

# Conservancy celebrates acquisition of wetlands

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VALYERMO — Antelope Valley Conservancy and Los Angeles County Parks and Recreation officials celebrated the conservancy's acquisition of 40 acres near the county Devil's Punchbowl Natural Area with a ribbon-cutting ceremony Friday.

The AV Conservancy purchased the two 20-acre parcels, along Sandrock Creek north of the county park's Nature Center, with grant funds and cooperation from the longtime landowners.

"It's a huge accomplishment," said Hayden Sohm, deputy director of the county parks department's Regional Facilities Agency. "Wetlands (are) a vanishing environment. It's something that's so valuable."

The land was acquired with grants from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and state Proposition 84, which was approved by the Rivers and Mountains Conservancy.

The agencies agreed to reallocate funds so the AV Conservancy could purchase the land.

The land will provide year-round resources for the animals and birds in the area.

"Wetlands really are the hub for the wildlife that inhabits this area, and without them we're seeing a lot of loss in terms of the numbers of wildlife," Sohm said.

A biological team will develop a site management plan to determine whether the land will be open to the public and what uses and protections are appropriate and necessary for the parcels,

according to Wendy Reed, AV Conservancy president.

"Not everything can be open to public access," Reed said. "It's just not necessarily safe for human beings."

Plaques for their joint efforts were presented to representatives from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Los Angeles County Department of Parks and Recreation, and Northrop Grumman Corp., which contributed to the initial annual costs to manage the property.

A member of the Ketterling family, one of the families who owned part of the land before selling it to the conservancy, also received a plaque.

The Rivers and Mountains Conservancy and the Darrington family, who also owned a portion

of the land before its acquisition, received recognition as well for their collaborative efforts.

The ceremony featured a keynote speech by Dr. Kate Gale, managing editor of Red Hen Press, and a native American flute performance by Bill Neal Elk Whistle.

Devil's Punchbowl is a tilted sandstone formation on the northern slopes of the San Gabriel Mountains, south of Pearblossom off Longview Road. The county park comprises more than 1,300 acres and has three trails that run nearly nine miles.

"It really is a special place, and we feel very fortunate to have it," Sohm said of the park.

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**TROY HARVEY/Valley Press**

**OPEN FOR BUSINESS** — Antelope Valley Conservancy President Wendy Reed, right, cuts the ribbon Friday during a press conference at the Devil's Punchbowl Natural Area.