

Land Trust working to preserve access to Castle Lake gems

By Skye Kinkade

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The WLT has successfully protected 467 parcels in 105 wilderness areas across nine western states totaling nearly 50,000 acres.

Escrow closed last week on a 637 acre piece of land that includes Little Castle Lake, a portion of the trail to Heart Lake and part of Castle Lake's shoreline. The Washington-based

Wilderness Land Trust has purchased the acreage, which it will hold until the land can be transferred to public ownership, explained Siskiyou Land Trust Executive Director Renee Casterline.

The parcel, which is adjacent to U.S. Forest Service property and is the largest remaining private property within the designated Castle Crags Wilderness, was listed in April in a real estate auction by Realty Marketing/Northwest with a published reserve price of nearly \$1.7 million.

When community members heard the property was for sale, concerns arose about potential development, logging, or restricted access to these popular destinations.

The Wilderness Land Trust was able to avoid a public auction by working with the property owners to purchase it before the July deadline, said Vice President and Senior Lands Specialist Aimee Rutledge.

Although the Siskiyou Land Trust wanted to help with the project, the scale was too great and they contacted the Wilderness Land Trust, which specializes in projects of this type, Rutledge noted.

The WLT plans to hold the land until the U.S. Forest Service is able to generate a proposal and secure funding so it can be purchased and the wilderness area can be completed, Rutledge said.

To accomplish this, the WLT got a loan from the David and Lucile Packard Foundation. Costs associated with holding the land are estimated to be \$80,000 a year, said Rutledge.

The bulk of this amount is interest on the loan, which is low interest, but not zero percent. WLT must also hold timber insurance, since the main value of the land is in its timber.

There are also minimal administrative costs, Rutledge added.

To help offset costs to the WLT, a Go Fund Me campaign has been created to raising money toward the project, said Casterline. As of Monday afternoon, \$3,999 had been raised of a \$365,000 goal.

It could take three to five years until the U.S. Forest Service can arrange to purchase the property, said Rutledge.

Siskiyou Land Trust was first made aware of the landowner's desire to sell the property three years ago, Casterline said. The acreage had been owned by three parties, including a timber company and two private individuals, for many years, Rutledge noted.

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"We work to complete wilderness areas," said Rutledge. By transferring the land to public ownership, its management will be unified and access to recreational areas will be assured. In addition, the area's extensive ecological resources, including old growth forest, will be protected.

The land is desirable because of its year-round access and valuable timber. If the property had been purchased by a private individual, one or more residences could have been built there or a resort could have been developed, depending on

county zoning. As private property, the owners could have blocked access to Heart Lake and also Mt. Bradley. In addition, logging could have occurred in the area, said Rutledge.

To access the Go Fund Me campaign and to make a donation, go to <https://bit.ly/2xnow5l>. You can also make donations offline to The Wilderness Land Trust, PO Box 11697 Bainbridge Island, WA 98110.