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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Peninsula Open Space Trust Transfers 644 acres of Johnston Ranch to Midpeninsula Regional Open Space District, Fulfilling Long-Term Vision to Protect Agriculture and Build Climate Resiliency on San Mateo Coast

Aerial view from Johnston Ranch uplands, westward to the Pacific, over Half Moon Bay. Photo: Teddy Miller for POST

Palo Alto, Calif. (June 5, 2024) — Peninsula Open Space Trust (POST) today announced the transfer of 644 acres of the Johnston Ranch property in Half Moon Bay, Calif., to the Midpeninsula Regional Open Space District (Midpen), a public agency that owns and manages open space preserves across the region. The transferred portion of the Johnston Ranch property will become part of Midpen's existing Miramontes Ridge Open Space Preserve. Together over the past four decades, POST and Midpen have protected tens of thousands of acres across the region.

The entire 868-acre Johnston Ranch property is an iconic coastal landscape located on the southern edge of the City of Half Moon Bay (see map below). It is made up of rolling grassy hills, or "uplands," a mix of coastal ecosystems, the Arroyo Leon Creek corridor and working agricultural lands. In the early 1990s, the property was slated to be developed into a golf course and luxury homes; however, 84% of San Mateo County voters rejected that proposal, creating the opportunity for POST to purchase and preserve the property in two transactions in 1999 and 2001 totaling $5.65 million.

Following the Midpen transfer, POST will retain ownership of a 224-acre section of prime-soil agricultural lands on which Giusti Farms has been farming for generations. In keeping with the vision of its Farmland Program, POST aims eventually to transfer ownership of the farming acres to the Giusti family. POST will continue to hold an agricultural conservation easement over the property, protecting it from future development and ensuring that it remains productively farmed.

"Johnston Ranch is a prime example of how we must use all the tools we have – conservation easements, environmentally conscious farmers and ranchers, private and public funders and a community committed to conservation – to enable matching the right lands with the right long-term stewards so everyone wins," said **Walter T. Moore**, president of POST.

Since late 2021, when its board of directors approved purchasing the undeveloped Johnston Ranch uplands from POST, Midpen has been managing the property as part of its adjacent Miramontes Ridge Open Space Preserve. Conservation grazing by a local cattle rancher continues on the property, now as part of Midpen's conservation grazing program. Midpen developed a rangeland management plan for the site and worked with the grazing tenant on brush management.

In alignment with Midpen's coastal mission, conservation grazing is a land-management tool that both supports viable local agriculture and achieves conservation goals. These include maintaining and enhancing remnant stands of biologically rich native grasslands, which evolved with and can benefit from periodic disturbances such as those provided by managed grazing. Johnston Ranch's rangelands include California oatgrass, purple needlegrass, California meadow barley, western rush and other native grasses and wildflowers. They also provide important habitat for grassland-dependent native wildlife, including grasshopper and savannah sparrows, western meadowlarks, burrowing owls and American badgers.

Future plans for Johnston Ranch

In the future, Midpen will undertake a public process to explore creating environmentally sensitive public access via a new loop trail near the Johnston House, as well as possible trail connections to nearby Burleigh Murray Ranch State Park.

"Midpen and POST have a productive public-private partnership that contributes significantly to the health of the plants, wildlife and people throughout our region," Midpen Assistant General Manager **Brian Malone** said. "On the San Mateo County coast specifically, where agricultural roots run deep, our partnership is uniquely positioned to also help preserve and support viable agriculture that provides local food and is compatible with conservation and ecologically sensitive public access. Our work together on protecting the Johnston Ranch property is an excellent example of our partnership at work on the Coastside."

History of Johnston Ranch

Johnston Ranch is located within the ancestral territory of the Quiroste Tribe, which is one of many independent tribal groups referred to collectively today as the Ohlone. The Quiroste and other Ohlone tribes managed the lands for many purposes, including growing food and regularly burning the grasslands, until they were displaced by European settlers. In 1853, James Johnston, a Scottish immigrant who prospered in post-Gold Rush San Francisco, purchased 1,162 acres of the Miramontes Rancho de San Benito along the southern part of Half Moon Bay.

The City of Half Moon Bay continues to own and manage the historic New England saltbox-style Johnston House located on a 20-acre parcel within the Johnston Ranch property. Visible from Highway 1 and a landmark to many who live on or visit the coast, the house is open to the public for docent-led tours. In the coming years, the City of Half Moon Bay will launch its planning process for a pedestrian and bike trail to connect downtown Half Moon Bay with the Johnston House along Higgins Canyon Road.

