

Muir Trust secures large grant for Fernandez Ranch

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A Martinez nonprofit organization will be the recipient of a grant of more than \$1.9 million for restoration, public access and an environmental education program at the 702-acre Fernandez Ranch property along Highway 4 in west Contra Costa County.

The Muir Heritage Land Trust purchased the open space two years ago for more than \$3 million. The grant comes from the California River Parkways Grant Program.

"We're absolutely ecstatic and deeply grateful that the Fernandez Ranch project was selected for this grant," Linus Eukel, executive director of the Muir Heritage Land Trust, said in a statement. "The property will offer tremendous public recreational opportunities and wonderful benefits to wildlife and water quality..."

He said about \$1 million of the grant money will be used to restore and enhance unstable and degraded sections of Rodeo Creek, with more than 2,500 feet of riparian habitat being improved. Another \$900,000 will pay to develop public amenities, including a staging area for vehicles and equestrian trailers, a bridge across Rodeo Creek for pedestrians and emergency vehicles, 3.5 miles of multiuse trails, and four picnic areas.

The entire project will cost \$2.8 million, with additional funding coming from the California Coastal Conservancy, Bay Area Ridge Trail Council and the Oakmead Foundation, among other groups.

Fernandez Ranch is expected to open to the public by 2010.