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Lakeside Land to Become Habitat Preserve with \$8 Million Acquisition

By LOU HIRSH

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Leaders of the San Diego Association of Governments (SANDAG) and conservation groups have announced an \$8 million acquisition of 410 acres in Lakeside, to preserve habitats for endangered species.

The acquisition of the East County land was announced at an Oct. 13 news conference by leaders of SANDAG and the city of Santee, Marine Corps Air Station Miramar and the Endangered Habitats Conservancy.

Officials said the acquisition, involving the former Lakeside Downs land on Oak Creek Drive near state Route 67, is made possible with \$4 million in funding being provided by SANDAG through its TransNet Environmental Mitigation Program. Another \$4 million will be provided by the U.S. Department of Defense under its Readiness and Environmental Protection Integration Program.

A SANDAG statement said the Endangered Habitats Conservancy worked with all parties to put together the acquisition and has assumed ownership and management of the land, which is being acquired from Helix Land Cos.

Officials said the land was previously proposed for a 140-home development and contains a "robust population" of the threatened California gnatcatcher, high-value coastal sage scrub habitat, and extensive stands of spiny redberry, host plant for the rare Hermes copper butterfly.

The acquisition is expected to help close gaps between large swaths of conserved land and parcels targeted for conservation, officials said. The site's preservation will also help advance goals in the multiple species conservation plans of the city of Santee and county of San Diego.

Officials said the preservation will also support military readiness by helping MCAS Miramar avoid encroachment of development that could restrict military training or operations.

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