

Victory for open space

SAVE MOUNT DIABLO has scored another victory in its never-ending efforts to preserve open space in an increasingly urban part of the East Bay.

The latest success is a deal to buy 320 acres of spring-fed grasslands and oak woods in Irish Canyon east of Clayton between Black Diamond Mines Regional Preserve and Mount Diablo State Park.

The nonprofit group was able to buy the land for \$1.34 million, a very reasonable price even for undevelopable land in the area. Seth Adams, Save Mount Diablo's land programs director, is understandably pleased about the deal.

The organization has made a \$450,000 down payment toward the purchase and has 21 months to raise the remaining \$894,000 through donations, government grants and fundraising.

Back in 1988, two doctors from Modesto bought the land with the hope of selling it to a developer. But thanks to the urban limit line adopted by Contra Costa voters in 1990, the property became off limits to development.

To their credit, the two landowners, Sawtantra and Aruna Chopra, are not upset that they will not be able to make a huge profit selling the land to builders.

Instead, they expressed pride in being able to help Save Mount Diablo preserve another parcel of open space and valuable habitat.

The property will protect an important piece of a wildlife corridor that will improve a number of species' ability to survive.

Generally, Save Mount Diablo buys land and gives it to state or regional park agencies. It has yet to be determined who the long-term owner of the land will be. But it is certain the land will become another welcome addition to the tens of thousands of acres on and surrounding Mount Diablo.

As the East Bay continues to grow, it is increasingly critical to purchase private property and place it in the public domain.

That is the best way to assure that open space will be indefinitely preserved even as the region's population grows.