and Cochiti's Keresan language, noted that the events that led to the land trade started in 2011 when Dixon's Apple Orchard near Cochiti – previously a beloved destination for autumn day-trippers – was ruined by wildfire and subsequent monsoon floods.

“It was the devastation of the fire and the floods that made it possible,” Suina said. He said the orchard located in a scenic canyon is no longer viable economically “but, for the people of Cochiti, that land will always be viable.”

The demise of the 625-acre orchard set off a bitter legal dispute between Dixon's former operators, Jim and Becky Mullane, and former Land Commissioner Ray Powell. The fight centered on the terms of a 75-year lease the Mullanes had been granted under a prior land commissioner for the apple farm and an adjacent 8,800 acres of additional state trust lands.

The Mullanes, ready to move on with the orchard devastated, wanted to transfer the lease to a pueblo – San Felipe was involved initially – for a substantial payment. Powell didn't like the long lease because he said it didn't make enough money for the state land trust, which provides funds for public schools, universities and other state operations.

In a three-party settlement reached in 2014, the Mullanes relinquished their lease and received \$1.8 million from Cochiti, and \$200,000 from insurance proceeds the Land Office received after the fire and flooding. The Land Office agreed to lease the land to Cochiti Pueblo for five years, during which a trade allowing the pueblo to become owner of the land would be discussed.

The roughly 9,200 total acres includes shrines, sites of ancient villages and hunting grounds that Suina recalled using stealth, hiding behind trees so that one of the apple orchard's former owners didn't see. “Now we can do it without sneaking around,” said Suina. He said the trade will allow Cochiti people to “go to church” on the remote, open land that backs up to Bandelier National Monument. The land is “connected to a higher, sacred being,” said Suina.

He noted that, while driving on Interstate 25 on Thursday morning, he could see the canyons and peaks that now belong to Cochiti. With scars from fire and floods, he said, “the mountains looked like a young boy with a close, bad haircut. But it was beautiful.”

Suina said Cochiti has been trying to get the land back for 50 years. The land swap plans were first disclosed in January.

Suina credited Dunn for carrying out the trade plans set in motion by Powell. As Dunn put it, the pueblo leaders were worried about what “a dumb old cowboy

from southern New Mexico would do.” In the 2014 elections, Powell, a Democrat, was defeated by Republican Dunn, who made a campaign issue of how Powell had dealt with the Mullanes over the apple orchard.

On Thursday, Dunn said he was pleased to be part of returning ancestral lands to Cochiti and that the state trust will make 10 times more from the Garrett’s site on prime downtown real estate. The Land Office plans to work with city government and others on a plan for the property.

An appraisal commissioned for the land trade found the Garrett’s property would be worth \$7.1 million if it were “vacant and unencumbered by lease” as opposed to \$5.05 million with the 1950s-era hotel standing and open for business. The rural land traded to Cochiti was previously appraised for trade purposes at about \$4.8 million.

Santa Fe Bite’s fate?

One question in the minds of many Santa Fe foodies is the fate of the Santa Fe Bite, the restaurant located in the Garrett’s restaurant space that is nationally known for its green chile cheeseburgers.

Bonnie Eckre, who owns the Bite with husband John, said Thursday it’s still unknown what will happen with the restaurant, but that the Land Office has been “very accommodating” and has kept the Eckres informed along the way. She expects to know more when a city committee on developing the Garrett’s site gets organized and meets.

“I like our little corner,” she said. “I’m going to stay on the positive side.” Current leases should keep the Bite in place at least through October 2017, Eckre said.

She said a contingent from Cochiti came across the street to the Bite to celebrate after Thursday’s ceremony. Despite the doubts the land trade raises about the Bite’s future, Eckre said returning ancestral lands to the pueblos is a great thing. “John and I feel that it’s a wrong that happened decades ago and this is something that makes it right, and that makes us very happy.”