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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Peninsula Open Space Trust Purchases and Permanently Protects Additional 2,284 Acres of Sargent Ranch in South Santa Clara County

$23 million acquisition ensures conservation of full 6,500 acres; commitments in place for remaining ranch parcels in late 2026

Deal secures habitat for threatened species, regional wildlife connectivity and preservation of culturally significant landscape

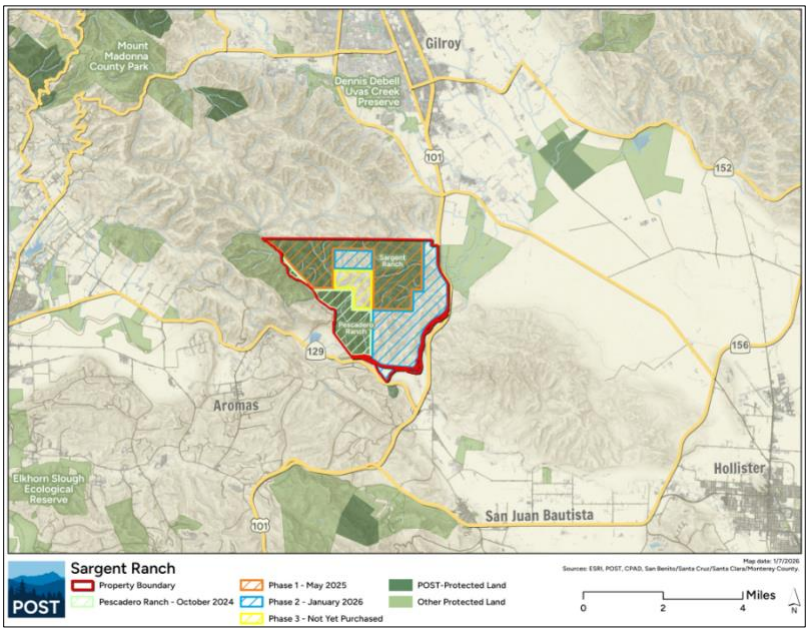
Photo: Teddy Miller for POST

PALO ALTO, Calif. (January 29, 2026) – Peninsula Open Space Trust (POST) today announced the purchase of an additional 2,284 acres of the historic Sargent Ranch property for $23.04 million. Sargent Ranch, originally named *Rancho Juristac*, is located in southern Santa Clara County, southwest of Gilroy, Calif. To date, POST has protected 6,114 acres of the 6,500-acre ranch that is home to multiple at-risk species and provides vital habitat and connectivity for wildlife across the region. This land forms the core of the Juristac Tribal Cultural Landscape, an area held sacred by the Amah Mutsun Tribal Band where tribal ceremonies were conducted for millennia. The unique geography of Sargent Ranch provides essential connectivity between the Santa Cruz Mountains, Gabilan Range and Diablo Range.

POST's purchase of this property helps preserve biodiversity and connectivity across the entire region, provides environmental benefits such as watershed protection and carbon sequestration, protects the

scenic natural beauty of this iconic California landscape and secures a significant portion of the Juristac Tribal Cultural Landscape.

“Sargent Ranch is a rare ecological and cultural treasure. Its location right at the southern tip of the Santa Cruz Mountains makes it a vitally important landscape that connects the San Francisco Peninsula to the rest of California,” said **Gordon Clark**, president of POST. “This connectivity is critical to the environmental health of our entire region and the state more broadly. Additionally, it is part of what is known as the Juristac Tribal Cultural Landscape, an irreplaceable and uniquely meaningful place of spiritual, cultural and natural importance. Had we missed out on this huge conservation opportunity, all these benefits may have been lost forever.”



Property History

Sargent Ranch occupies much of the land from west of Highway 101 to the Santa Cruz County line and north of Highway 129. The Amah Mutsun Tribal Band refers to the Sargent Ranch area as Juristac, or meaning “Place of the Big Head,” and considers the area to be home to spiritual deities that are connected with ceremonial rites. For millennia, Indigenous peoples gathered at Juristac for sacred ceremonial dances and healings, regarding it as a place of inherent power. The Amah Mutsun and their ancestors stewarded the landscape for countless generations as they hunted, fished, collected plants for food, craft and medicine, and lived in small villages within the southern foothills of the Santa Cruz Mountains, above the Pajaro and San Benito rivers.

“It is deeply fortunate that the landscape of Juristac has been protected. We are grateful to all who have worked alongside our Tribe to make this dream a reality,” said **Ed Ketchum**, chairman of the Amah Mutsun Tribal Band. “Juristac is a place of great power, where our spiritual doctors lived and conducted healings. The history of our people is written across the landscape and lives today in our stories. The protection of Juristac honors our ancestors and brings hope for a brighter tomorrow when we can return to our sacred grounds and restore our traditions.”

The Sargent Ranch property spans a vast open space area above the confluence of the Pajaro and San Benito rivers, west of Highway 101 and north of Highway 129. In the Spanish period in the early 1800s, the land that would become Sargent Ranch was claimed by Mission San Juan Bautista, and in the Mexican period, became an 1835 Mexican land grant known as *Rancho Juristac.*

The ranch’s current name is derived from the mid-1800s purchase by James P. Sargent, who made his fortune in the California Gold Rush. For a time, the property included a railroad depot, saloon and other infrastructure. It has had numerous owners since and has been subject to various unrealized plans for

