

Arroyo Hondo to be Preserved

The vision of the **Conservancy** is the permanent protection of the Gaviota Coast's unique natural, scenic, agricultural, recreational, and cultural resources.

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The Land Trust for Santa Barbara County has secured an option to purchase the spectacular 782-acre Arroyo Hondo Ranch located between Refugio and Gaviota Canyons. The entire coastal watershed of the canyon will be preserved, providing trail and wildlife corridor linkages between the Santa Ynez Mountains/Los Padres National Forest and the coast. Said to be the "jewel of the coast," the property was recently assessed as one of the top 3 of the 36 watersheds of the Gaviota Coast in terms of habitat quality and species diversity.

The Land Trust's long term vision for the ranch is that it is managed in perpetuity as a public preserve. The public will be welcomed into the canyon to enjoy its beauty and serenity in a way that does not compromise the canyon's sensitive natural resources. The Land Trust will develop a management plan addressing the issues of recreational access, educational programs, resource management, and long-term ownership.

This is the first fee-title conservation acquisition on the Gaviota Coast. It is an important example of a win-win-win scenario for the property owner, the public and the environment. For the Land Trust to finalize this exciting purchase, significant money needs to be raised from our community. Of the almost \$7,000,000 project price, the Land Trust has already received \$4,500,000, including



Clyde Butcher, the renowned Everglades landscape photographer, visited our coast last spring and took this portrait of Arroyo Hondo Canyon.

© Clyde Butcher 2000

a \$4,000,000 grant from the California Coastal Conservancy. Over \$1,000,000 in private contributions and foundation grants must be raised by October 15, 2001.

We strongly support this important acquisition and urge you to help the Land Trust in any way you can. To find out how to help, or to support the purchase through a gift of cash or stocks (to avoid capital gains taxes), contact the Land Trust at 966-4520 or ltsbc@silcom.com.

Community Meeting

We will host a **slide show and public forum** on the threat of urban sprawl on the coast and the numerous strategies available to preserve the coast from development. This free discussion will be held at the **Goleta Community Center**, 5679 Hollister Ave, on **Tuesday, April 17**, beginning at 7:00 p.m.

