



Time is Running Out on Preserve Fundraiser Challenge

Efforts to turn a 900-acre private ranch into public space got a boost earlier this month, but time is running out to meet a dollar-to-dollar fundraising challenge to help create the proposed Pismo Preserve.

PB Coast Views LLC owns the property, and The Land Conservancy of San Luis Obispo wants to purchase the land that runs along the hillside behind Pismo Beach City Hall to Price Canyon Road. It comes with a \$11.7 price tag. The Land Conservancy is working to get about \$8 million from state agencies and \$2 million from local government.

"Just from the visibility and what this offers the community we really want to promote healthy living, getting people outside and an appreciation for nature," said Land Conservancy Executive Director Kaila Dettman. "It would also provide a boost to the local economy in terms of drawing tourist to our county, which we all know is a big part of our livelihood here. It is an amazing piece of property. It is beautiful out there. It is hard to describe how phenomenal it is. Because of dwindling budgets, a lot of government agencies aren't able to own and maintain properties like this going forward. In terms of conservancy-owned properties, this is what we would call a signature preserve. This is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to purchase a world-class park for our community."

The conservancy hopes to raise the remaining money through community donations by July 1 of this year.

Longtime Land Conservancy supporter Richard Alberts of San Luis Obispo kicked off what is hoped will morph into a financial landslide. He has agreed to match all donations from community members up to \$10,000 through the end of March.

"He has gotten us off to a great start," Dettman said. "He wanted to inspire people in the community to give."

The Pismo Preserve would be a day-use park open to hikers, mountain bikers, horseback riders, walkers and their leashed dogs as well as other passive outdoor activities.

Human activities aside, the preserve would also serve to protect



the federally threatened California red-legged frog, the southwestern pond turtle, steelhead trout as well as habitat for several small and endemic and endangered wild flowers.

"There is something there for everyone," Dettman said. "It is a spectacular coastal property. It has a view that I don't think I have every really seen anywhere in the county, at least on public properties. It has amazing wildlife habitats, Oak woodlands and some threatened and endangered species on site, so from a wildlife perspective, we want to protect it."

Currently, there is 10-miles of existing ranch road and single-track trails that the Land Conservancy would make improvements on. Interpretive signs would also be installed and a parking lot and restroom would be constructed at the entrance to the preserve along Mattie Road.

Dettman said that PB Coast Views LLC has had discussions with the Land Conservancy over the past couple of years about what a conservation real estate deal might look like.

"If we are unable to raise the money, then we can't move forward with the transaction," Dettman said.

"Our purchasing agreement would expire and the property owners will look around for someone else to purchase it, and it could be developed some day. Now that the price tag is out there, I would be

surprised if a developer didn't want to swoop in at that price point. But, really, the owners are conservation minded. They want to see it be a public amenity."

Should the Land Conservancy purchase the property, Pismo Preserve would be open to the public in the summer of 2015.

"We want to get it open to the public as soon as we can," Dettman said.

Future plans include school field trips, docent-led hikes and perhaps a trail run event.

The Pismo Preserve is part of the conservancy's 30th anniversary Heart & Soil campaign that challenges the community to contribute \$5 million over the next five years in order to leverage an additional \$25 million in funds they plan to bring in from outside San Luis Obispo County.

The Land Conservancy of San Luis Obispo County is a local nonprofit land trust working to protect and restore local landscapes for the benefit of people and wildlife. The land trust's efforts help protect drinking water sources, prevent poorly planned development, restore wildlife habitat and promote family farmlands and ranches.

For more information or to make a donation to the Pismo Preserve, visit www.lcslo.org or call 544-9096. A video tour of the proposed Pismo Preserve can be found at <http://youtu.be/-Gbg-f7owKE>. ♣

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