

Preservation of Wild Cherry gets private funding boost

David Sneed

Private donors have contributed more than \$207,000 to the effort to conserve Wild Cherry Canyon behind Avila Beach and add it to Montaña de Oro State Park.

The American Land Conservancy is continuing its efforts to raise the last \$1.3 million to acquire the 2,400-acre ranch, project manager Kara Blakeslee said in an e-mail to supporters. The total purchase price is \$24 million.

The acquisition, combined with other recent land purchases in the Irish Hills area, would add 5,500 acres to Montaña de Oro, expanding it by 65 percent and making it one of the largest parks in the state parks system.

The park would then stretch from Morro Bay to the north to San Luis Obispo Bay to the south and add 20 miles to the California Coastal Trail.

Most of the money for the purchase comes from voter-approved conservation bonds.

However, those funds have been frozen as a result of the state's budget crisis. No date has been set for releasing the funds, Blakeslee said.

The group is also working on updating the land appraisal as required by the funding agencies.

To learn more about the Wild Cherry Canyon conservation project, go to www.alcnet.org.

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