

Local news

Big Basin Small parcel plays a big role in connecting parks

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BIG BASIN — A small, but significant piece of land has been acquired by the state to connect Big Basin Redwoods State Park and Ano Nuevo State Reserve.

The majestic 41-acre parcel creates a link of state park lands, stretching from the redwood forests to the Pacific Ocean.

"It's a wonderful step in connecting Big Basin and Ano Nuevo," said state Department of Parks and Recreation Director Don Murphy. "It's an opportunity to get from Big Basin to the sea."

Environmentalists and state officials gathered on the scenic land to announce the deal Friday.

Parks officials said they hope to clear trails connecting the 20,000-acre Big Basin and the nearly 4,000-acre Ano Nuevo reserve by spring.

The site features sweeping views of the Pigeon Point Lighthouse, the Monterey Peninsula and the mountains.

Within a small area the land includes several unique habitats including chaparral, coastal grasslands and forests made up of redwoods, Douglas firs and oaks.

Property owner Jim Werle bought 139 acres of forest land between the two parks in 1989 with plans to one day build a family home. A Scotts Valley resident, he is a geographic information systems analyst

with the Association of Monterey Bay Area Governments.

In the spring of 1996, he went to the Sempervirens Fund and offered to sell the key ridgetop for the link.

"If you look at a map, it's obviously a key piece," Werle said.

By preserving it as a park, he said his family will be able to enjoy the land along with the rest of the public.

The final sale involved splitting off the 41 acres, valued at \$85,000, from the rest of Werle's property. The state could only allocate \$15,000 so Sempervirens had to find the rest.

The group, the state's oldest land con-

servancy, seeks to preserve land in the Santa Cruz Mountains. It has focused on a \$3.5 million campaign to purchase more than 800 acres of forest along Gazos Creek to add to Butano State Park.

"Sempervirens was not in position to break stride on the Gazos campaign," said Verlyn Clausen, executive director of the organization.

The group, however, then turned to the Jeangerard Foundation, which has the motto "No Nonsense Environmentalism," for assistance. The Jeangerard family has a fondness for Big Basin as well as long ties with the Sempervirens Fund. They underwrote the Sempervirens Fund's portion

of the purchase.

"We had this proposal presented to us," Bob Jeangerard. "It is what we attempted to do with our foundation."

Park officials said they hoped connecting the parks would benefit different species by giving them more protected land and help people by keeping them connected with nature.

"The health of every park unit is dependent on these connections," said David Vincent, Santa Cruz District Superintendent for state parks.

Vincent said it will be important to look at other gaps to make the ties even stronger.