

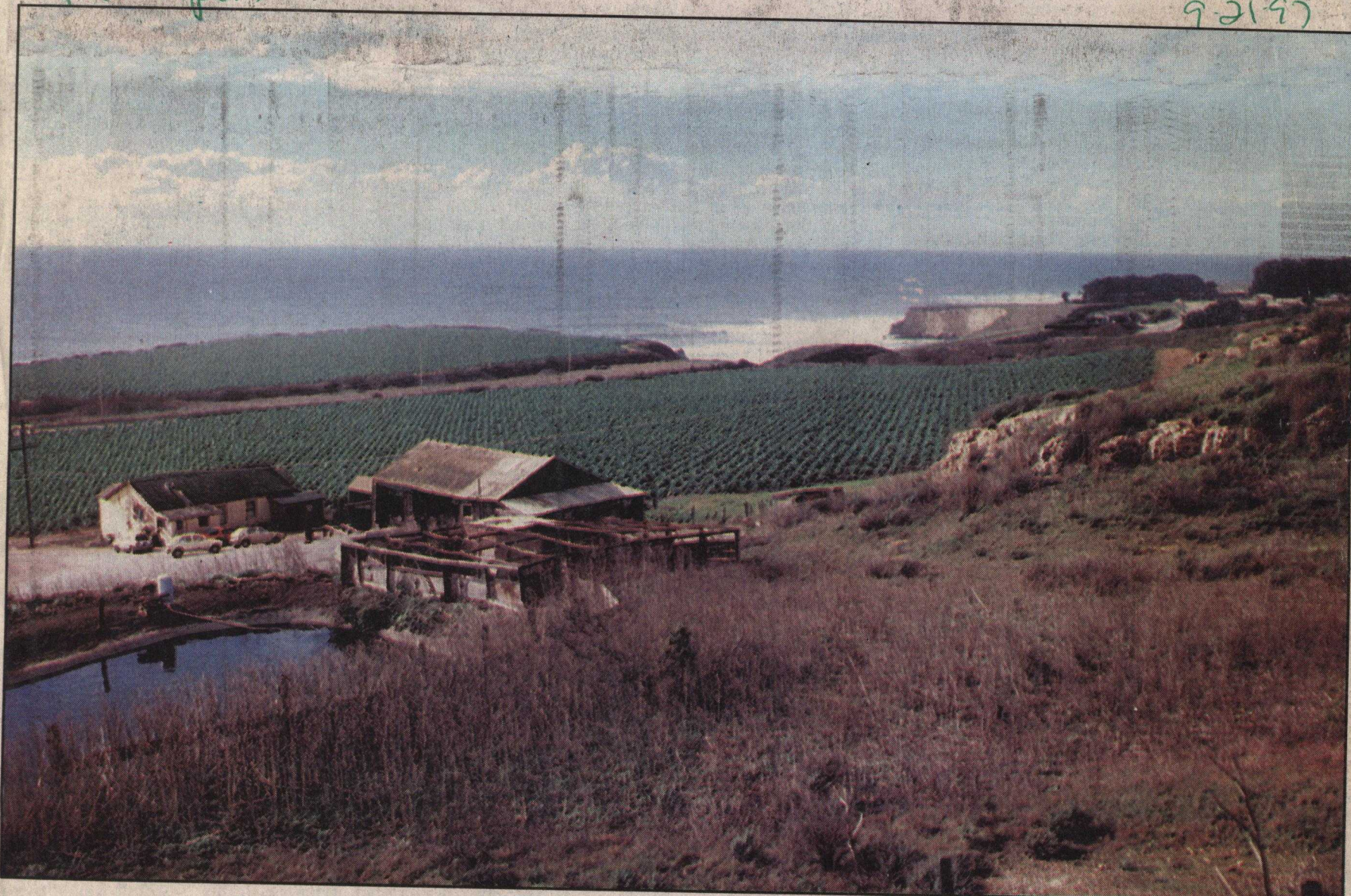
# North Coast deal disclosed

Save-the-Redwoods League to buy Coast Dairies

■ **SURPRISE AGREEMENT:** Environmental group, developer worked out the deal in secret negotiations

■ **FUNDS SOUGHT:** \$5.6 million must be raised by Dec. 31

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Dan Coyro/Sentinel

An environmental group will buy the scenic Coast Dairies land, which offers sweeping vistas of the ocean near Davenport.

