

Land Trust of Santa Cruz County
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Land Trust Buys Rare Sandhills Property

SCOTTS VALLEY/FELTON -- What do you do after you've saved some of the world's most unique habitat? "You take care of it," said Terry Corwin, Executive Director of the Land Trust of Santa Cruz County.

Last week (August 5th) the Land Trust of Santa Cruz County took ownership of 189 acres of Sandhills habitat between Scotts Valley and Felton. The Sandhills, an ancient seabed in the mountains, has been called "The Galapagos Islands of Santa Cruz County" by one biodiversity expert. It is home to at least seven species of plants and animals found nowhere else on earth.

Corwin said that an extensive clean-up was completed before the Land Trust took ownership on August 5th. Trash, concrete pipes, and buried oil storage tanks were removed. "And that's just the beginning of taking care of this special place," Corwin said.

The Land Trust is developing plans to address soil erosion, invasive non-native plants, and destruction caused by extensive trespass by motorcycle users and others. Corwin said the Land Trust will hold public meetings with neighbors and others interested in the future of the property. She said the Land Trust has raised funds to help care for the property. "Land protection doesn't end when we take title," Corwin said, "It enters the stewardship phase."

The Land Trust acquired the property after a year long fundraising campaign, the largest in its history. \$1.2 million was raised from local supporters and was matched by over \$4.3 million in grants. The Gordon and Betty Moore Foundation contributed \$2.3 million and the State Wildlife Conservation Board another \$2 million. Other major gifts came from the David and Lucille Packard Foundation, Robert Stephens and Julie Packard, Richard and Mary Solari, Michael Honack and Wendy Grace, Reed Hastings and Patty Quillin, the Bright Horizon Fund at the Community Foundation of Santa Cruz County.

Gary Knoblock, Program Officer of the foundation, said, "The Gordon and Betty Moore Foundation is committed to protecting our world's threatened biodiversity. The Santa Cruz Sandhills are not just important locally, but important globally."

John Donnelly, Executive Director of the Wildlife Conservation Board, said, "We were pleased to see a partnership of this nature come together. Many folks worked long-hard hours to complete this project and the benefits of protecting the rare ecosystem and species that are dependent on the habitat will be realized for generations to come."

The Land Trust plans to acquire additional Sandhills habitat and carefully manage them. The group will also develop a public access plan that will emphasize the use of the land for broad educational purposes. The sandy soil is highly sensitive to intensive human use.

Biologist Peter Raven likened the Sandhills to the Galapagos because of their biological diversity. Seven species found only in the Sandhills are the Mt. Hermon June Beetle, Zayante band-winged grasshopper, Santa Cruz kangaroo rat, Ben Lomond spineflower, Santa Cruz wallflower, Silverleaf manzanita and Ben Lomond buckwheat. Fossils of sand dollars, extinct sharks and other ancient ocean species can also be found there, evidence that it was once an a seabed.

The Land Trust is a local nonprofit that works with land owners to protect and preserve land throughout the county. In the past 30 years the Land Trust has helped protect more than 10,000 acres in Santa Cruz County, including redwood forests, wetlands, and oak woodland. In the past two years the group has reached agreements with landowners to protect almost 1,000 acres of prime farmland in the Pajaro Valley.

More information about the Land Trust is available at their website:
www.landtrustsantacruz.org.