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## Fate of Bandon Muni may be decided this week; Cabot Cliffs update

- By [Matt Ginella](#)
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What's the status of Bandon Muni?

“It's no better than 50/50 that this will happen,” says Mike Keiser, owner of Bandon Dunes, the five-course resort on the Southwest Coast of Oregon.

Keiser's admittedly frustrated. He has land, money, a vision for a lasting legacy that would continue to positively impact the locals and the local economy, and yet he's having a hard time giving it away. He has been trying to negotiate a land swap with the Oregon State Parks Department for four years. He's set to meet again on Wednesday, May 15, where he says he will make his final offer.



*The proposed site of Bandon Muni, which would be home to a 27-hole course designed by Gil Hanse.*

Keiser covets a 250-acre gorse-choked piece of coastal dunesland (pictured above) that's 15 miles south of Bandon Dunes Resort. The No. 1 golf destination in the U.S., as voted by [Golf Digest](#), consists of five courses and 85 holes. In exchange, and in his best estimation, Keiser is offering usable parkland worth four of his dollars for every one of theirs.

So what's the problem?

"There's a cultural divide," says Keiser. "Not to cast aspersions, but they're afraid."

Keiser says state park departments aren't in the business of trading land, especially rare coastal land, and he assumes they're suspicious of his intentions. In a [recent article in the Register-Guard](#), a local newspaper, writer Ron Bellamy told a story of environmental concerns, such as frogs, turtles and birds.

Keiser has always said Bandon Muni would be his philanthropic offering to a community that has afforded him the opportunity to build his dream of links golf in America. Bandon Muni would create another 80 jobs, and cater to Oregonians and locals with affordable green fees and an extensive junior caddie program.

"I see it as a \$15-million gift to Coos and Curry County golfers and juniors who don't even know they miss golf," says Keiser.

If he can't get the deal done on Wednesday, he says he'll move on. "The resort will be just fine, thank you."

If he can get the deal done, Gil Hanse, who's building the Olympic Course in Rio, will be the architect. "If it doesn't work, Gil will be just as disappointed," says Keiser, who hasn't spoken to Hanse in six months. "I've been laying low. There's nothing new to report."

Going back to 1999, with the modest opening of Bandon Dunes and a 50-room lodge, Keiser began the foundation of what has become a mecca for avid amateur golfers, with four of the top 25 public courses in the country. In doing so, he has created roughly 1,500 jobs and rescued the tenuous timber industry of Coos Bay. Not to mention the millions of dollars in donations for a local medical facility, schools, the environment and the 60-plus caddies who have gone on to earn Evans Scholarships, which consists of full college tuition to the University Oregon or Oregon State.

"I wish I had better news to report," says Keiser. "Previously, it seemed we were moving forward." Admittedly, he could build Muni on the land he owns, and it could be "pretty good," but if he could turn Hanse loose on a site like the one he wants, "it would be superlative."

Keiser hasn't become Keiser by building 'pretty good.'

## **Bandon's 'Punchbowl' seeded**



*Punchbowl at Bandon Dunes Resort*

Keiser also told me they've started seeding 'Punchbowl,' the 150,000 square-foot putting course (pictured above), designed by Tom Doak and Jim Urbina. Keiser anticipates a soft opening in September and then, due to the newness of the turf, closing it again in October until the spring of 2014.

I asked Keiser if he was afraid something like the Punchbowl, which will most likely be free and a lot of fun for the competitive types with sore feet and tight hamstrings, would steal business from his other five courses on property. "I don't fear it," says Keiser. "If people are willing to get here, I believe the more things we can present, the better. And I mean it."

To prove it, Keiser says he's also considering a second par-3 course, which would be located in the dunes south of the second hole at Bandon Trails. There's no name or specific timetable for this one, and he hasn't decided on an architect yet, but don't be surprised if it's David McLay Kidd, who built the original 18 holes at Bandon Dunes.

Keiser hasn't considered Kidd for another one of his courses until recently, after they bumped into each other twice in the past six months. Once at the grand opening of [Streamsong Resort in Florida](#), where Keiser says Kidd admitted that in some of his recent designs, he built courses too difficult for what Keiser likes to refer to as "the retail golfer."

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## New Bandon Muni? Bring It On!

Posted at 1:23 PM by [Joe Passov](#) | Categories: [Bandon Dunes](#)



*The 14th hole at Old MacDonald at the Bandon Dunes resort (Courtesy of Bandon Dunes).*

The news from coastal Oregon on Wednesday was encouraging. Bandon Dunes domo Mike Keiser met with the governor of Oregon and the Oregon State Parks Department to discuss the fate of a new course he has planned, tentatively called Bandon Muni Golf Links. “There’s no official announcement at this time,” says Bandon Dunes spokesman B.R. Koehnemann, but sources indicate that the meeting resulted in a preliminary agreement for a land swap to take place that will allow for the creation of the 27-hole course. To that, I say, “Bring it on!”

From Day 1 in the spring of 1999, passionate course connoisseurs flocked to Bandon Dunes Golf Resort, the greatest “must-play” public-course mecca ever built in the United States. So significant was its impact that in 2004, Golf Magazine named it No. 34 of the 45 Greatest Golf Moments of the past 45 years. Since then, Keiser has only enhanced the product, exponentially. Naturally, environmentalists from a fistful of factions have raised stop signs -- or at least caution flags -- but if there’s one guy to trust to get things right on the Oregon coast, it’s Keiser.

The plan Keiser has in mind is to create a St. Andrews-style muni operation; while his would be privately owned, it would be operated to benefit locals especially, as is the case with how the St. Andrews Links Trust administers its golf offerings. To that end, Keiser acquired several coastal parcels roughly 15 minutes south of Bandon Dunes and hired golf’s hottest architect, Gil Hanse, to craft 27 holes. That plan has been in place for at least two, perhaps even three years, and Hanse has completed several preliminary routings. However, Keiser has had his eye on some virtually untouched State Park land, replete with massive dunes, scrubby vegetation and magnificent ocean views that would turn his good golf course into a potentially outstanding one. He proposed a land swap with the state government, but his proposal had stalled -- or at least had been idling for many months. Optimism on Keiser’s part had clearly faded -- until now.

The age-old issue of land tampering now rears its head. Do we really need more golf in Bandon? Is it worth it to intrude on such a pristine piece of property? For the state or Oregon to part with such a parcel, there has to be an “overwhelming public benefit,” says a state parks spokesman. Keiser makes a compelling case. He’s asking for a small slice of an otherwise inaccessible plot that’s covered with gorse and other invasive plant species. In exchange he would give up land of equal or greater value, plus cash. He would offer state residents substantial discounts and invite locals from Coos and Curry Counties to play for nominal, even miniscule rates. Juniors would play free of charge and a caddie program will be established to provide jobs for young people.

So long as the bulk of the duneland is maintained in its natural state, this sounds like an “overwhelming public benefit” to me. Thinking that Keiser has kept every promise in keeping Bandon Dunes sustainable and that Gil Hanse embodies the lay-of-the-land, don’t-fight-with-nature-but-rather-work-with-it-kind of architect, the Bandon Muni project seems like a certain home run. There remain many hurdles to overcome, but for now, I’m excited to place Bandon Muni on the front burner.