

Davenport residents celebrate preservation of Coast Dairies

By DONNA KIMURA
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DAVENPORT — The preservation of 7,500 acres of spectacular North Coast property was celebrated Thursday night by the small town that sits in the middle of it all.

More than 100 people gathered in Davenport — population 200 — to rejoice in the protection of the Coast Dairies property as well as make it known that they are committed to being involved.

"It's a clear demonstration of the level of support this small community has about the property," said John Barnes, board member of the Land Trust of Santa Cruz County.

The property includes 7.4 miles of shoreline, seven important beaches and their watersheds, historic limestone mining and agricultural land and vital wildlife habitat.

It has been owned for years by a group of Swiss dairy farmers. Save-the-Redwoods League, however, gained control of an option for the land last year, saving the scenic property from possible development. It was one the most significant land deals for Santa Cruz County.

Barnes noted that that it felt "like the end of something" because the property was saved. At the same time, it is the beginning, he said.

About \$4 million still must be raised, according to officials with the Land Trust, which is leading the local effort.

Davenport residents can help not only through financial contributions, but by lending their voices in support of the project, said Laura Perry, executive director of the trust.

A letter requesting donations recently raised \$30,000 in local contributions. More fund-raising events will be announced in the future.

Representative of four organizations — Trust for Public Land, Land Trust of Santa Cruz County, Nature Conservancy and Save-the-Redwoods League — will also be part of a planning team to determine the property's ownership and management.

To aid in the planning, a large model of the vast property was unveiled Thursday during the celebration at the Davenport

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Fire and Rescue station.

It will give people an idea of the size of the property as well as the varied terrain.

"The model is to go back to time after time," said Bud McCrary, a longtime resident of the North Coast and an owner of Big Creek Lumber Co. He helped fund the costs of the elaborate model along with an anonymous donor and the model makers B & C Models/Charles Cooper.

It is expected to go on display at the main branch of the Santa Cruz City-County Library next week.

A series of slides by photographer Frank Balthis showed off the spectacular features of the property Thursday night.

A developer who sees the same images may see dollar signs, noted Santa Cruz County Supervisor Mardi Wormhoudt.

"This purchase is probably the most important purchase," she said.

A hundred years from now a child will travel through the area and see the North Coast in the same way that people do today, Wormhoudt said.

"It will be extremely important to put together a plan with access to beaches, recreational opportunities and still keep land in agricultural use, which I think most of us consider very important," she said.

The significance of the deal was not lost on the residents of Davenport, who are among the most affected by the deal.

"My family roots are here in Davenport," said Marilyn Demos Fravel. "It's an honor to be part of the current community and the tradition of the area."

The Coast Dairies property, she said, is significant in size as well as coastal beauty and agricultural heritage.