



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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## President's Message, The Force of Fire

If you've driven the Gaviota Coast since last May, you have witnessed the stark changes produced by the Gaviota fire. Joe Pasinato at the USFS says the fire started about noon on June 5th, next to the highway in the Gaviota Pass, but an exact cause has not been determined. It burned 7,440 acres over 5 days, with containment at 6 p.m. on the 10th, in Arroyo Hondo Canyon. The U.S. Forest Service, California Division of Forestry, and Santa Barbara County Fire Department shared responsibility for managing suppression, with another dozen agencies assisting, at a total cost of \$5,545,514.

The visual impact of the fire is pretty dramatic in places. But, what you can't see while driving the highway is the extent of emerging new growth. The closer you look, the more you see. Some areas have as much as 80% of the shrubs with new growth and many of the blackened live oaks are sprouting new branches. Once the rainy season begins, we'll see even more variety in the emerging vegetation.

As expected, there are pockets of unburned areas which will, along with the variety of new growth, produce an increase in species diversity and age groups in the vegetation, with a corresponding increase in food sources for wildlife.

Sometimes change is a good thing; even if we don't recognize it at first. Biologists tell us that living systems are dynamic; changing through time to such an extent that change is to be expected, even necessary. Natural forces, like fire and storms, routinely bring change. I think that's a good way to think about fire; a natural force of change. It is, in



*The charred Gaviota Coast looking east from Hollister Ranch.*

fact, one of the key processes which shape the terrestrial landscape.

While most people now understand that fire brings benefits to the natural landscape, our relationship with fire has always been about control; it always will be, but research and experience teaches us that using fire may be the best way to control fire. The best stewardship of the Gaviota Coast's increasingly rare and valuable biological resources includes the use of occasional prescribed fires. Without it, we are left with increased risk of loss from inevitable wildfires. After all, it's not a matter of if fire will happen; it's a matter of when and under what conditions.

Surprisingly, even though the 50-year-old fuel load was expected to produce fearful destruction, the damage to buildings and infrastructure was minimal. We got off easy this time. The Conservancy will encourage land management agencies to use this good fortune to re-introduce prescribed fire to the Gaviota wildlands more frequently, for enhanced resource management and public safety.

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You can always retrieve another at our website: [www.gaviotacoastconservancy.org](http://www.gaviotacoastconservancy.org).

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# Naples Update

The GCC and its partners in the Naples Coalition continue the effort to minimize the impacts of any development that may occur on the antiquated subdivision historically known as Naples. The Land Use Committee of the Coalition had a series of meetings over the spring and summer with the developer Matt Osgood and his consultant Mark Lloyd in an attempt to find a compromise that would remove development from the coastal bluffs and reduce the project's visual impacts. These discussions were suspended until such time as a productive dialogue could be resumed.

The County has deemed the developer's application complete, starting a 12-month Planning Commission review and an additional 6-month Board of Supervisors decision period. This compressed timeline is mandated by the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) entered into by the County and the property owners. The MOU is an agreement that froze pending lawsuits against the County brought by the previous owner of Naples, the Morehart family. In return the developer was allowed to submit a proposal for the construction of 54 residences ranging in size from 3,500 to 13,300 square feet (average 5,800).

The Coalition is engaging a broad range of community expertise to develop alternatives to the present proposal.

- ◆ Christina and Mike McGinnis of Bioregional Planning Associates (BPA) will assist in preparing comments to the County regarding the scope of the project's Environmental Impact



photo © Joe Babine, 2004

*Coalition members participating in a field trip at Naples hosted by the developer.*

Report (EIR). BPA has considerable practical and academic experience in local planning and environmental issues.

- ◆ The Conception Coast Project will develop maps of the property to help in the creation of an alternative project in the EIR to reduce the visual impacts of the development.
- ◆ The Environmental Defense Center continues to assist the Coalition in preparing its legal strategy.

The GCC and the Naples Coalition will vigorously address the threat that this project presents to the rural character of the coast.

## Plover Patrol *(Board member Ed Easton is the chairperson of Friends of Coal Oil Point Reserve)*

"It was the best of times, it was the worst of times." That sums up the summer of '04. The plovers started breeding early and bred in great numbers. But only 24 chicks finally fledged, compared to last summer's 40. We'd been warned to expect predation increases, but the number shocked us.

The problems started early, because the plovers started nesting early. The tide took 14 eggs as late winter waves went far beyond what the early nesters anticipated. We'd had a record number, 300, of wintering birds and that may have triggered early competition for nesting sites. Then, between the skunks, crows and a red tailed hawk, we lost 47 more eggs and chicks. One chick was stepped on by a night time stroller. That was the bad news.

The good news was that between 15 to 30 nesting pairs were on the beach at various times during this summer. They produced 152 eggs and 24 chicks finally fledged. The season of '03 saw 62 eggs produced and 40 chicks fledged. Our egg production more than doubled but our fledging success ratio dropped.

The pros and cons of caging nests to protect them from nocturnal predation are being studied for the next breeding season. This has a significant negative consequence as it allows predators to identify nest locations by looking for the cages. It should be noted that the top predators on our plovers are not usually found at beaches in large numbers. Crows and skunks migrate towards beaches to look for human garbage. Unfortunately, what they find is far more precious.

