

**'IT'S A PHENOMENAL PLACE'**

# Save Mount Diablo wrangles 154 acres

\$1 million conservation easement with Concord equestrian group staves off home development

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For years, a group of local conservationists has tried to acquire a “missing mile” of land at Mount Diablo’s north peak surrounded by vast swaths of open space it had already protected against future development.

Now the group, Save Mount Diablo, has secured that critical square-mile piece by securing a \$1 million conservation easement agreement with a local equestrian society that was considering selling some of the property for



ARIC CRABB — STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

A 154-acre property held by the Concord Mt. Diablo Trail Ride Association will be preserved as open space.

construction of single-family homes.

The coveted 154-acre property — along with the creeks and species such as the golden eagles that treat it as habitat — now will forever be unfettered, though the Concord Mt. Diablo Trail Ride Association still plans to allow horse riding there.

“Before the campaign, this was just a pipe dream,” said Ted Clement, the group’s executive director. “We hoped we could raise the money and that we could get to the finish line. Well, we just got there.”

In the mid-2000s, Save

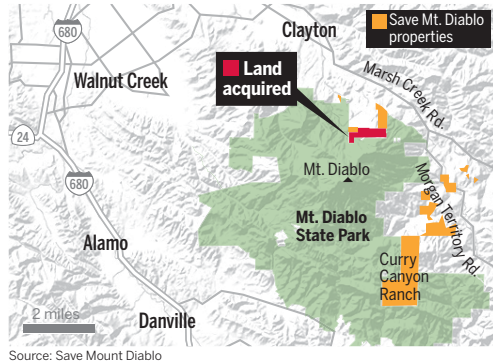
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# Diablo

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Mount Diablo members had noticed large homes and buildings sprouting up nearby and worried that more would follow. So it decided something must be done to prevent structures from further sullyng the scenery.

With a \$1 million conservation easement, the land is now legally guaranteed to remain open space, though it remains under the ownership of the Trail Ride Association. Save Mount Diablo will oversee its conservation easement with



annual monitoring.

"This agreement affords us the security of knowing that a beautiful piece of the mountain will be for-

ever protected from urban development without sacrificing land ownership. The heritage of horses on Mt. Diablo can continue indef-

initely," said Elaine Baker, president of the Trail Ride Association's board.

The property is adjacent to Save Mount Diablo's Young Canyon property and North Peak Ranch project and is surrounded by Mount Diablo State Park on three sides.

It rises from 1,100 feet to 2,010 feet with views of the Carquinez Strait and Suisun Bay to Lassen Peak and the Sierra Nevada Range, according to Save Mount Diablo.

The sloped property can also be seen from Marsh Creek Road in Clayton.

Save Mount Diablo and the Trail Ride Association discussed during negotia-

tions how the land could remain free without taking away the association's ability to manage equestrian trails for its members.

The association, which owns 200 acres around Mount Diablo, will keep some buildings on the site, including horse-riding facilities and a clubhouse. A couple of decades ago, the organization had begun leasing some of the land for private residences to raise needed revenue. Now it won't have to.

"Riding on the trails is extremely peaceful," said Chris Barnhart, the group's treasurer. "I just love the quiet and the beauty of the

mountain. It's a phenomenal place."

Save Mount Diablo's fundraising campaign, Forever Wild, finished last year after reaching its \$15 million goal with most of the donations coming from private contributors, Clement said.

The campaign helped the group secure and preserve several other nearby properties, including the 105-acre Highland Springs, the 95-acre Anderson Ranch and the 87-acre North Peak Ranch.

Save Mount Diablo's largest acquisition to date was the Curry Canyon Ranch, a 1,080-acre valley it bought for \$7 million in 2015.