

State grant for Elkhorn project approved

Plans are under way to convert the 150-acre Azevedo Ranch on Elkhorn Slough to a low-chemical-input agricultural and natural preserve through the efforts of a coalition of environmental and agricultural representatives.

Last Friday, a \$932,00 grant to buy the property was approved following testimony from North Monterey County Supervisor Marc Del Piero and Craig Pritchard, executive director of the Monterey County Agricultural and Historical

Land Conservancy, before the California State Coastal Conservancy.

The low-chemical project, envisioned as a strawberry farm with a native-plant buffer that will assist in biological pest control, is to serve as a regional model for economical strawberry farming next to a natural-resource preserve.

Purchase of the land, which will extend the Nature Conservancy preserve from the mountains to the coastline, would also allow for implementation of the Monterey

County Wetlands Management Plan sponsored by Del Piero.

Project manager Laurel Marcus said the intent of the design is to resolve conflicts of agricultural uses and natural-resource values on the site, whose slough side is marked by a series of pocket salt marshes.

In her project summary, Marcus touches on the problems resulting from nearby intensive agriculture operations, such as removal of the upper fringes of the marsh, sedi-

mentation and inflow of pesticides and fertilizers into the wetlands.

The Land Conservancy will take responsibility for 83 acres of the agricultural land and the Nature Conservancy will take care of the 67 acres of natural resources.

Revenue will be generated by the sale of the five-acre residential ranch and leasing the strawberry project.

The Castroville-based Land Conservancy was established in 1985 as a non-profit organization dedicated to the preservation of the agricultural and historic resources of Monterey County. The state Coastal Conservancy allocates voter-approved funds for coastal preservation.

—Laramie Trevino