

# The Mercury News

## Scenic San Mateo County beach linked to singer Chris Isaak to become new public park

By Paul Rogers | November 16, 2017



TUNITAS CREEK BEACH — For the past few years, this magnificent mile-long stretch of remote oceanfront property seven miles south of Half Moon Bay has become known for its abandoned bluff-top house, rowdy overnight beach parties and rumors about a rock-star absentee land owner.

Hundreds of people with stereo systems, disco balls, tents, kegs and mattresses have left huge amounts of trash, set off fireworks and used the beach as a bathroom during all-night raves. Last year, a San Jose man drowned there.

On Wednesday, however, the beach began a new chapter when a Palo Alto-based environmental group closed a deal to purchase 58 acres of land surrounding it for \$5 million, with plans to work with county officials to turn the property into a new San Mateo County park with restrooms, trails, parking and a ranger station.

But one key detail of the deal by the Peninsula Open Space Trust remains a mystery: Who is selling the stunning property? The group says it's bound by the seller to keep secret who previously owned the property. But tax documents, word of mouth and other clues suggest the secretive owner is rock singer Chris Isaak.

Isaak, 61, is a Stockton native and San Francisco resident who had a top 10 hit with his 1990 single "Wicked Game." Also an actor, he's known for his 1950s style and falsetto voice.

At least for now, he's not talking.

"Chris is currently in Australia on a promo tour and has no time for any other interviews," said Stacie Surabian, a manager with HK Management, the Los Angeles firm that represents Isaak.



Property records show that an entity called The Todd Gelfand Trust bought the land in 1998 for \$3.1 million. Gelfand is a partner at Gelfand, Rennert & Feldman, a prominent Los Angeles company that provides business management, accounting and tax services to singers, movie stars and other wealthy clients.

Isaak's personal company, Chris Isaak Productions, lists Gelfand as its business agent and shares the same mailing address with him that the property used for tax purposes. Members of a neighborhood group say they've heard for years that Isaak was the owner.

"I never saw him" at the house, said Brandy Chenoweth, who started TLC Locals in 2015 to clean up trash on the beach. "Nobody has been there for years. We talk about that all the time. It amazes me that somebody would just let that go."

The 1950s-style house is painted pink and boarded up. The inside of the home burned not long after the sale 19 years ago, and heavy winter storms long ago wrecked the well, leaving it without a water system.

Now that the sale to the Peninsula Open Space Trust is complete, the old home site could become a ranger station and the property will be protected and opened to responsible public use, said Walter Moore, the group's president.

"We want to bring back the beauty," Moore said. "It's very rare to have the opportunity to create a new county beach park. This is one of the last opportunities."

In September, Moore's group signed an agreement with San Mateo County that gives it the responsibility to purchase the land, with the county agreeing to patrol the property and install restrooms, trails, parking and other facilities.

That should take about three years, said Don Horsley, the San Mateo County supervisor whose district includes the property.

"It is magical. It's a jewel," Horsley said. "It's probably the most spectacular beach on the entire coast."

Horsley, who led county efforts to close the deal, said in the coming years the county will need to hire a few rangers and maintenance people, along with a couple of new sheriff's deputies, to properly staff and patrol the area.

The beach is technically open now because all beaches in California are publicly owned up to the mean high-tide line, but it's difficult to access. And its rules have become much stricter in recent months.

In June, county supervisors passed an ordinance that bans overnight camping, dogs, fires, fireworks, amplified music and accumulating trash on Tunitas Creek Beach. Authorities, who have begun ticketing violators, also put up no-parking signs along Highway 1 and Tunitas Creek Road, where many of the overnight party-goers were leaving their cars.

The goal was not just to help restore some order to the area, but also to protect its natural features, Horsley said. Studies have shown that endangered steelhead trout live in Tunitas Creek and that the beach is home to snowy plovers, a rare bird. The vast beach, with cliffs more than 100 feet tall on the northern edge, looks similar to Point Reyes National Seashore.

Famed Spanish explorer Gaspar de Portola and his men camped along Tunitas Creek in 1769 during their expedition from Baja California to San Francisco Bay. The property was in private ownership for more than 100 years, its breathtaking cliffs and sand dunes hidden from motorists zooming along Highway 1 between Santa Cruz and Half Moon Bay.



After the illegal camping and all-night parties worsened, Horsley said, he contacted the Peninsula Open Space Trust and together they reached out to the owners.

“They knew the house that was there is no longer habitable,” he said. “So they were willing to sell.”

Gelfand and Isaak did not answer questions about the property emailed by the Bay Area News Group. The owner of the only other property that abuts the beach, to the north, supports the new park, which will be San Mateo County’s first county-owned beach park.

And the neighborhood group, which still cleans the beach once a month, said it couldn’t be happier.

“We’re really excited,” said Chenoweth, who has since moved to Santa Cruz. “I’d like to see families go down there and enjoy the beach. I’m even OK if people have parties down there, as long as they have permits and clean it up. It should be healthier, cleaner and more enjoyable for everyone.”

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