



TRUCKEE ▲ DONNER
LAND TRUST

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Land Trust Finalizes Purchase of 280-Acre Parcel in Negro Canyon

The Truckee Donner Land Trust has completed the purchase of 280 acres in Negro Canyon, near Donner Summit.

The land trust completed the \$1 million acquisition with funding from the State of California Department of Resources, transfer fees from the Old Greenwood and Gray's Crossing developments, and private donors.

“Negro Canyon is well on its way to being permanently preserved as public open space,” said land trust Executive Director Perry Norris. “As anyone who has hiked, biked or skied in the canyon can attest, the area is an incredible asset for the Truckee and Donner Summit communities.”

Under county plans, the 280-acre parcel and an adjoining 422 acres were designated as a residential development called Donner Heights. The land use designation allowed for 38 homes to be developed on the two parcels, as well as almost 10 acres of roads.

This development potential prompted the land trust to contact the owners about purchasing the land. They found willing partners in Peter Royce of San Francisco and Dan Harmon of Truckee, who together bought the land in Negro Canyon in 1963 after a devastating forest fire. Recognizing its value as a gateway to the Castle Peak Wilderness Area and as a migratory corridor for the Loyalton deer herd, the owners were glad to find a buyer who would preserve the land as open space.

“We hope the public will enjoy it,” Royce said.

Harmon noted that the topography of the land makes it a valuable resource for recreation.

“The Interstate 80 freeway interchange connects directly to a flat portion of the land, making it ideal for parking and public access to the canyon,” said Harmon. “And the upper portion of the land abuts forest service land.”

The acreage is just outside of Truckee’s town limits in Nevada County. The parcel can be accessed from Interstate 80 at the Donner Lake exit.

Truckee town council member Barbara Green called the acquisition “a major step in eliminating sprawl development at the edge of the town’s limits.”

Tony Lashbrook, Truckee’s town manager, applauded the acquisition as well.

“The acquisition of Negro Canyon benefits Truckee because it protects a critical ridgeline identified in our General Plan; facilitates the protection and enhancement of Gregory Creek, an important tributary to Donner Lake; and provides opportunities for key trail connections identified in the town’s trails plan.”

According to land trust personnel, the area is rich in wildlife, including black bears, coyotes, mule deer, porcupines, chipmunks and squirrels. Gregory Creek runs through this chaparral-covered canyon, which is an important migration route and fawning area for the Truckee-Loyalton herd.

The Canyon also supports a healthy bird population, including at least four species of birds listed as protected by state or federal programs. Bald eagles, osprey, great horned owls, goshawks and red-tailed hawks have been sighted in the canyon.

Additionally, grouse, quail, woodpeckers, nuthatches, grosbeaks, flickers and other birds feed and nest in the area.

Because of its easy access both from the interstate and the Tahoe Donner subdivision — and the stunning views of Donner Lake, Castle Peak and Mount Rose — the canyon is also a popular recreational site. On a recent morning, a group of skiers was finishing a run into the canyon.

“I love skiing in this Canyon and I want my kids to be able to ski and snowshoe this area with us,” said Steven Poncolet, a Truckee local who was out for an early morning ski. “I’m glad that this land will continue to be accessible to the public.”

The area is also popular in summer with hikers, bikers and equestrians who use the Donner Lake Rim Trail that traverses the Canyon. Work on the trail began in 1996, and the trail will eventually include more than 23 miles on the ridges above Donner Lake.

In 2002, the Truckee town council passed a plan to establish a system of 130 miles of trails and bikeways in the Truckee area. The rim trail, which is a project of the Truckee Donner Land Trust, is an important addition to the Town of Truckee’s trail network. The Land Trust hopes to complete the Rim Trail, built solely by volunteers, in the next five years.

The Canyon also has historical significance to the Truckee community. The name Negro Canyon first appears on official documents with the 1955 U.S.G.S. map. Local historians believe the name may be related to an African American resident of the Donner Lake area from the turn of the century (see “The Naming of Negro Canyon”). Many African American miners, adventurers and entrepreneurs came West during the gold rush era.

Founded in 1990, the Truckee Donner Land Trust is a non-profit organization of more than 1,000 members dedicated to acquiring, preserving and protecting open space in the Truckee Donner region. Since its inception, the Land Trust has protected more than 11,000 acres. Land Trust staff can be reached at 582-4711.