

NEWS

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TOP FEATURED NEWS

Kathleen's Canyon dedicated

Friday, October 01, 2010

By Mike Hodgson/Associate Editor



Robert Hill, center, of the San Luis Obispo County Land Conservancy, takes a group to the spot on Nipomo Mesa where a viewing platform overlooking Black Lake Canyon will be built as part of Kathleen's Canyon Overlook, named after Nipomo conservationist Kathleen Goddard Jones. //Leah Thompson/Staff

Plans for a park where the public can learn about and appreciate Black Lake Canyon were unveiled last week by the Land Conservancy of San Luis Obispo County.

Conceptual photo-illustrations and a site plan were displayed Friday at a dedication of Kathleen's Canyon Overlook on a 12-acre property at Highway 1 and Callender Road.

The informal ceremony also honored Save the Mesa, which provided seed money to get the project started.

"It would not have happened, period, without Save the Mesa," Land Conservancy Executive Director Robert Hill told a small crowd of conservancy staff, Save the Mesa members and others.

The park's namesake

Land Conservancy staff named the park to honor the late environmentalist Kathleen Goddard Jones.

"This will pay tribute to the person who started it all," Hill said, noting how Jones inspired him and others to protect the dunes and canyon.

"She was ahead of her time in thinking about that," Hill said.

Before her death in October 2001 at age 94, Jones led hikes into the dunes and often testified about preserving the area at government meetings.

In the 1960s, she was instrumental in blocking construction of a nuclear power plant — now located at Diablo Canyon — near Oso Flaco Lake.

Her dreams of protecting the canyon were outlined in the Land Conservancy's Black Lake Canyon Enhancement Plan that identified four properties vital for conservation.

One is the site of Kathleen's Canyon Overlook, but the Land Conservancy lacked the funds to purchase and improve the land.

That's when Save the Mesa stepped in.

Save the Mesa's help

Save the Mesa was formed in the late 1990s by Nipomo area residents in response to a greenhouse expansion that bypassed the Board of Supervisors, said Marianne Buckmeyer, the group's president for about seven years.

Members also were concerned about County General Plan amendments that were quickly increasing density on the Nipomo Mesa, she said.

Incorporated in 1999, Save the Mesa received a grant of \$250,000 in settling a lawsuit over the Woodlands development.

Some of the money helped the Dana Adobe Nipomo Amigos acquire property around the adobe and some helped the Land Conservancy protect the canyon, Buckmeyer said.

"We gave \$179,000 to the Land Conservancy to write grant (applications) that got them \$5 million in grants," Buckmeyer said.

Hill noted, "That was the catalyst that resulted in over \$6 million in land conservation here on the Mesa."

Plans for the park

Hill said the overlook property was valued at \$2 million, but the owners agreed to sell it to the conservancy for \$1.6 million and donate the rest.

After buying the land, conservancy staff and volunteers spent days cleaning out junk and clearing away a thick eucalyptus grove.

The site now consists of a large dirt parking area separated by a split-rail fence from open land dotted with native and non-native plants.



But Hill said if a \$300,000 state Nature Education Grant is approved in January, the site could become a natural park for individuals and school field trips as well as an equestrian staging area.

Conceptual plans, developed by Cal Poly landscape architecture major Christian Boehr, call for an elevated platform to give a view of the canyon below and the distant dunes.

Plans also include a boardwalk to the platform, an amphitheater, a raptor perch, a picnic area, walking trails and interpretive displays.

A large, circular parking lot will allow buses and vehicles with horse trailers to easily pull in and out.

Buckmeyer said Save the Mesa has distributed all its money and disbanded, but the group's legacy will live on in sites like Kathleen's Canyon Overlook.

"I think the members are extremely proud of what Save the Mesa has been able to accomplish with the Land Conservancy," Buckmeyer said.
