



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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District Protects Critical Habitat, Wildlife Linkages in Mayacamas

Agreement will protect one of the largest landholdings in Sonoma County

SANTA ROSA, Calif. –A 2,716-acre ranch in the central Mayacamas Mountain region, proximate to what was historically known as the H-E Ranch and one of the few remaining large landholdings in the area, is now protected forever through a conservation easement purchased by the Sonoma County Agricultural Preservation and Open Space District.

The property, east of Cloverdale, is located in an area that has been regionally identified as being one of seven critical wildlife linkages in the San Francisco Bay Area. It has also been recognized as a key wildlife movement corridor between the central Mayacamas and the Mt. Hood and Sonoma Mountain regions to the south, as well as the Mayacamas Range across the Russian River Valley to the Lake Sonoma Wildlife/Cooley Ranch Natural Areas to the west.

“This is prime ranchland teeming with wildlife,” said Richard Casarotti, co-owner of the Klesko property. “We wanted to ensure its preservation for generations to come.”

Today, the Sonoma County Board of Supervisors, acting as the District’s Board of Directors, approved the agreement between the District and former San Francisco Giants ballplayer Ryan Klesko and Richard Casarotti for a purchase price of \$1,766,000, with a maximum District contribution of \$1,590,000. The remaining cost will be funded through a commitment by The Nature Conservancy for up to \$176,000 or 10% of the purchase price, and a potential grant of up to \$250,000 from the California Habitat Conservation Fund Program.

“Today’s action will keep one of the most critical wildlife corridors in the Bay Area protected forever,” said Mike McGuire, Fourth District Supervisor. “Our partnership with the landowners and The Nature Conservancy preserves one of the richest natural areas in our County.”

This is the first land conservation deal that The Nature Conservancy has participated in Sonoma County in more than three decades. The conservation organization—which has protected nearly 120 million acres of land and 5,000 miles of rivers worldwide—preserved more than 1,200 acres in Sonoma County between 1969 and 1975. Additionally, The Nature Conservancy invested in the environmental education program at the Fairfield Osborn Preserve for almost 20 years.

“This easement protects a large area of the Central Mayacamas Mountains, one of the most pristine regions of Sonoma County,” said Jason Pelletier, The Nature Conservancy North Coast Project Director. “Preserving the critical habitat in this region is essential to iconic species like mountain lions and steelhead trout, and to the public who care about this majestic place.”

The project complements a statewide assessment completed last year by the California Department of Fish and Game and the California Department of Transportation of essential habitat connectivity that identifies large remaining blocks of intact habitat or natural landscape and linkages between them that need to be maintained, particularly as corridors for wildlife. A key goal of the effort, which was directed by the passage of AB 2785 (Ruskin, 2008), was to integrate natural resource considerations into transportation and land-use planning.

A variety of habitats, including oak woodlands, coniferous and cypress forests, chaparral, native grasslands, and rock outcroppings are present on the property—which boasts nine different oak species and reaches of the Big and Little Sulphur Creeks, designated as critical habitat under the Federal Endangered Species Act.

“Connection of our landscapes is critical to our local and regional conservation efforts,” said Bill Keene, General Manager of the District. “These linkages are essential to providing a safe passage for wildlife adapting to an ever-changing climate.”

About the Sonoma County Agricultural Preservation and Open Space District

The Sonoma County Agricultural Preservation and Open Space District permanently protects the diverse **agricultural, natural resource** and **scenic open space** lands of Sonoma County for future generations. Since 1990, the District has protected more than 83,000 acres. Agricultural and open space lands have been protected through a 1/4-cent sales tax approved by voters in 1990 and reauthorized in 2006. For more information, please visit www.sonomaopenspace.org

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