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## **Elkhorn foundation looking for a few good acres**

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The Elkhorn Slough Foundation is looking for more land. Another 2,000 acres to be exact.

This weekend the foundation marked its 20th anniversary by unveiling an ambitious campaign to double the amount of land that it protects over the next three years.

The plan seeks to permanently protect vulnerable and sensitive species and habitats in the Elkhorn Slough and its watershed.

That is possible thanks to some \$20 million in donations from the David and Lucile Packard Foundation, the Coastal Conservancy, the Wildlife Conservation Board, the Regional Water Quality Control Board, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration and individual donors. The largest donor was the water quality board that contributed \$7 million.

The decision to double the land was initially made in 1999 when the foundation drafted a detailed conservation plan, identifying resources and species that could be in jeopardy.

The money began coming in over the past year, and is still coming in.

In addition, the foundation launched a program this weekend to double its membership, and started a Stewardship Circle for those donating \$1,000 or more.

Now that the dollars and support are there, the foundation is actively seeking more acreage.

Executive Director Mark Silberstein said today the group is talking with a handful of local landowners on four possible land purchases.

Although he would not comment on specific deals, Silberstein said he is confident that the group will acquire at least 1,000 acres in the next year.

"We're poised now to protect some of the most important lands in the slough. It's very ambitious," Silberstein said.

He regularly fields calls from area landowners who say they are interested in donating their land. One family donated \$2 million worth of land to the foundation.

"There are many people in this area who have a strong connection with their land, and they'd like to figure out a way to protect it," Silberstein said. "It's really unique, and that's what has captured people's imagination."

Nevertheless, the land must meet the foundation's criteria, which includes some of the following:

- Protects critical resources or ecological linkages including coastal marshes, fresh water wetlands, rare species and "scenic viewsheds."
- Reduces sediment movement or agricultural runoff.
- Reduces depletion of groundwater.
- Land has high restoration potential.
- Land can provide habitat for rare species or wildlife.

Silberstein said another catalyst for the land drive is the speed of development and rocketing real estate prices.

"The cost of land has increased. There was a period where it was almost scary how much land was going for," said development

director Stephen Slade.

However, Silberstein said, the foundation's focus is as much on conservation as it is on getting the land.

"Our goal is not to own lots of land. It's to make sure it stays healthy and productive."

The Elkhorn Slough Foundation owns or manages about 1,500 acres of the 45,000-acre Elkhorn Slough National Estuarine Research Reserve.

The reserve is at the midway point of Monterey Bay's coastline, and is the second largest tidal salt marsh in the state after San Francisco Bay.

For more information on the Elkhorn Slough Watershed Conservation Plan, visit [www.elkhornslough.org](http://www.elkhornslough.org)

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