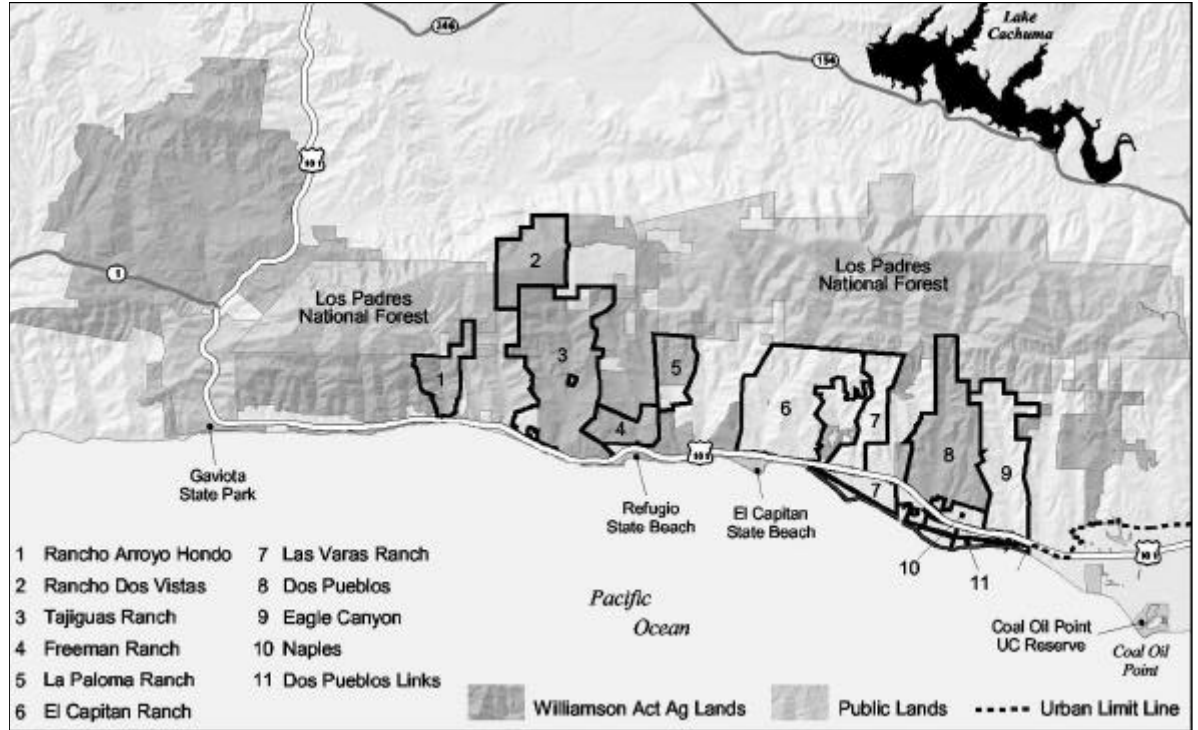
Threats to the Coast

Recently, a rancher suggested that the agricultural preserve program was enough to prevent urban sprawl on the Gaviota Coast. He showed a map of the properties in the program and said that when you combine these lands with the publicly owned lands, there is little left to worry about within the coast and its watersheds. This raises a good question:

Are the status quo zoning and land use regulations sufficient to protect the coast from development?

The agricultural preserve program encourages landowners to keep their land in agricultural production by substantially reducing their property taxes, if they agree to keep their land in agricultural use for at least 10 years.

It's ironic, however, that the area most suitable for agriculture has the least acreage in agricultural preserve. As you might



expect, the foothills and canyons between the mountains and the sea contain the best areas for agriculture. The steep mountain backdrop is less suitable, and as the mountains crowd in closer and closer to the shoreline moving from Goleta to Gaviota, there is less and less land suitable for agriculture. Most of the agricultural activity on the Gaviota Coast has historically been between Tajiguas Canyon (just west of Refugio) and Goleta. That is still true today, but, surprisingly, much of this land, while in agricultural use, is not in the agricultural preserve program. The privately owned land between El Capitan and the urban limit line at Winchester Canyon contains about 17,000 acres, yet, only about 20% of it is in the agricultural preserve

program. Thus, the program provides little protection from development threats to the most endangered portion of the coast. And these pressures are significant. A tour of the development interests from Ellwood to Tajiguas is instructive.

Ellwood Mesa: The proposal to build the “Monarch Point” luxury homes in Western Goleta continues to wind its way through the permit process. If approved, it would forever displace scenic coastal open space and sensitive habitats within the urban area.

Winchester Canyon: This wonderfully scenic canyon has been in row crop production for many years. Although zoned for agriculture, much of the canyon is not enrolled in agricultural preserve status and is vulnerable to development if the zoning restrictions were to change. This canyon borders the urban limit line and is the first defense against urban sprawl.

Eagle Canyon: Eagle Canyon, with lush bottomland and stunning mountain vistas, lies two canyons to the west of Winchester Canyon. It is in agricultural use, but is not in agricultural preserve status. The owners recently initiated a lawsuit against the County because of a new policy that prevents increased development on agriculturally zoned land. The owners assert that the policy impairs their “potential development rights.” This is a clear indication of development awaiting a change in zoning policy.



Board members and volunteers spent an early February day on the coast discussing issues and hiking at Arroyo Hondo. This view of the coast is taken from Coal Oil Point.

© Rich Reid 2001

Preservation Alternatives

Although it is difficult to determine the best strategy for preservation of the Gaviota Coast, it may be useful to look at our options and realize that it is quite likely that a combination of alternatives could provide the optimal preservation benefits.

A National Seashore or other **Federal designation** of the coast could potentially provide numerous advantages, including Federal funding for purchase of development rights, conservation easements, or fee title to property sold by willing sellers. In addition, the National Park Service has extensive experience in land management, public services, restoration, and regional planning to protect biodiversity.

Local and national conservation groups could have a large role to play through the purchases from willing sellers of development rights and conservation easements, or land acquisition. The Land Trust's purchase of the development rights of the Freeman Ranch at the mouth of Refugio Canyon and their current campaign to acquire Arroyo Hondo are excellent examples of recent success in this endeavor. The scale of the large economic need for future acquisitions may overwhelm the resources of these conservation groups, but they play a vital role.

