



**LAND
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Land Trust Protects Key Slough Land

The Land Trust of Santa Cruz County has purchased a key property that drains the Watsonville Slough system. The Land Trust plans to restore wetlands and lease farmland on the 45 acre property. The property is located west of Highway 1 and adjoins 440 acres of slough land the Land Trust acquired at the end of 2009.

Much of the property floods and 18 acres is already in the process of returning to wetlands, according to the Land Trust. The Land Trust plans to restore these wetlands and lease a third of the land as farmland. Land Trust Executive Director Terry Corwin said the wetland restoration will benefit wildlife, water quality, and help reduce upstream flooding. The property drains four of the five tributaries of the slough system, which flows into the Pajaro River and Monterey Bay.

Funding for the acquisition came from a U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service grant secured by and awarded through the California Coastal Conservancy. The \$860,000 grant will cover the purchase of the 45 acres, which cost \$546,000, with the remaining funds to be spent on future slough acquisitions and restoration projects. The Nature Conservancy and the Wildlife Conservation Board were also key partners in supporting other acquisitions in the sloughs.

The Watsonville Slough system is the only large freshwater coastal wetland in Santa Cruz County. The sloughs are important habitat for migrating birds and for at least 12 species of birds considered of "special concern" to the state, including the California brown pelican.

The Land Trust is currently working on a number of restoration projects with with the Natural Resources Conservation Service, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Resources Conservation District of Santa Cruz

County and Watsonville Wetlands Watch. A Technical Advisory Committee comprised of these and other agencies and conservation organizations is providing assistance and expertise to the Land Trust in developing a long-term management plan for the sloughs property.

“The entire Watsonville Slough project is all about partnerships,” Corwin said. Corwin points out that the latest acquisition follows years of actions by others that have protected over a thousand acres in and around the Watsonville Slough. The California Department of Fish and Game protects 350 acres and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service protects 109 acres.

Corwin said the Land Trust will host a dedication of their Watsonville Slough Farms on September 19th. “We hope everyone involved over the years in protecting the sloughs will come celebrate with us,” Corwin said. Information on the event is on the Land Trust website: www.LandTrustSantaCruz.org.