

***GAVIOTA COAST CONSERVANCY***

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**NEWS RELEASE**

On the 9<sup>th</sup> of March, the Bush Administration sent the Gaviota Coast Feasibility Study to Congress recommending no federal action. With this regrettable lack of action, the Administration has turned its back on a partnership with local and state groups working to secure permanent protection for the Gaviota Coast. This failure to share responsibility for the long-term stewardship of the nationally significant resources of the Gaviota Coast leaves a disproportionate burden on local and state resources.

Obtaining *permanent* protection goes beyond the usual mechanisms of local and state land use regulations, and incentive programs, which are subject to change. Permanent protection requires large capital investment in the purchase of interests in land. Today, nearly 6,000 acres (about 7% of private land) on the Gaviota Coast are on the market for more than \$200 million. The purchase of conservation easements alone dwarfs local resources.

The Conservancy's 10 year effort to bring federal assistance to the Gaviota Coast helped produce this detailed study by the National Park Service. The Study concluded in 2003 with a finding that the resources of the Gaviota Coast are nationally significant and suitable for inclusion. However, in yesterday's final recommendation to Congress, the Administration claimed local landowner opposition was too strong and "NPS is not able to undertake new acquisition or management responsibilities of this cost and magnitude, given competing priorities..."

The Conservancy is disappointed, but not surprised, that the Bush Administration chose to ignore the nationally significant environmental and cultural resources identified by the National Park Service. What is worse, failing to suggest any increased protection for the area is contradictory to the study's findings, and intentionally discourages future assistance on any conservation strategy for Gaviota.

One thing is clear. The NPS Study has expanded the awareness of the significance of the Gaviota Coast, and the threats it faces. It has put it onto a national stage, raising expectations that the local community must act to properly steward it on behalf of present and future generations. We will all be held accountable for what we do next.