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Another block builds protection for pine forest

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Another 4.5 acres of rugged Strawberry Canyon on Cambria's Lodge Hill is now protected from development by the land's new owner, Greenspace — The Cambria Land Trust. The acquisition expands the trust's preserve there to more than 20 acres, or about one third of the approximately 60-acre canyon area.

Greenspace has scheduled a celebratory hiking open house from noon to 3 p.m. Sunday, March 25, at the site. Participants should meet at Burton Drive and Kay Street. The newly conserved, nearly rectangular parcel, which butts up against the northeast end of Greenspace's previous 16-acre preserve in the canyon, starts near that intersection.

Escrow closed Feb. 27 on the \$175,000 land purchase from a foreclosure by a Texas bank, according to Richard Hawley, Greenspace's executive director. He said the acquisition was paid for with a bequest from the Lillian Gleicher estate and other donations.

Strawberry Canyon runs approximately northeast from the Camp Ocean Pines property off Randall Drive to the Top of the World neighborhood east of the south end of Burton Drive. The canyon includes dense pine-and-oak forest, with a hiking trail through publicly held portions, a meandering creek, lots of wildlife — and a substantial crop of poison oak. With the new land added in, Hawley said, the trail loop now is about 1.5 miles long.

The land trust is fundraising to establish a \$20,000 endowment to manage the property, and has acquired \$15,000 of that amount within about six weeks, Hawley said.

Biologist Galen Rathbun, who lives at the top of the canyon and frequently hikes through it, said the newly protected property is important because, "In addition to the often-stated need to protect biodiversity and the unique Monterey pine forest we live in, we need to implement management measures to ensure the long-term sustainability of the forest," which is addressed in more detail in the Cambria Forest Management Plan.

"One important aspect of this is the need to set aside from development relatively large blocks of forest," which will, in the long run, benefit the entire stand, Rathbun continued. "Strawberry Canyon is not only becoming one of these larger blocks, but it is adjacent to several other large blocks, including Rancho Marino, Camp Ocean Pines, and some

other privately held pieces, which makes the canyon an increasingly important component in the conservation of the forest.”

The Cambria Community Services District and county planners have accepted the forest management plan’s precepts, but the document hasn’t yet been formally adopted or implemented, primarily because of a lack of funding.

For details, go to www.greenspacecambria.org.

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