Midpen's $4.8 million purchase of the Johnston Ranch uplands from POST is funded by Measure AA, passed by local voters in 2014 to support the implementation of projects in Midpen's community-supported Vision Plan. The cost was offset by a total of $700,000 in grants from the Coastal Conservancy and California State Parks' Habitat Conservation Fund.

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About the Peninsula Open Space Trust (POST)
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 preserving more than 87,000 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 benefit from the careful balance of rural and urban landscapes that makes our region extraordinary. Visit openspacetrust.org for more information.

About Midpeninsula Regional Open Space District (Midpen)
Midpen is a public agency whose mission is to acquire and preserve a regional greenbelt of open space land of regional significance in perpetuity, protect and restore the natural environment and provide opportunities for ecologically sensitive public enjoyment and education. On the San Mateo County coast, Midpen's mission also includes preserving agricultural land of regional significance and rural character and encouraging viable agricultural use of land resources. Midpen has successfully protected more than 70,000 acres of public open space land across 27 preserves throughout the greater Santa Cruz Mountains region since 1972. Visit openspace.org for more information.

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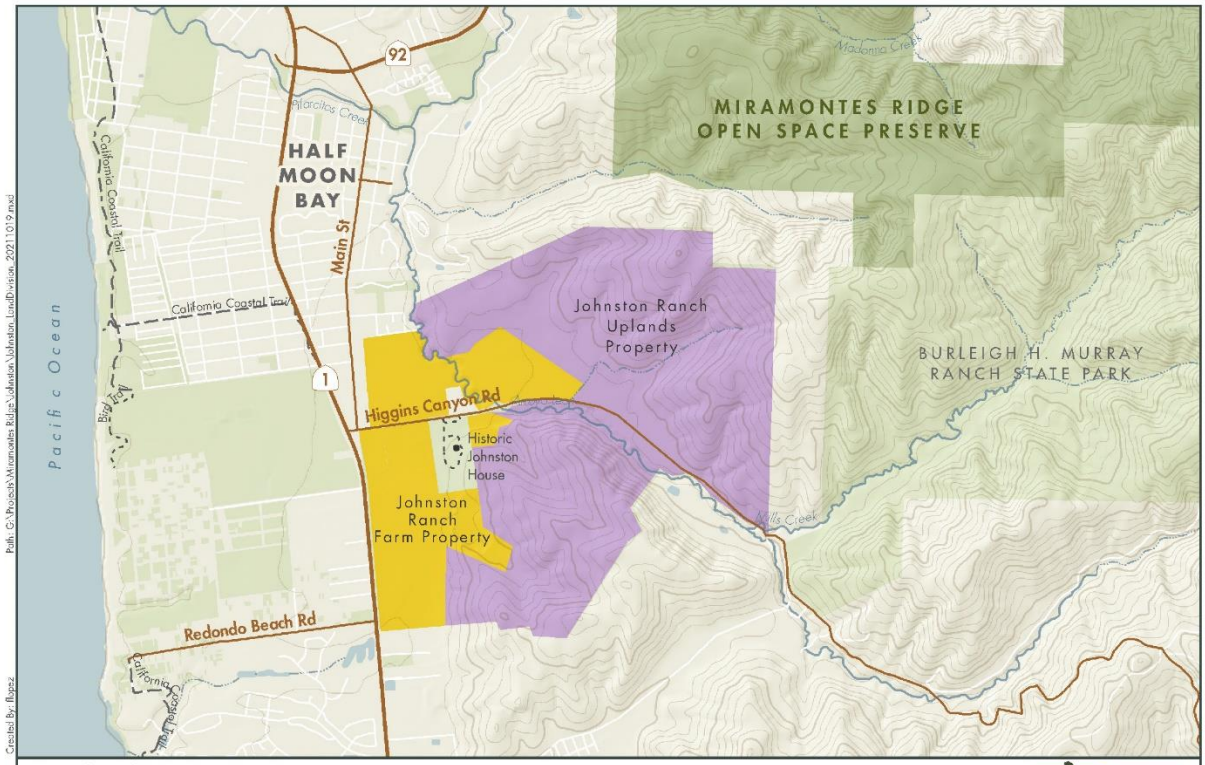
-- For high resolution photos or map, email post@landispr.com or access here --



Transfer of Johnston Ranch

- Midpen preserve
- Other protected land
- Private property
- 224-acre Farm Property
- 644-acre Uplands Property

Midpeninsula Regional
Open Space District
(Midpen)
3/15/2024

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Created By: flopez

While the District strives to use the best available digital data, these data do not represent a legal survey and are merely a graphic illustration of geographic features.