# Gaviota Coast Explorer's Guide

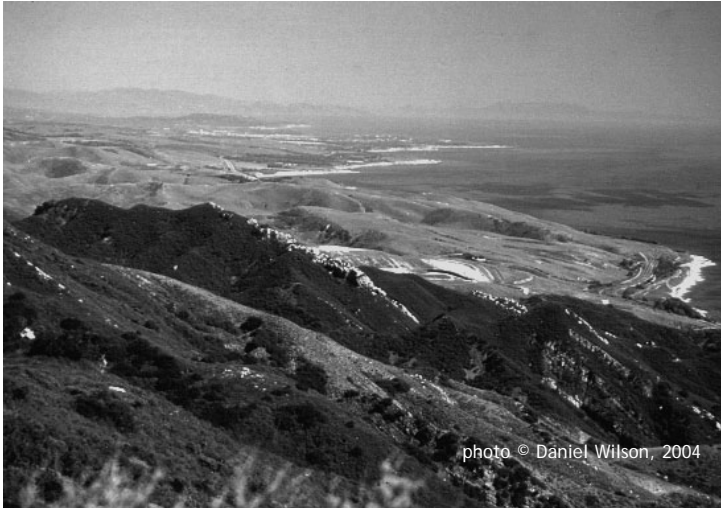


photo © Daniel Wilson, 2004

*From Gaviota Peak looking southeast.*

With the recent wildfire as a point of interest, a hike in the Gaviota Peak area will display the adaptability of the local flora to fire and provide unique vistas.

**PARKING:** Turn off Highway 101 at the intersection with Highway 1 at Las Cruces. Turn east and then south down the frontage road to the Hot Springs parking lot. The fee for the parking area is \$2.

**ACCESS POINTS:** Take the fire road behind the gate up the Hot Springs Canyon through a stand of massive, old sycamores. Stay to the left at the first fork in the road, and left at the next fork to circle around behind and above the hot springs on a more gradual climb. The locked gate on the road above the hot springs is to prevent unauthorized vehicle access; both sides are park property and open to the public.

**DETAILS:** The fire road takes you to the ridge top just below Gaviota Peak, about 3 miles from the parking lot and more than 2,000 feet of elevation gain.

Turn right at the top of the ridge to get to Gaviota Peak. The ridge-top fire road continues over Gaviota Peak and down the southeast face of the mountain and eventually back to the Hot Springs parking lot, but it is terribly eroded and rutted in places. From Gaviota Peak on a clear day, you can see from Pt. Mugu to Morro Rock. Look for horned lizards and golden eagles, and check the logbook in the special metal container at the peak.

**CAUTIONS:** This hike takes you into areas that can be hot, dry and windy. Wear layered clothing (a light windbreaker is good) and sun protection, and don't be surprised if a cool wind is blowing on the ridge top.

## Transfer of Development Rights Study

A team of graduate students at UCSB's Bren School of Environmental Science and Management are studying transfer of development rights on the Gaviota Coast. The study will evaluate a county-wide program to transfer existing legal development rights from the Gaviota Coast to more suitable urban locations. The Conservancy has pledged \$2,000 in support of this study.

## Santa Barbara Coast Walk 2004

The 2004 Santa Barbara Coastwalk event was coordinated by the Conservancy's own Vie Obern, an award-winning local trail advocate. Participants experienced the transition from the cool Central Coast beaches to the warmer Southern California coastline, with beach walks between Pt. Arguello on Vandenberg Air Force Base, to Haskell's Beach in Goleta. Participants camped at Refugio State Beach and Jalama County Beach, where they were treated to evening campfire programs on local natural and cultural history, and home-cooked meals by Coastwalk volunteers.

Coastwalk, a nonprofit organization based in Sebastopol, coordinates annual coastal hikes in each of California's 15 coastal counties to promote the statewide coastal trail. If you would like to participate in next year's event, either as a volunteer or a hiker, contact Coastwalk directly at (800) 550-6854 or the GCC.

## Community Planning Efforts

GCC board members are participating in two independent community groups seeking to define long-term strategies for the preservation of the Gaviota Coast. The Study Group is composed of a broad spectrum of concerned community members that has been meeting for almost three years. The group is nearing completion of its findings concerning land use, ecological and cultural resources, public access, agriculture, and governance on the coast. The Common Ground membership is similarly composed of a wide cross-section of community members, but has found difficulties in building consensus on important issues. Both of these citizen groups have the potential of developing constructive perspectives and building a strong base of support for the permanent protection of the coast. We will keep you posted.

## California Coastal Records Project [www.californiacoastline.org](http://www.californiacoastline.org)

Kenneth and Gabrielle Adelman have created a unique and invaluable photographic record of the California coastline by posting over 12,000 photos on their website. With the exception of the no-fly area at Vandenberg AFB, they have documented the entire coast with aerial photos from their helicopter. As if that task was not enough for these two citizens, they have digitized and posted to their website a similar inventory of photos taken in 1972. From their work it is possible to visually inspect coastal development from the comfort of your own computer! Check out photos number 3066 and 7231087 to view Haskell's beach then and now.

# Membership!

“The trouble is that places work on people very slowly, but people work on places with the single-minded ruthlessness of a beaver at a cottonwood tree.”

– Wallace Stegner

“A true conservationist is a man who knows that the world is not given by his fathers, but borrowed from his children.”

– John James Audubon

“Forever is composed of nows.”


– Emily Dickenson

**Can you write a check?... Now?... We have supplied the envelope... Thanks!**

Photo © Joe Babine, 2004

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