

Leigh Anne Varney
Landis Communications Inc. for POST and VHA
(415) 713-0713
post@landispr.com
www.landispr.com

Alisha Maniglia
Open Space Authority
(669) 210-9590
amaniglia@openspaceauthority.org

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Santa Clara Valley Habitat Agency, Santa Clara Valley Open Space Authority and Peninsula Open Space Trust Protect 1,861-Acre Tilton Ranch, Bringing Total Acres Protected Adjoining Coyote Valley to 2,900

Public-private collaboration preserves habitat for endangered native species, wildlife passage, grazing and critical watershed

MORGAN HILL, Calif. (October 6, 2020) – [Santa Clara Valley Habitat Agency](#) (Habitat Agency), [Santa Clara Valley Open Space Authority](#) (Authority) and [Peninsula Open Space Trust](#) (POST) today announced the purchase of 1,861 acres of Tilton Ranch, increasing permanently protected land to more than 2,900 acres adjacent to Coyote Valley, north of Morgan Hill. One of the largest remaining intact ranches in the South Bay, Tilton Ranch contains critical watershed for both Monterey and San Francisco Bays and is home to dozens of unique and endangered species, some of which occur only in this area.



Tilton Ranch borders the previously protected 603-acre Baird parcel acquired by the Habitat Agency in December 2019. To the north, it borders the existing 348-acre Coyote Valley Open Space Preserve. Today's acquisition significantly expands the open space that connects San Jose and Morgan Hill, providing numerous environmental benefits and potential recreational opportunities for citizens and municipalities throughout the region.

Photo courtesy The Chickering Company

The Property History

The ranch opened in 1917, under the ownership of the Tilton family and their descendants, and has operated continuously since then. For much of that time, the land has been grazed with cattle and dry-farmed for hay and grain. Mining for cinnabar also took place on part of the property early in the 20th century, but that usage ceased following World War II. The ranch sits on ancestral lands of numerous Indigenous peoples, who stewarded the land for millennia and whose descendants, members of the [Muwekma Ohlone Tribe](#) and the [Amah Mutsun Tribal Band](#), still reside in the region.

The Conservation Vision

Situated in the eastern foothills of the Santa Cruz Mountains, the expansive property has been a top conservation priority, cited in numerous regional plans and studies, for decades. It provides landscape linkages that help connect wildlife from the Santa Cruz Mountains in the west to the Diablo range in the east and the Gabilan range to the south. Protecting these pathways from development ensures viable wildlife passage between the ranges, which is essential to maintaining biodiversity in the entire region. Tilton Ranch is also home to the headwaters of Fisher Creek, which flows north through Laguna Seca, the largest remaining freshwater wetland in Santa Clara County located in Coyote Valley, and into the San Francisco Bay. It also constitutes part of the Pajaro River watershed, which flows south to Monterey Bay.

The combined Tilton-Baird properties support thirteen natural land cover types, including habitat for five animal species and six California endemic plant species targeted for conservation by the Santa Clara Valley Habitat Agency. These include the endangered Bay checkerspot butterfly, threatened California red-legged frog, endangered foothill yellow-legged frog, threatened California tiger salamander, western pond turtle, threatened tricolored blackbird, western burrowing owl, fragrant fritillary, Loma Prieta hoita, most beautiful jewelflower, Mount Hamilton thistle and smooth lessingia.



Endangered coyote ceonothus

“The Habitat Agency shares the family’s commitment to preserving the property’s ranching heritage, the rare and endangered habitat that exists on this property, as well as their wish to ensure the future of this place that is so iconic to the American West,” said Executive Officer **Edmund Sullivan**. “Our 2013 Habitat Plan specifically identified this area for conservation due to the 13 natural land cover types and known occurrences of endangered species on the ranch, plus the 5.8 miles of streams that are so vital to our area’s water supply. We are grateful to our partners for making this keystone acquisition possible.”

As it is today, the 1,861-acre Tilton Ranch property will remain a multi-use landscape, with habitat protection, continued conservation grazing and numerous possibilities for compatible outdoor public recreation. Due to sensitive species on the site, the Baird parcel, at 603 acres, will become a nature reserve with strictly limited public access.