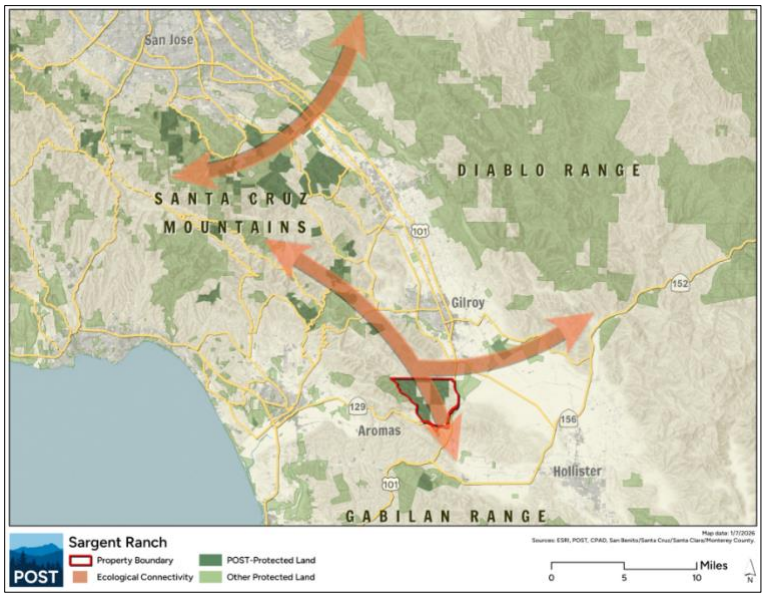
development. The property was owned most recently by a group of investors called Sargent Ranch Partners LLC that proposed a sand and gravel mine on the site.

POST's purchase of Sargent Ranch follows years of coordinated efforts by the Amah Mutsun Tribal Band and numerous regional organizations and their supporters to advocate for conservation of the property through the Protect Juristac campaign. A unique coalition of advocacy partners convened by the Amah Mutsun Tribal Band and Green Foothills included regional conservation organizations, faith communities, civil rights organizations and grassroots community groups such as Friends of Juristac.

The Conservation Vision

By protecting Sargent Ranch, POST hopes to achieve landscape-scale conservation by protecting regionally significant wildlife linkages and broad ecological habitat for multiple at-risk species. The Ranch provides essential connectivity between the Santa Cruz mountain range, south through the Aromas Hills to the Gabilan Range and east to the Diablo Range through the Upper Pajaro Valley, facilitating movement for animals such as mountain lions and badgers.

As the climate changes, maintaining connected habitats is crucial to preventing genetic isolation and the potential local extinction of species in the Santa Cruz Mountains and beyond. Recent research by the California Department of Fish and Wildlife has found that mountain lions in the Santa Cruz Mountains are already isolated and at risk for population decline over time.



"Protecting apex predators like mountain lions that have an outsized effect on our local food webs helps sustain the health and biodiversity of our entire region," said **Marian Vernon**, wildlife linkages program manager for POST. "A purchase of this size, in a location as important as this, is extremely rare. I am thrilled that POST was able to make this happen since this land provides much to humans, too, including helping to mitigate the effects of climate change."

Among myriad other species, the property's grassy, oak-dotted hillsides are foraging grounds for golden eagles and northern harriers. The streams, ponds and wetlands in the valleys are suitable homes to California red-legged frogs, California tiger salamanders, northwest pond turtle and steelhead trout, all of which are federally threatened or proposed threatened species. A variety of soil types on site also offer excellent habitat for a vast array of plants.

"Many species that will benefit from the protection and enhancement of wildlife habitats and connectivity at Juristac are also of cultural importance to Indigenous people of the region including the Amah Mutsun Tribal Band, who regard the health of local wildlife populations as a reflection of the health of the landscape as a whole," said **Noelle Chambers**, executive director of the Amah Mutsun Land Trust. "The protection of Juristac demonstrates how wildlife conservation can dovetail synergistically

with the preservation of Indigenous people's sacred sites and cultural landscapes, leading to more meaningful and effective conservation outcomes."

Next Steps
The primary purpose of POST's acquisition is for conservation and as a result any commercial development proposals and plans, including the formerly proposed Sargent Ranch Quarry project, are no longer under consideration. POST will retain ownership of the property until its environmental resources can be thoroughly studied and plans for long-term stewardship are developed.

In these efforts, POST is working closely with a variety of partners, including the Amah Mutsun Tribal Band, Amah Mutsun Land Trust, Santa Clara County Parks, the Santa Clara Valley Habitat Agency, Valley Water, the Santa Clara Valley Open Space Authority and the Land Trust of Santa Cruz County, among others.

"Santa Clara County Parks congratulates POST on this historic open space acquisition," said **Todd Lofgren**, director of Santa Clara County Parks. "We look forward to collaborating on future opportunities for funding, planning, and visioning for the property that balance protection with preservation of natural and cultural resources and public access for education and inspiration."

The Transaction
POST's purchase of 2,284 acres for $23.04 million on January 28 was enabled by $3.95 million in funding from Valley Water's voter-approved Safe Clean Water and Natural Flood Protection Program and $1 million from the Land Trust of Santa Cruz County. Remaining funds will be raised from generous donors to POST.

In October of 2024, POST acquired the adjacent 1,340-acre Pescadero Ranch, previously part of the historic Sargent Ranch, for $15.65 million. An additional 2,490 acres of Sargent Ranch were purchased by POST in May 2025 for $25 million. When combined, the three purchases represent a total of 6,114 acres for a combined investment of $63.7 million. Another 480 acres of Sargent Ranch remain and are under contract to be sold to POST in late 2026.

POST president **Gordon Clark** added, "Taken together, the acreage and the funds invested make this the largest land conservation purchase in POST's nearly 50-year history. It represents decades of efforts on the part of many conservation and cultural organizations, funders and donors from across the region. We are deeply grateful to all POST's partners for their part in making this landmark conservation achievement possible."

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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 95,000 acres since 1977. POST works with private landowners and public agencies to connect people and nature. Visit openspacetrust.org for more information.

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