

## Strawberry Peak Parcel Sold to Better Place Forests

In late September, the San Bernardino Mountains Land Trust closed the sale of fifty-two acres of land off of Highway 189 near Strawberry Peak to Better Place Forests. Better Place Forests is a mission-driven company dedicated to land conservation that provides a unique end-of-life option for those who choose cremation. Their motto is “Leave the earth better.” Because of their commitment to land conservation, Better Place Forests was a natural fit for the divestiture. Save Our Forest Association supported the sale.

The company has ten conservation memorial forests across six states. They work with land trusts to protect the land for future generations while allowing customers to choose a final resting place that leaves a legacy of conservation through the purchase of memorial trees. Along with conserving the memorial forests, for every tree sold, Better Place Forests makes a donation to One Tree Planted, a non-profit that does critical reforestation work around the country.

During a memorial ceremony in the forest, the ashes of the deceased are carefully mixed with soil from around the tree and spread over the ground. Family and friends are welcome to visit the memorial trees.

### Public Access

Since Better Place Forests took ownership of the property, SOFA and other partners have received many questions about public access to the trails near Strawberry Peak. In their other forests, access is restricted to customers and their visitors. However, Better Place Forests understands the unique dynamic in Lake Arrowhead and how beloved these local trails are.

Better Place Forest will continue to allow recreational hikers from the general public to use the trails with some limitations. They ask that hikers stay on marked arterial trails and be respectful of families in the forest. During memorial ceremonies, which occur once or twice a week, signs will be posted that the trails are closed to respect the grieving families and the intimacy of the event. On days when the trails are open to the public, they ask that visiting hikers be respectful of customers and refrain from picnicking and playing loud music. Alternative access to Strawberry Peak and the San Bernardino National Forest trails can be found off of Highway 18.

If you are interested in bringing a large group to the forest to hike, like Boy Scouts, school groups, etc., please contact them in advance so that they can facilitate the best forest experience. They welcome this type of engagement, and they would happily host your group as the schedule allows.

### Development Plans

Better Place Forests intends to make physical improvements that enhance the experience for visitors while maintaining the existing character and history of the property. Over the next few years, they plan to build a small “Welcome House” for customers, reconfigure the entry/exit points from Highway 189, add parking, and enhance the existing trails. Most importantly, they will maintain the forest health by doing fuels reduction, removing invasive species, and ensuring that the trees and habitats are thriving.



Entrance to Better Place Forests Property

### Outreach

They welcome the community to come and learn more about the forest, their approach to end-of-life, and the forest. If you have questions about access or want to learn more, please reach out to them directly. Chad Barnes, the onsite manager for the property, can be reached at [chad.barnes@betterplaceforests.com](mailto:chad.barnes@betterplaceforests.com).

Based on SOFA’s experience with Better Place Forests, we feel confident that Better Place Forests will be an excellent steward of the land and that they will maintain the property in a way that honors the mission and value of conservation.

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