

# More funds sought for habitat

*Endangered Species*

## County says \$700,000 is promised toward \$3.2 million for sandy site

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Seven months after negotiating a compromise agreement that would preserve a rare Santa Cruz Mountains sand-land habitat while allowing a sand-mining firm to continue operating nearby, Santa Cruz County officials

are still trying to raise funds to purchase the 36-acre site.

The environmentally sensitive sand-hill parcel, located on the south ridge of the Quail Hollow Quarry between Zayante and Ben Lomond, is home to 78 unusual plant species — including three on the federal endangered list —

and 13 locally rare species of animals.

Granite Rock Company, which owns the 240-acre sand quarry, agreed to sell the south ridge to the state as an environmental preserve for \$3.2 million. The deal, which would include the donation of about 60 adjacent acres to the county, must be completed by mid-1998.

Under the terms of the settlement, Santa Cruz Aggregates, which operates the quarry under

a lease agreement, would be allowed to mine sand from the center of the quarry as long as neighbors' concerns about dust and noise are answered.

The dispute began in 1988 when Granite Rock wanted to expand mining operations.

The company sued the county in 1990 after the board of supervisors denied its claim. Granite Rock then stayed the suit and tried to negotiate a settlement with the county, environmental

groups, and neighboring residents who were concerned that mining expansion would increase noise and dust pollution.

The county obtained a court order lifting the stay in fall of 1993. The following spring, shortly after a hearing date was set, negotiations resumed and the compromise agreement was reached.

So far, county, state agencies and private foundations have promised to contribute about

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\$700,000 toward the purchase price, said Supervisor Fred Keeley, who negotiated the sale agreement. The county has also applied for about \$900,000 in federal grants, he said, and is discussing a loan package with the Packard Foundation.

"We're trying to move on several fronts," Keeley said.

County officials invited representatives from several state agencies, local environmental organizations and others to tour the site Sunday. Peter Raven, a world-renowned botanist and director of the Missouri Botanical Garden, and Boyd Gibbons, director of the California Department of Fish and Game, talked with the group, which also included John Schmidt, executive director of the state Wildlife Conservation Board, quarry officials and site neighbors, after the tour.

"Dr. Raven was impressed with the unique biotic habitat," Keeley

said. "The (other) botanists were just beside themselves with excitement about meeting Dr. Raven."

If the south ridge sale is consummated, a management plan will be drafted to preserve the habitat while providing limited access to the fragile site, Keeley said.

The settlement was reached last summer after six years of negotiations among environmentalists, quarry officials, site neighbors and representatives from Santa Cruz County. It has been characterized as a win-win agreement which balances economic, environmental and residential concerns.

The parcel is a biological island of inland marine sand and home to the Santa Cruz cypress, Ben Lomond spineflower and Santa Cruz wallflower, all classified as endangered by the federal government. The Zayante band-winged grasshopper, the Mount Hermon June beetle and the Santa Cruz rain beetle, currently be-

ing considered for inclusion to the federal endangered species list, are also found on the site, which biologists from the California Department of Fish and Game consider one of the most significant natural areas within the state.