

Portland man buys Eagle Cap Wilderness lodge

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RICHARD COCKLE

COVE, Ore. —

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New owner Barnes C. Ellis of Portland, during an inspection of the guest ranch, said he plans keep it much as it is.

"It's got a lot of local people who love it," Ellis said. "The place has a wonderful, rich history. I want to be a good steward and keep it available."

The 46-year-old Oregon City-born partner in Baker Ellis Asset Management LLC bought the 127-acre property for \$605,000 in a sealed bid auction Aug. 13. His bid was far short of the original \$4.6 million sought, but was the highest offered.

Ellis said he had visited the picturesque, off-the-grid retreat in its mountain-rimmed canyon only twice before, and hadn't been back for at least 10 years when his offer was accepted.

He drove to a wilderness trailhead near Cove on Saturday and hiked the 8 1/2 miles to the lodge, which is accessible only by wilderness trail or small aircraft. It has a 2,400-foot sod airstrip.

Minam Lodge dates to about 1950, and is the last operating wilderness lodge in eastern Oregon. Surrounded by the 560-square-mile Eagle Cap Wilderness, the state's largest wilderness area, it consists of a main lodge and dormitory, five cabins, a horse barn, corrals and a miniature sawmill. It can accommodate 35 guests.

"I especially like the idea that you have to earn it to come in and enjoy the lodge," Ellis said. "You just can't hop in your car and come out to the Minam River Lodge."

The lodge has operated as a commercial guest ranch for many years, most recently by wilderness outfitters Shawn and Shelly Steen of Joseph. Working on a contract with the former owners, the Steens have hosted about 150 paying guests during each vacation season between Memorial Day and Labor Day, charging \$135 to \$300 per night for adults, including meals.

The ranch had worn a "For Sale" sign for years, but after the Oct. 1, 2010, death of 81-year-old owner George Peekema, of Vancouver, Peekema's heirs dropped the asking price from \$4.6 million to \$2.25 million and before accepting Ellis' bid.

Information from: The Oregonian, <http://www.oregonlive.com>

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