

Open space victory

ONE OF THE East Bay's finest stretches of open space lies in Franklin Canyon in Hercules. There are grasslands and oak forests on hills with fantastic views of San Francisco Bay.

For many years, developers have had their eyes on this land. At one time there were plans to build 500 homes, a hotel and shops on the property. More than 3,000 trees were to be cut down on 483 acres.

Thanks to a 2004 ballot measure, those plans were defeated by Hercules voters 63 percent to 37 percent. However, the land remained in investors' hands, making future development possible, if not likely.

Fortunately for East Bay residents, the Muir Heritage Land Trust has negotiated a deal to buy most of the land from those investors for \$1.8 million.

Purchase of 423 or the 483 acres by the trust means the land will remain open space indefinitely.

There will be hiking and riding trails open to anyone who wants some serenity amid the suburban sprawl that has gobbled up so much of the East Bay.

We have long believed that the best way to preserve open space is through public or private trust purchases. Not only is the land removed from development, but the owners and investors are justly compensated.

That is why the Muir Land Trust deal is so appealing. However, the nonprofit group still has to raise at least \$1.8 million over two years to buy the land.

The Muir trust plans to kick off its fundraising effort with a dinner from 5 to 9 p.m., Saturday at the John Muir National Historic Site on Alhambra Avenue in Martinez. To get more information, visit www.muirheritagelandtrust.org.

The organization hopes to raise \$2.5 million to buy and maintain the property. Muir also wants to raise another \$6 million over five years to buy additional open space in Contra Costa County. We urge the public to support these efforts.