

CENTRAL COUNTY

CONTRA COSTA TIMES

Group to buy rest of canyon property: Preserved habitat, watershed part of Muir Heritage plans for Franklin Canyon

By Denis Cuff

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The Muir Heritage Land Trust has secured a deal to buy and preserve the last 60 acres of Franklin Canyon land in Hercules where city voters blocked plans for 500 houses and a hotel.

Now the conservation group needs to come up with \$2.6 million in grants and donations by June 26 to carry out its plan to buy all 483 acres of the Franklin Canyon property once slated for development.

A deal to buy the first 423 acres from a group of investors for \$1.8 million was announced last year.

"With this amended purchase agreement, we will be able to permanently protect the entire parcel. It's the whole deal," said Linus Eukel, executive director of the land trust, which has preserved 2,000 acres of open space mostly between Martinez and Hercules.

The 60-acre purchase site, adjacent to Muir Heritage's 702-acre Fernandez Ranch property, includes the flattest and most developable portion of the canyon property, Eukel said.

Muir Heritage plans to preserve the land to protect wildlife habitat, watershed lands draining into Refugio Creek and routes for public hiking and riding trails.

In 2004, 63 percent of Hercules voters approved Measure M, blocking GreenPark developers' housing plan on the 483 acres.

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ANNIVERSARY DINNER

Muir Heritage will hold its 20th anniversary dinner from 5 to 9 p.m. Aug. 15 at the John Muir National Historic Site in Martinez. Information at 925-228-5460.