A **transfer of development rights program** allows the development rights of one property to be transferred to another property where development would be more appropriate. Such a program requires the support of all of the involved governing bodies and finds little support at this time. Nonetheless, its application could be useful in certain circumstances.

One of several voter-approved initiatives has been contemplated. A **SOAR Initiative** (Save Our Agricultural Resources) locks-in-place the County's agricultural zoning ordinances and policies for a period of up to 30 years unless a change is made by public vote. This is an anti-sprawl strategy growing in popularity around the State and reduces the politics in the land use arena. Importantly, such an initiative tends to cause land to be valued more for its agricultural values rather than speculative values based on anticipated development potential. The primary disadvantage of a SOAR Initiative is that it does not preclude large lot development of agricultural land ("trophy ranches") now zoned mostly 100 acres minimum.

Other alternatives include an **open space district, agricultural district, or park district** established by voter initiative. Voters in a given geographic area can create these districts by taxing themselves to acquire land or easements, and electing a managing Board of Directors. The creation of such districts requires a two-thirds majority vote.

Naples: Naples is located between Eagle Canyon and Dos Pueblos Canyon. There are two development proposals by landowners in this area.

1) West of the Bacara Resort, on the ocean side of Highway 101, the Dos Pueblos Associates are seeking a permit to develop the Dos Pueblos Links – a golf course, driving range, restaurant, and miscellaneous support facilities – on their 147 acres. Additionally, this property includes a portion of the old Naples antiquated subdivision with some uncertain number of potentially buildable lots. The County Board of Supervisors during the tenure of Supervisors Staffel and Stoker granted a conditional use permit for this development, circumventing a more rigorous process for change in zoning designations – an example of the limits of "local control" in containing urban sprawl.

2) The site of the old Naples township was recently sold by the Morehart family, *et al* to Vintage Communities, an Orange County development company. This property is subject to an antiquated subdivision originating from the 1880s. The County currently recognizes up to 233 buildable lots on this 485-acre beachfront parcel. This property has the largest and most threatening development potential on the coast at the present moment.

Las Varas Ranch: This ranch contains some of the most scenic coastal landscapes in the area. This 1,520-acre property is on the market for \$45,000,000 (\$30,000 per acre), a price that may preclude an agricultural buyer, illustrating the challenge of maintaining agricultural land use. Proposals by the owners in the past revealed their intention to hold the land for development purposes. The owners are a party to the recent lawsuits brought against the County to protect their "potential development rights."

Tajiguas Ranch: The owners of this ranch have recently proposed to subdivide the Tajiguas Ranch into twenty-five, 100-acre lots using the "lot line adjustment" process. This would create a development similar to the subdivision of Hollister Ranch. Approximately 130 parcels of 100+ acres would make it the largest subdivision in the rural portion of the coast. The Tajiguas owners joined the lawsuit against the County to maximum their "potential development rights."

For more information, see "Frequently Asked Questions" on our website: www.gaviotacoast.org.

Become a Member

Join the GCC and help us maintain our efforts to preserve our beautiful coastline and watersheds. Membership is:

\$10 for students, seniors, low income

\$25 for other individuals or families

\$40 for businesses

Other donations are greatly appreciated.

We are a non-profit organization so your contribution is tax-deductible under the terms of the law.

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You can also download our membership form from our website:

www.gaviotacoast.org

NPS Feasibility Study

The Park Service anticipates having a draft of this study available for public review and comment in August of this year. The study will:

- ❖ Evaluate the significance of the area's natural, cultural, and recreational resources.
- ❖ Determine the suitability and feasibility of adding the area, or portions of it, to the National Park System.
- ❖ Evaluate a range of strategies for the protection of the Gaviota Coast's resources, including options that do not involve the National Park Service.

Contact: National Park Service, Gaviota Coast Feasibility Study (PGSO-PP), 600 Harrison St. #600, San Francisco, CA 94107
e-mail: PGSO_Gaviota@nps.gov
www.nps.gov/pwro/gaviota

What You Can Do

Contact any or all of the below to express your support for the preservation of the coast and/or the NPS feasibility study:

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