Media Contact
Robin Carr, Landis Communications Inc. for POST
415-766-0927, robin@landispr.com

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PENINSULA OPEN SPACE TRUST PRESERVES 839 ACRES IN SANTA CRUZ MOUNTAINS

Multi-phased project to permanently protect Estrada Ranch secures environmentally significant redwood forest, wildlife habitat and sustainable working lands

Westward view from Estrada Ranch ridgeline, with redwoods and cattle. Photo courtesy Teddy Miller for POST

PALO ALTO, Calif. (January 23, 2023) – Peninsula Open Space Trust (POST) today announced it has acquired 839 acres of redwood forest, working lands and critical wildlife habitat in the southern Santa Cruz Mountains. POST's acquisition marks completion of the first phase toward permanently protecting this environmentally significant property in partnership with the Estrada family and the Land Trust of Santa Cruz County (LTSCC).

The two parcels, owned by Richard Estrada, included in this transaction constitute a significant portion of the Estrada Ranch – one of the last, large private properties under family ownership in the Santa Cruz Mountains. The Estrada family, who have sustainably ranched and harvested timber here for more than 150 years, will continue to manage the land.

“We are grateful to work with the Estrada family and the Land Trust of Santa Cruz County to protect this significant property from development and subdivision and to enable continuity of the family’s legacy of responsible, sustainable timber production and cattle grazing. This is a creative conservation solution that benefits the land, people, wildlife and environmental resilience of our region,” said **Walter T. Moore,** president of POST. “It’s our shared vision that people and nature will benefit from this land being preserved forever.”

Estrada Ranch, which runs more than two miles along the ridge above Corralitos, is bordered to the northeast and south by Mount Madonna County Park (Santa Clara). Its protection sets the stage for a contiguous protected landscape of more than 5,400 acres vital to the regional movement of wildlife, from the Santa Cruz Mountains to the Gabilan Range and the Central Coast Range beyond.

"This is a poignant moment for me," said **Richard Estrada**. "For more than forty years I have taken care of these lands, and for many years before that I supported my parent's efforts to do the same thing. Now it is time for me to move on from those responsibilities. I am very happy that POST has purchased these parcels from me to protect and preserve the land, to continue to care for the redwoods and to keep this way of life going at Estrada Ranch."

The ranch also includes sensitive grasslands, maritime chaparral, riparian and wetland habitats, watersheds and streams important for South-Central Coast steelhead and rare amphibians. Its steep terrain is an important feature as well, providing climate change adaptation options to species moving up in elevation as temperatures rise on the valley floor. The ranch’s working lands are high in both historical and economic value to the community at large.

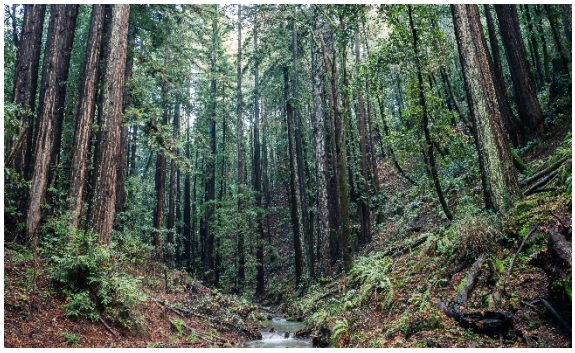

Photo courtesy Teddy Miller for POST

The Project Phases

POST’s purchase of 839 acres of the ranch for more than $10.6 million closed on December 20, 2022. This first phase of conservation will help ensure the land continues to be managed by members of the Estrada family, working with their longtime partner Big Creek Lumber to maintain sustainable forestry practices. Long-time cattle ranching on the property will also continue through the efforts of Zach Estrada, grandson of Richard’s brother Frank, who owns the remainder of the ranch.

In a future phase of the project, LTSCC will lead efforts to secure a conservation easement that will cover 1,204 acres of the ranch. LTSCC will work with POST, Frank Estrada and his two sons Greg and Grant to develop easement terms that ensure that the entirety of the property is permanently protected as conserved lands under the management of the Estrada family.

“We are so happy to celebrate the initial protection of this ranch with everyone involved,” said **Sarah Newkirk**, executive director of LTSCC. "To permanently protect Estrada Ranch, we will partner with POST and the Estrada family to raise the necessary funds to place conservation easements on the entire

property. We look forward to collaborating with public and private partners that make investments in conservation easements to sustain working lands, sequester carbon, and protect habitat."

History of Estrada Ranch

Members of the Estrada Family on the ranch in the 1930s. Photo courtesy Greg Estrada

Estrada Ranch is located on the ancestral lands of the Amah Mutsun Tribal Band and other Indigenous peoples. It has been in the Estrada family since 1863, when Richard and Frank Estrada's great-grandparents Jose Antonio and Loretta (Duarte) Estrada purchased the land. Since then, the family has grazed cattle and harvested redwood trees while maintaining the environmental integrity of the landscape. The brothers were raised on the ranch and have continued to work the lands through the years. Through Frank's children Greg and Grant, the next generation is already deeply involved in carrying out the family legacy. This deal's two-phased conservation approach aligns with the family's long-term vision for their property. The Estrada family is prominent within the Santa Cruz community, supporting local organizations such as the Ronald McDonald House, the Santa Cruz County Farm Bureau and supporting efforts to teach ranching and agriculture to youth of the region.

With regard to future phases of the project, **Greg Estrada** said, "Our family has been managing and protecting this ranch since the mid-1800s, and we feel very strongly that it be preserved for the future. By entering into this relationship with Peninsula Open Space Trust and the Land Trust of Santa Cruz County, we will be able to continue our family's way of life and preserve the ranch forever." Greg and his brother Grant support their father and uncle with day-to-day ranch management and stewardship and will continue to do so during POST's ownership.

Photos, drone videos and map available for media usage here.

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About Peninsula Open Space Trust

POST protects open space on the Peninsula and in the South Bay for the benefit of all. As a private nonprofit land trust, POST has been responsible for conserving more than 82,000 acres since its founding in 1977. POST works with private landowners and public agencies to connect people and nature. Visit openspacetrust.org for more information.

About Land Trust of Santa Cruz County

The mission of the Land Trust of Santa Cruz County is to protect, care for, and connect people to the extraordinary lands that make this area special. Information is available at LandTrustSantaCruz.org

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