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Coastal panel expected to OK \$5 million to help buy 2,400-acre addition to Montaña de Oro

Vote looms on Avila Ranch funding

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The California Coastal Conservancy is expected next week to approve \$5 million in funding for the preservation of 2,400 acres of land at Avila Beach.

The conservancy vote on Nov. 6 is the first of three votes by state agencies in the coming months that will provide the bulk of the funding for the Avila Ranch, centered on Wild Cherry Canyon between Avila Beach and Port San Luis.

Other major state funders are the Department of Parks and Recreation, the Wildlife Conservation Board and private donors.

The deal is expected to be finalized in the spring, said Kara Blakeslee, who is coordinating the deal through the American Land Conservancy.

"Things are coming together nicely," she said. "The Coastal Conservancy vote is important because it sets the stage for the next two."

THE FACTS IN BRIEF

- California Coastal Conservancy will vote Nov. 6 to approve \$5 million in funding for the preservation of 2,400 acres of land on Wild Cherry Canyon between Avila Beach and Port San Luis.
- With Avila Ranch and other Irish Hills land acquisitions, Montaña de Oro State Park will grow to be one of the largest in the state system.

FUNDING SOURCES FOR CONSERVATION OF RANCH

Coastal Conservancy	\$5,000,000
Department of Parks & Recreation	\$6,500,000
Wildlife Conservation Board	\$6,876,000
California Transportation Commission	\$1,030,000
SLO Council of Governments	\$350,000
Regional Water Quality Control Board	\$950,000
Hind Foundation	\$150,000
Private Donors	\$3,128,000
TOTAL	\$24,000,000

The Coastal Conservancy meeting will be held at the Monterey Conference Center. It begins at 9 a. m.

Once the deal is complete, the Avila Ranch along with other lands already acquired in the Irish Hills will be turned over to the state Parks Department and added to Montaña de Oro State Park.

The park is set to grow by more than 5,500 acres, making it one of the largest in the state system.

One of the key features of the acquisition is the creation of a new 20-mile segment of the California Coastal Trail from Los Osos to Avila Beach, said Tim Duff, Central Coast project manager with the Coastal Conservancy.

“One of the reasons we are participating is that we’re excited about the new Coastal Trail link,” he said.

The state Wildlife Conservation Board is expected to approve nearly \$7 million in funding for the ranch in February, Blakeslee said. The American Land Conservancy is conducting its own fundraising drive.

The group needs to raise more than \$3 million from private sources. This will make up the shortfall in the overall acquisition price of \$24 million not provided by public sources.

Conserving the Avila Ranch is the last part of a process that began earlier this year. State agencies funded the purchase of 730 acres from the Andre family as well as 1,279 acres from The Nature Conservancy.

These lands, coupled with the 1,500-acre Hibberd Preserve, donated by the Land Conservancy of San Luis Obispo County, lie north of the Avila Ranch and will connect it to Montaña de Oro.

Once the conservation deal is complete, the Parks Department will take possession. Parks officials hope to open the new parklands to the public soon thereafter.

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