By BRAYTON TOMPKINS  
Sentinel staff writer

SANTA CRUZ — After months of secret negotiations, the Save-the-Redwoods League announced Saturday it will acquire control of the hotly contested 7,500-acre Coast Dairies property that surrounds Davenport.

"Permanent protection of the spectacular Coast Dairies property is within reach for the first time," said Mary

Angle-Franzini, league executive director. "This has been the goal of the environmental community locally and statewide for many years."

The league said it will purchase a stock option for the parcel Monday from Nevada developer Brian Sweeney, owner of Nevada and Pacific Land, L.L.C. The surprise announcement came in a statement Saturday after nearly five months of confiden-

tial negotiations between the league and Sweeney.

League officials were unavailable for comment. No public statement was made concerning the purchase price, but as recently as 1989, the property was valued at around \$15 million.

Sweeney, who was also unavailable for comment, bought the stock option two years ago from a group of Swiss dairy farmers who had owned the

land from 1902.

The league's race to buy the option began when Sweeney fell under public scrutiny in May, after he decided to apply for division of the land into more than 100 parcels. Sweeney claimed that the divisions were only a necessary step toward a legal appraisal of the land, while local legislators contended that the proposed parcels

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## Land deal

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were an attempt to make more money by selling the land piecemeal.

"That land doesn't need to be divided. It could easily be appraised as one parcel," said Third District Supervisor Mardi Wormhoudt, whose district encompasses the scenic Coast Dairies property. "If he (Sweeney) thought he could somehow develop this land intensively, I could have told him it wasn't going to happen."

After Sweeney announced his intentions, the league immediately launched a statewide fund-raising campaign that Franzini said garnered "very significant funds raised from a range of private donors."

Before the stock option can be exercised, Franzini said an additional \$5.6 million must be raised by Dec. 31 or the price will increase. To do this, the league anticipates a partnership with the county and state.

That partnership appears to have begun already.

Assemblyman Fred Keeley, D-Boulder Creek, joined forces with the league about 10 days before the end of the legislative session. Keeley organized a joint conference committee of both senators and representatives and called for a bi-

partisan effort to save the Coastal Dairies property.

"The willingness of all members of that conference committee to agree to support the acquisition of this land became the momentum we needed in the Legislature to get the money," said Keeley. "This is a critical acquisition. It is a property that contains substantial delicate environmental resources and having those resources free from the pressures of development is very important."

On the last day of the legislative session, Keeley, along with state Sen. Bruce McPherson, R-Santa Cruz, secured \$1 million for the Coast Dairies purchase with an addendum to the state budget that would use unallocated money from the state Resources Agency to help defray the cost of the stock option.

The addendum awaits Gov. Pete Wilson's signature.

"That whole property has been the subject of possible public purchase for a long time. In terms of conservation, it really fits in well with what people in this county and district want," McPherson said.

The league is also in line to receive another \$700,000 remaining from the last State Parks Bond Act, approved by voters in 1988. The county Agricultural Conservation Easement Committee recom-

mended Thursday that the Board of Supervisors allocate the unspent funds to the Coast Dairies project.

The supervisors are to discuss the issue sometime in the future. But Wormhoudt speculated that the proposal is likely to pass.

"I think it's a wonderful idea. It's absolutely the proper way to use that money," Wormhoudt said. "The Coast Dairies property is the last, large ocean front property on the North Coast. That is not only of local significance, but state and national significance as well."

Franzini cited the Peninsula Open Space Trust, the Santa Cruz Land Trust, the Nature Conservancy and the Trust for Public Land as major contributors to the fund-raising and negotiation processes.

Although plans for the 7.4-mile coastal stretch of land remain uncertain, Franzini said it will continue to be leased for agricultural cultivation and shale extraction, while other options include maximizing the parcel's varied and abundant natural resources in coordination with the adjoining 3,200-acre Swanton Pacific Ranch.

In the past, the league has purchased lands such as Gray Whale Ranch, and then sold them to environmental groups or agricultural organizations that will maintain the ecology of the properties in perpetuity.