“Tilton Ranch is an astonishing property with glorious hilltop views and grasslands that host many native species. In many ways, it’s a gateway to California’s past and – thanks to the seller’s commitment to protecting these natural resources – to its future as well,” said **Walter T. Moore**, president of POST. “We are especially grateful to our public and private funding partners, in particular the Gordon and Betty Moore Foundation. They have not only been generous with grants in support of our recent major Coyote Valley conservation purchases, but also have been exceptional partners in offering additional financing options when needed.”

“Tilton Ranch is one of the County’s largest working ranches, and protecting such a large natural and working landscape so close to our urban areas is so important for nature and people,” said **Andrea Mackenzie**, general manager for the Authority. “We look forward to stewarding this important landscape for all its conservation benefits and continuing the family’s ranching legacy.”

“This is one of the most significant Bay Area conservation acquisitions in recent memory,” said **Dan Winterson**, who manages the Bay Area Conservation Program at the Gordon and Betty Moore Foundation. “It would not have happened without truly effective collaboration among the partnering agencies, non-profits and funders, and we are thrilled to be able to support the permanent protection of Tilton Ranch.”

The Transaction

This conservation purchase is the third transaction involving the ranch owners and Santa Clara Valley Habitat Agency. The Habitat Agency's purchase of 1,861 acres of Tilton Ranch for \$18,051,700 is funded by \$9.9 million in grants from the [California Wildlife Conservation Board](#) and [U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service](#); \$1.4 million from the Habitat Agency; \$2.4 million from the Authority, which includes a \$1 million Priority Conservation Area grant from the [Metropolitan Transportation Commission](#); \$3.4 million from POST; and \$1 million from [Santa Clara County Parks](#). Support for this project was generously provided through grants and program-related investment from the [Gordon and Betty Moore Foundation](#).

In December 2019, the Habitat Agency purchased the 603-acre Baird property for \$6.5 million, and the 93-acre Davidson property for \$1.3 million in February 2020. Both were originally part of Tilton Ranch. With this transaction, the Habitat Agency assumes full ownership until a future transfer of the property to the Authority is completed.

Santa Clara County Supervisor **Mike Wasserman**, whose district 1 includes Tilton Ranch, said, "The County, the Habitat Agency and the Open Space Authority have a long-standing history of partnership in acquiring, linking and managing parks and open space preserves. I am excited to support the purchase of these lands and work with all of our vital partners to protect our wildlife habitats, while ensuring that all of our residents can enjoy more trail connectivity for activities such as hiking, biking and running."

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About Santa Clara Valley Habitat Agency

The Santa Clara Valley Habitat Agency is responsible for implementing the Santa Clara Valley Habitat Conservation Plan and Natural Community Conservation Plan (Habitat Plan), which was approved in 2013. The Habitat Plan provides a regulatory framework for local governments, districts, and landowners to efficiently attain the necessary permits for projects that support economic development of the region while also taking a holistic approach to protecting listed species and enhancing natural resources. The Habitat Plan will result in a coordinated, comprehensive conservation that will ensure that habitats are connected, monitored, and maintained for maximum benefit to at-risk species. The Reserve System the Habitat Agency is charged with creating will ultimately protect an estimated 46,920 acres for the benefit of 18 plant and wildlife species, natural communities, biological diversity, and ecosystem function. Visit scv-habitatagency.org for more information.

About the 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 80,000 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.

About the Santa Clara Valley Open Space Authority

The Open Space Authority was created by the California state legislature in 1993 to conserve the natural environment, support agriculture, and connect people to nature by protecting open spaces, natural areas, and working farms and ranches for future generations. The Authority has protected over 28,000 acres of open space, preserving the region's scenic beauty, protecting open space, wildlife habitat, water resources and agricultural land, and providing outdoor recreation opportunities for Santa Clara Valley residents. In 2017, the Authority published the [Coyote Valley Landscape Linkage Report](#), a scientific vision identifying Coyote Valley as an essential landscape linkage to facilitate wildlife movement between the mountain ranges that surround it. Visit openspaceauthority.org for more information.

