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Land Trust Protects 280 Acres for Wildlife Crossing East of Laurel Curve on Highway 17

The Land Trust of Santa Cruz County purchased 280 acres today as part of its planned Wildlife Crossing on Highway 17. The group went ahead with the purchase even though it is \$150,000 short of its \$1 million goal for the project.

"We have gone out on a limb here," said Executive Director Terry Corwin, "and we are trusting that the community will step forward." Corwin said the Land Trust had raised \$850,000 from more than 1,000 donors since September.

The non-profit began work on the wildlife crossing project earlier this year, with the protection of 10 acres at the future site of the wildlife tunnel. Corwin said the Land Trust will protect a third property in 2016—190 acres on the west side of Laurel Curve. Once the three properties are protected, Caltrans can begin construction of a wildlife tunnel under the highway.

Land Trust Projects Director Dan Medeiros said the organization has been working with Pathways for Wildlife on a camera trap study and corridor design for the past couple of years.

"In October a male lion that we'd been tracking was hit and killed at Laurel Curve just 100 yards from where the tunnel will be built," Medeiros said, adding that there is already a new male in the area. "I really hope this young lion doesn't fall to the same fate."

Medeiros said 13 mountain lions have been hit on Highway 17 since 2007, most of which were young males. As a natural drainage,

Laurel Curve is a popular area for animals to travel and attempt highway crossings. The pattern puts both animals and drivers at risk.

In 2011, the Land Trust's Conservation Blueprint identified the 280 acres on the east side of Laurel Curve as having the most development potential in all the Santa Cruz Mountains, and if sold to a developer—which was the original plan, said Medeiros—the land would have lost its appeal as a wildlife corridor.

In addition to the \$1 million the Land Trust is seeking to raise, funding for this project comes from the Gordon and Betty Moore and the David and Lucille Packard Foundations. The Land Trust also drew funds from its Opportunity Fund, which was raised as part of its 2011-2012 Campaign to Protect 10,000 Acres.

Donations can be made on the Land Trust website www.LandTrustSantaCruz.org or by calling (831) 429-6116.