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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Peninsula Open Space Trust Acquires 668 Acres Within Upper Pajaro River Valley

Three connected properties represent an opportunity to demonstrate the regional benefits of agriculture and environmental restoration working together

Southward-facing aerial view of three properties in the Upper Pajaro River valley (L to R: Ojeda Ranch, Gonzales Ranch, Bloomfield South Farm) purchased by POST for sustainable agriculture and environmental restoration. Photo: Teddy Miller/POST

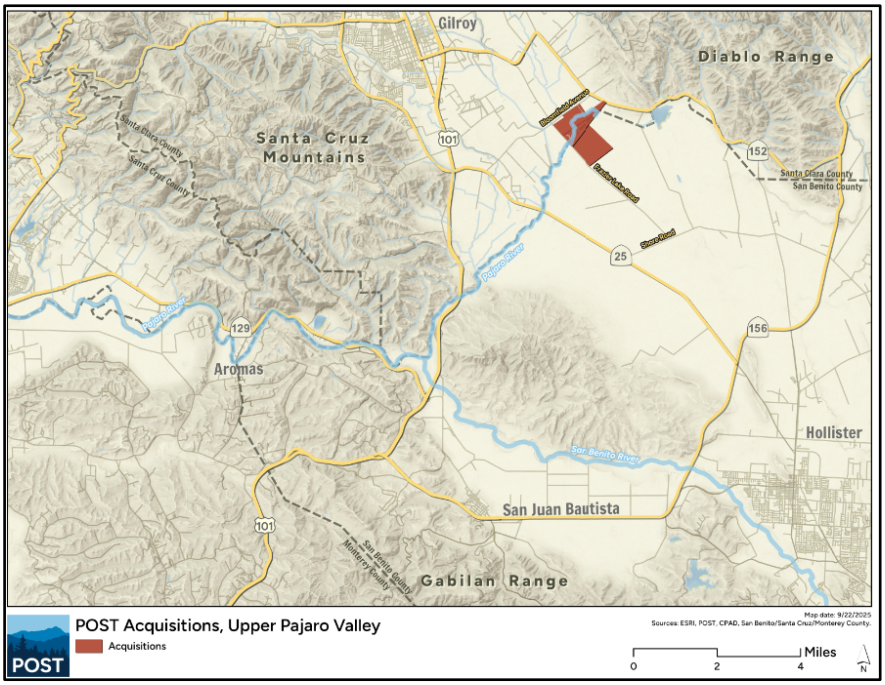
PALO ALTO, Calif. (Oct. 7, 2025) – Peninsula Open Space Trust (POST) today announced it has completed the purchase of 668 acres along the border of Santa Clara and San Benito Counties in three separate transactions totaling $7.8 million. These contiguous properties – Bloomfield South Farm, Gonzales Ranch and Ojeda Ranch – along the Upper Pajaro River and within the Soap Lake floodplain represent a unique opportunity to demonstrate how agriculture and environmental restoration can work together to support regional ecological resilience.

These acquisitions are the culmination of a multi-partner effort among POST, The Nature Conservancy (TNC), Santa Clara Valley Open Space Authority (the Authority), San Benito Agricultural Land Trust (SBALT) and others, demonstrating the widely recognized environmental significance of this area.

The Pajaro River watershed is a vital water source that supports an agricultural economy generating close to $1 billion in crops annually, as well as tourism and recreation in the area. These properties, one

of which is already protected by a conservation easement, are currently used for active row crop agriculture or livestock grazing.

A long history of human intervention in this watershed has impacted its ecological function, which is now further exacerbated by climate change. This region frequently experiences flooding, posing significant challenges for agriculture and other uses.



"Working with local partners to restore this landscape over time will support a mosaic of agricultural and natural lands that benefits biodiversity, climate resilience and sustainable working lands," said **Gordon Clark**, president of POST. "We are especially grateful to the state's Wildlife Conservation Board for their generous grant to support a restoration and land use planning process for these three properties."

History of the Upper Pajaro River

The Pajaro River flows roughly east to west, originating in the Santa Clara Valley near Soap Lake (also known as San Felipe Lake) and emptying into the Pacific Ocean at Monterey Bay. Historically, the area between the Santa Cruz Mountains and Diablo Range has been home to many wetlands, streams, ponds and meadows. The entire Soap Lake floodplain absorbs heavy seasonal rains, helping to mitigate flood risk to downstream Pajaro River communities.

The area surrounding and including the Pajaro River headwaters is part of the ancestral lands of the Mutsun people, who stewarded the land for millennia and whose descendants, members of the Amah Mutsun Tribal Band, still reside in the region.

Over the last 150 years, most of the land has been converted to productive agricultural use. The Pajaro River was diverted into canals, separating flows from the adjacent lands and embankments. As a result, the river's natural functions were disrupted, and today, the landscape and communities, especially those downstream, are less resilient overall to the impacts of more severe storms and flood events. Recent examples include the extreme flooding that occurred in 2023 and caused an estimated $790M in damage to agriculture, housing, and businesses in the area.

