

## Wild Cherry Canyon: Buying a view for Montaña de Oro

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**By Joe Johnston | The Tribune 2008**

Panorama of the Pacific: The view west from Wild Cherry Canyon looks out toward Port San Luis.

In what was more of a love fest than a budget allocation, the county Board of Supervisors Tuesday enthusiastically voted to contribute \$500,000 to the effort to add Wild Cherry Canyon to Montaña de Oro State Park.

With the addition of the county contribution, the American Land Conservancy now only needs \$1.4 million to complete the \$24 million deal. Once done, Montaña de Oro will be a bay-to-bay park, stretching from the southern end of Morro Bay at Los Osos to San Luis Obispo Bay at Avila Beach.

A diversity of groups, from the San Luis Obispo Chamber of Commerce to the county Parks Commission, spoke in favor of the allocation. None of the 24 public speakers who commented Tuesday opposed the funding.

Many spoke of the need for the supervisors to take the long view and leave a legacy for future generations, despite economic hard times and the uncertain future of funding for state parks.

“No one has ever looked back on these conservation deals and said that was a mistake,” said Supervisor Bruce Gibson.

The money for the contribution comes from a county parks fund into which residential developers pay as environmental mitigation for their projects. Much of the residential development in the county in recent years has taken place on the Nipomo Mesa, said Supervisor Katcho Achadjian.

This prompted Achadjian, whose district includes the Nipomo Mesa, to explain his vote to spend about half the money in the parks fund on a project outside the Mesa.

“The bottom line is that when we can bank land like this we should, no matter whose backyard it’s in,” he said.

Expansion of the park will allow for the creation of a new, 20-mile segment of the California Coastal Trail. Hiking or biking that trail is bound to be “one of the signature experiences of our county,” said Supervisor Adam Hill, whose district includes the property.

Kara Blakeslee, Wild Cherry Canyon project manager for the American Land Conservancy, said the next goal in completing the deal will be to free up various state conservation bond monies. These funds have been frozen as a result of the state’s budget crisis.

The group has until the end of the year to complete the deal.

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