

Canyon supporters preserve open space

■ More than 200 people have contributed money to the group, according to its treasurer

By Lucinda Ryan
CORRESPONDENT

In the midst of a residential neighborhood in the Oakland Hills is a steep, woody canyon. Owls hoot from treetops at night and in the rainy season a stream flows in the gully between the slopes, offering an ecosystem for other forest creatures. That stream serves as the headwaters for Peralta Creek.

Butters Canyon, in the area just above Butters and Robinson drives, has remained an undeveloped oasis because a group of neighbors put together a plan eight years ago to acquire the land, about a half mile long, and protect and preserve it by creating a nonprofit organization they now call the Butters Canyon Conservancy.

Through their work, they have raised money from events, private donations and Measure DD funds, a \$198.25 million initiative voters passed in 2002 to fund land acquisition, creek restoration and other restorative projects for open space and historical facilities.

And the group doesn't just wait for money to come in. On May 17, a multi-neighbor garage sale netted about \$2,000 toward the conservancy fund.

Besides the household fare on sale, a woman sat beneath a tree, singing and playing German tunes on an accordion and treats and cool soft drinks were sold — the drinks being especially welcome in the weekend heat wave.

The conservancy now owns the lion's share of the 18 parcels, but there is still some land privately owned. Paul Dries, treasurer of the conservancy, said people in the area have been very supportive of keeping the land undeveloped, with more than 200 people contributing money to the conservancy (formerly called Butters Land Trust).

The residents know that tearing up the canyon to build homes would not only eradicate the ecosystem for the animals there, but also would remove a place where bicyclists and strollers enjoy the stretch of nature by the side of the road.

Dries, along with Lynette Cravens, who handles the conservancy's public information duties, and the conservancy's board President David Barron, are among

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several people who regularly don thick gardening gloves to dodge the itchy oils of the poison oak in the canyon and head into the slopes to weed and plant.

Another volunteer organization, Friends of the Last Wild Canyon, was instrumental in getting the word out to residents and interested groups about the potential development of the privately owned parcels in the canyon. The group still works with the conservancy to preserve the wild lands.

According to the conservancy's Web site, www.butterslandtrust.org, the board of directors decides on land use as it fits with the needs and wishes of the community and environmental guidelines.

The conservancy will hold title to the land in perpetuity or until a public agency, such as the city, chooses to purchase or receive title to them. The board welcomes comments on the use of the land; Barron's contact information is on the Web site. To reach Cravens, e-mail lynette-c@live.com.