

Groups work to preserve habitat in Lakeside



[\(/staff/karen-pearlman/\)](#)

By [Karen Pearlman \(/staff/karen-pearlman/\)](#) | 2:22 p.m. Oct. 13, 2015



A 410-acre property in Lakeside, once proposed for a 140-home development, will now be preserved as open space. — *Karen Pearlman/Union-Tribune*

LAKESIDE — A 410-acre swath of land in Lakeside will now be preserved as open space. The sensitive habitat, however, will be closed to the public.

The San Diego Association of Governments contributed \$4 million, the U.S. Department of Defense chipped in another \$4 million to purchase the habitat-rich property called Lakeside Downs.

The property is home to the threatened California gnatcatcher, mule deer, coastal sage scrub and strands of spiny redberry. The plant is the main host for a rare species of butterfly. The Lakeside property is between other areas of conserved land, and helps build San Diego County's Multiple Species Conservation Plan.

The land buy also will prevent development from encroaching on the Miramar Marine base, said Lt. Col. Donald Presto, executive officer at Marine Corps Air Station Miramar. The purchase will help the Marines avoid future land-use conflicts.

On Tuesday, Presto and other military and government officials gathered on the property and heralded its purchase from the Helix Land Co., Ltd. The area is now in the hands of the Endangered Habitats Conservancy, which closed escrow at the end of August.

The conservancy manages nearly 5,000 acres of conserved lands. Michael Beck, the conservancy's executive officer, said protecting and monitoring the Lakeside Downs property is another step toward a goal of preserving important ecosystems throughout Southern California.

"Conservation of this property is very important strategically," said Michael Beck, executive officer at the Endangered Habitats Conservancy. "We all share a responsibility to preserve the unique natural resources and landscapes of our home, but it is not really ours. We are temporary caretakers."

Beck said the area will be closed to the public for biological reasons as well as its high density of scrub making it an extreme fire danger. He said one of the things he is looking forward to is the return of the Hermes Copper Butterfly, which one thrived in the area but in recent years has been rarely spotted.

