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BLM Buys Land Near Ashland for \$1 Million

By Associated Press

MEDFORD, Ore. (AP) — In what could be the first of several such sales, the U.S. Bureau of Land Management spent more than \$1 million to purchase 890 acres of private land within the boundaries of the Cascade-Siskiyou National Monument.

The San Francisco-based Pacific Forest Trust has purchased almost 5,000 acres, mostly from timber companies, in hopes that the BLM will eventually have the money to buy the land and add it to the monument for conservation, the Mail Tribune newspaper reported.

The trust began accruing the parcels as they came up for sale after the monument was created in 2000.

"We went out on a limb and bought property from willing land owners at fair market value in the expectation the BLM will eventually have the funds to buy it," said John Bernstein, vice president of conservation for the nonprofit. "We're doing this basically at cost."

The 52,940-acre monument is located in the mountainous area east of Ashland; two prominent peaks are Pilot Rock and Soda Mountain. The monument has more than 3,500 plant and animal species, and 120 species of butterflies.

More than half the land is federally owned, but there are thousands of private parcels that the trust says are not being preserved. The trust's goal is to continue snapping up those acres as they go on sale, then transfer them to the BLM when the agency can afford to pay.

"There isn't a parcel they have that we wouldn't take," said Howard Hunter, the BLM's assistant monument manager.

"But we can't guarantee purchase because we're not in control of the funding to buy the properties," he added. "They started buying the property in the hopes we would buy it from them. But we can't make any commitments. I commend them for their act of faith."