About Santa Clara County Parks & Recreation

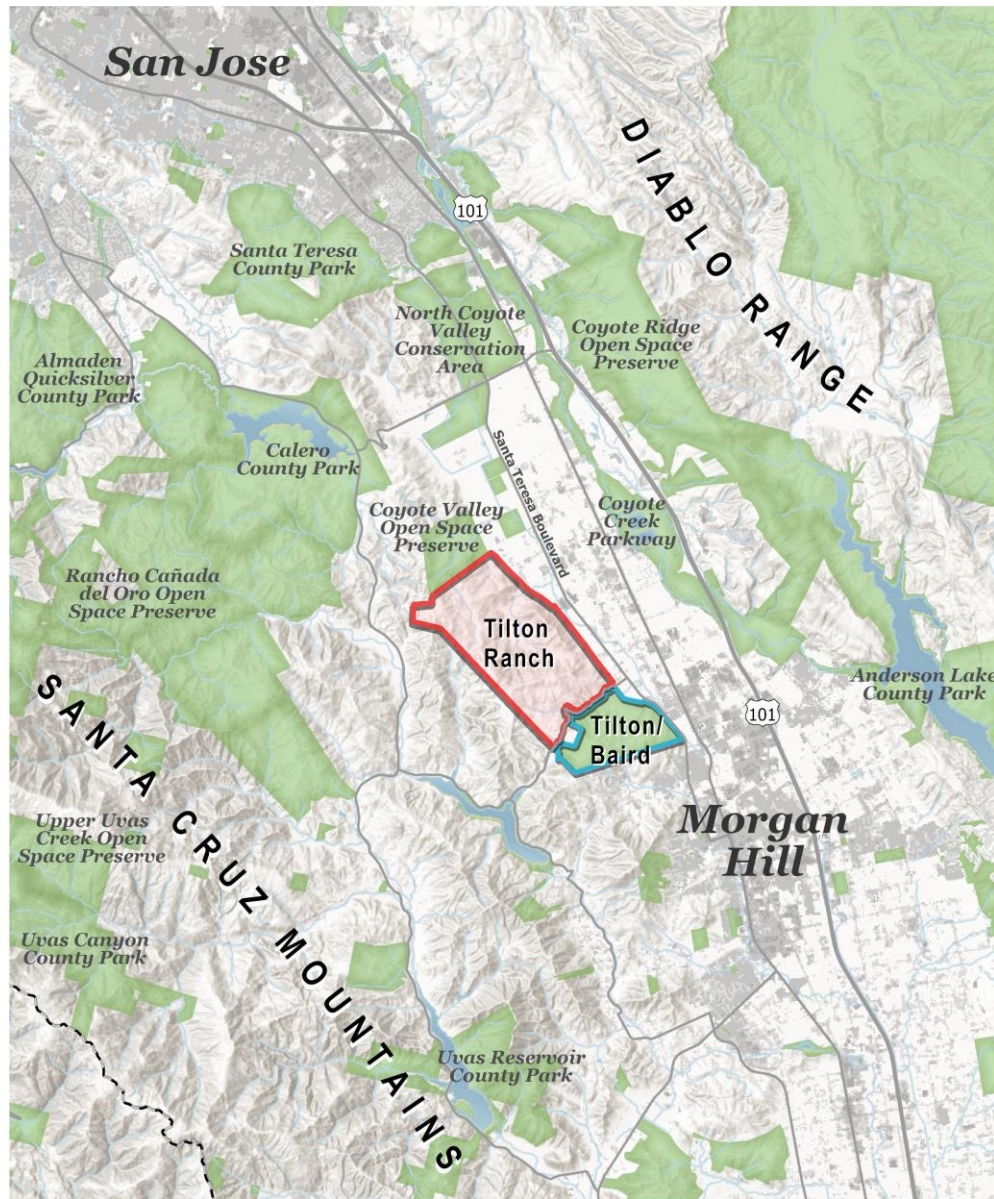
Santa Clara County acquired its first parkland in 1924 and became the Parks & Recreation Department in 1956. They provide a sustainable system of diverse regional parks, trails and natural areas that connect people with the natural environment, support healthy lifestyles, offer outstanding visitor experiences that renew the human spirit, while balancing recreation opportunities with the protection of natural, cultural, historic, and scenic resources. Learn more at sccgov.org.

About Gordon and Betty Moore Foundation

The Gordon and Betty Moore Foundation fosters path-breaking scientific discovery, environmental conservation, patient care improvements and preservation of the special character of the Bay Area. Visit Moore.org and follow [@MooreFound](https://twitter.com/MooreFound).

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Tilton Ranch and Tilton/Baird

Map date: 9/24/2020
Sources: ESRI, POST, CPAD, San Mateo County

