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Pacific Crest Trail Association Raises \$300,000 to Protect Trail Segment in Oregon

By Randy Minetor

An era of economic downturn may not seem like the time to launch a major fundraising campaign to protect a one-mile stretch of trail, but the Pacific Crest Trail Association (PCTA), facing a critical juncture, managed to pull off just such a fundraising coup in the last six months.

The PCTA, the supervisory organization for the Pacific Crest National Scenic Trail (PCT), announced today that it has raised the \$300,000 necessary to purchase a conservation easement on one threatened mile of the trail in southern Oregon.

More than 250 miles of the 2,650-mile PCT are on private land, including about 1,500 individual parcels, noted Liz Bergeron, executive director of the PCTA. "This was our first project of this type, and it's very, very exciting," she said. "There are so many people who believe in the concept of protecting open space around the trail. There's no question that this trail touches people's lives."

The success of this first fundraising project signals opportunities to look ahead to preserving the open space around more of the privately owned parcels, which constitute a little less than ten percent of the trail's total length.

The non-profit trail organization raised the funds from private donors to purchase the conservation easement, which protects this segment of the PCT from future development. Located just outside of Ashland, Oregon, the privately owned 153-acre parcel is known as the Keene Creek property, and lies within the greater boundary of the nearly 53,000-acre Cascade-Siskiyou National Monument, established by President Bill Clinton in 2000.

The property includes large meadows and stands of pine, fir and cedar trees, as well as juniper and oak. Deer, elk, coyote and black bear visit the area. The total national monument attracts more than 200 bird species annually, including endangered species like the great gray owl and the peregrine falcon.

The PCTA had a right-of-way easement to a strip of land through part of the national monument, but this agreement did not extend to the area flanking the trail. Not only were the surrounding flora and fauna at risk, but residential and commercial development, logging and mineral extraction operations also could occur next to the PCT.

By acquiring a conservation easement, the PCTA has protected the land surrounding the PCT segment in perpetuity, gaining legal agreement from the landowner that the land will never be developed, even if it is sold.

“The Cascade-Siskiyou National Monument is our country’s first monument created solely for the preservation of biodiversity,” says Laurie Wayburn, president and co-founder of the Pacific Forest Trust, which provided technical expertise for the easement project.

“The acquisition of this conservation easement on the Keene Creek property is important to protecting the Pacific Crest Trail, and to conserving the threatened landscapes within the Monument that are not protected by federal designation.

Our partnership with the Pacific Crest Trail Association was a natural outcome of our shared desire to protect this land.”

The Southern Oregon Land Conservancy also assisted in bringing the project to fruition.

The fundraising effort began with an anonymous springboard gift of \$100,000.

“There were large donors and lots of smaller donors—I’d say more than 600,” said Bergeron.

“Now we’re looking ahead at the fifteen hundred unprotected parcels, and looking at ourselves as an organization, and deciding what we need to do to build our capacity. We need to determine how to protect all of this trail.”