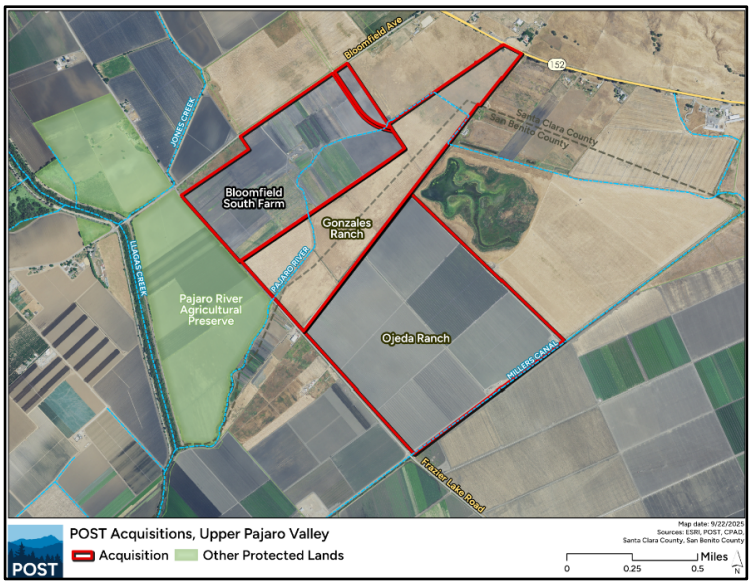
The landscape is also a vital water source and provides habitat for birds and other native wildlife. Today, remnant habitats are interspersed with productive agricultural lands. A restoration process that applies modern science and proven techniques can strengthen the natural connections between the mountain ranges along the Pajaro River and protect and enhance regional biodiversity, while supporting the region's vibrant agricultural economy.

“We value our landowner partners in San Benito County and are grateful to POST for helping them achieve conservation outcomes for their land,” said **Lynn Overtree**, executive director of SBALT. “Conserving land that sustains productive agriculture is one of SBALT's primary objectives. We're pleased that POST shares our vision for sustainable agriculture alongside natural resources and open space protections to generate climate resilience benefits for our community. We are excited to be involved in the restoration planning process for these three properties in the Upper Pajaro Valley.”

The Three Properties

Bloomfield South Farm

POST acquired this 185-acre farm, the northernmost of the three properties and located wholly in Santa Clara County, in a $2.4 million transaction that closed in late November 2024. The property has been protected since 2003 by a conservation easement held by the Authority, which introduced the property to POST. By purchasing it, POST can pursue riparian restoration planning with partner organizations along more than half a mile of the historic Pajaro River course, which flows through the property. It is currently in row crop agricultural production.



Three properties acquired by POST (red outline); Pajaro River Agricultural Preserve (in green) owned and managed by Santa Clara Valley Open Space Authority.

Gonzales Ranch

Located directly south of and adjacent to Bloomfield South Farm, and straddling the boundary of Santa Clara and San Benito Counties, is Gonzales Ranch. POST partnered with TNC to acquire the 165-acre property on October 2 for $667,000. Recognizing the importance of this watershed, TNC purchased the ranch in 2012, and began restoration by implementing sustainable agriculture on the property. The Pajaro River passes through Bloomfield South Farm into this property. A 130-foot-wide riparian buffer encloses the river course. It features riparian vegetation, previously planted by Point Blue Conservation Science’s STRAW program, which helps to support wildlife habitat and connectivity. Currently, Gonzales Ranch is leased for seasonal regenerative livestock grazing.

Ojeda Ranch

Located wholly within San Benito County, Ojeda Ranch runs along the southeastern edge of Gonzales Ranch. POST was introduced to the property by SBALT and purchased the 318 acres from the Fehlman family in a $4.77 million transaction that closed in April 2025. While there is no river frontage on site, the property is seasonally impacted by extreme storm events as part of the larger Soap Lake floodplain. It is currently farmed for hay and vegetable row crops.

“Our family owned and cared for this land for over 30 years, and there’s no question that seasonal flooding is a real challenge and only getting worse,” said **Kathy Fehlman**, whose family-owned Ojeda

Ranch for 30 years. “We are pleased that POST will continue what our family started and that they will explore the current water and land use challenges so that sustainable agriculture can continue to thrive here. It’s an enduring legacy that is a really great outcome for everyone.”

Gonzales Ranch facing the Diablo Range, with Pacheco Peak in the background. Photo: Teddy Miller/POST

Next Steps

POST plans to collaborate with various individuals and organizations to develop land use concepts for these three properties that incorporate restoration and sustainable agriculture. One plan will ultimately be selected to advance to further design stages. Throughout this process, POST will collaborate with local partners, such as the San Benito Agricultural Land Trust, Amah Mutsun Land Trust and others. POST will also consult with existing lease holders, other advisors and local conservation and agricultural community members.

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Media please note: Images, b-roll and maps for media usage are available for download 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 saving more than 93,000 acres since its founding in 1977. POST works with private landowners and public agencies to create a network of protected lands so that present and future generations may benefit from the careful balance of rural and urban landscapes that makes our region extraordinary. Visit openspacetrust.org for more information.

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