



**LAND
TRUST**
OF SANTA CRUZ
COUNTY

617 Water Street
Santa Cruz, CA 95060
831-429-6116
Fax 831-429-1166
info@landtrustsantacruz.org
www.landtrustsantacruz.org

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CONTACT:

Stephen Slade

(831) 461-5705(c)

(831) 429-6116(o)

stephen.slade@landtrustsantacruz.org

Land Trust to Buy 2,600-Acre Ranch

Wildlife Crossing on Highway 101

The Land Trust of Santa Cruz County announced plans to protect a 2,640-acre ranch south of Highway 101. The property is in San Benito and Monterey counties and borders a stretch of Highway 101 that has a tunnel complex that could become a wildlife crossing under the busy highway.

The Land Trust acquired the purchase rights from the Bingaman family, which has owned the uninhabited ranch since 1947. The property will be held by a third-party for up to three years while the Land Trust raises \$10.8 million to complete the purchase.

"This is a spectacular place," said Land Trust Executive Director, Stephen Slade. "It's like nothing in Santa Cruz County. It's all grassland and oaks and rock outcroppings," Slade said.

Slade said the previous owners planned to build up to 900 houses and a hotel on the property, forever eliminating the possibility of building a wildlife tunnel under Highway 101 as it crosses between the Santa Cruz Mountains and the Gabilan Range. "It's a developer's dream," Slade said. "It has water, it's between the Silicon Valley and the coast."

Dan Medeiros, the Land Trust's Project Director, called it, "A dream landscape for wildlife. It has water, grass, open land, breeding habitat, everything." Even, he said, an existing tunnel complex under Highway 101 leading directly into Rocks Ranch. Medeiros helped collar a mountain lion with UCSC Puma Project. They tracked the lion

from Laurel Curve on Highway 17 to Rocks Ranch. The lion was killed trying to cross Highway 101.

The Land Trust is in contact with Caltrans about retrofitting the tunnel complex on Highway 101 so wildlife can use it. The Land Trust worked with Caltrans on the Laurel Curve wildlife crossing. The Land Trust protected 470 acres around Laurel Curve and has committed \$3M towards construction of the Highway 17 wildlife crossing, which Caltrans has scheduled to begin in 2021.

"We've done this before," Slade said. "You protect land where animals are, where it is possible to build a safe passage, then Caltrans knows a wildlife crossing will work. They've been tremendous partners on the Highway 17 project."

The Land Trust will launch a fundraising campaign in the fall to protect the ranch. More information, photos, and a drone video of the property is available at www.LandTrustSantaCruz.org.

Rocks Ranch Basics

- ✓ 2,640 acres (half in Monterey County and half in San Benito County)
- ✓ 4.4 miles long (north to south)
- ✓ Borders 2.5 miles of US Highway 101
- ✓ Located in the choke point connecting the Santa Cruz Mountains and Gabilan Range
- ✓ Borders a culvert system under Highway 101 that could be retrofitted to improve wildlife connectivity
- ✓ 9 ponds, 2 miles of streams, many seeps/ springs, 10 acres of wetlands
- ✓ Approximately 7 acres of riparian woodland
- ✓ Extensive grassland, oak savanna, and oak woodland
- ✓ California red-legged frog breeding site and suitable California tiger salamander breeding and upland habitat
- ✓ Tricolored blackbird and western burrowing owl breeding habitat; foraging habitat for golden eagle and California condor
- ✓ Suitable habitat for American badger, San Joaquin kit fox, and tule elk