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Hwy 17 Wildlife Tunnel in Sight

Land Trust Completes Funding for Land Protection

The Land Trust of Santa Cruz County announced today that it has raised all the funds it needs to protect land on either side of Highway 17 for a wildlife tunnel. The final piece of funding was a \$200,000 grant from the Coastal Conservancy to help purchase an easement on 170 acres west of the highway at Laurel Curve.

Additional funding for the \$1.625 million purchase came from the Wildlife Conservation Board (\$400,000), the Natural Resources Agency (\$600,000), and donors to the Land Trust's Great Land & Trail Campaign (\$425,000).

The Land Trust launched the wildlife tunnel project two years ago with the protection of 290 acres east of Laurel Curve. Project Director Dan Medeiros emphasized the importance of building the tunnel at that location. "Roadkill data tells us that almost half the animals hit on Highway 17 are hit at Laurel Curve."

Last month, the California Transportation Commission approved \$3.1 million for design and engineering of the tunnel, and Measure D, which passed in last month's election, will contribute \$5 million toward the estimated \$8-\$12 million cost of tunnel construction.

Land Trust Executive Director Stephen Slade called the latest developments amazing. "This was always a risky project," he said, "protecting hundreds of acres,

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getting Caltrans to build a wildlife tunnel. To have it all come together in just a few years is amazing.”

Slade cited the importance of support from Natural Resources Secretary John Laird, Assemblymember Mark Stone, and thousands of donors. “When thousands of people put up money for a project like this, it gets everybody’s attention.”

Medeiros said the conservation easement on the latest property will be completed by mid-February 2017, and the design and engineering by 2019. He said construction of the tunnel could be completed in 2020.

The Land Trust has committed \$3 million for construction of the tunnel, which will be raised from individuals as part of their Great Land and Trail Campaign.

Slade said the Land Trust is still seeking support for this project. They are more than \$2 million away from their \$6.5 million goal to protect wildlands and build the tunnel.

For more details and to donate, visit www.landtrustsantacruz.org, or call the Land Trust office at (831) 429-6116.