

COASTAL CONSERVANCY

Staff Recommendation
September 29, 2016

**STEWARTS POINT RANCH
CONSERVATION AND TRAIL EASEMENT
ACQUISITION**

Project No. 09-007-01
Project Manager: Lisa Ames

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Authorization to disburse up to \$1,000,000 to Sonoma County Agricultural Preservation and Open Space District to acquire conservation and public trail easements over the 873-acre Stewarts Point Ranch on the northern Sonoma County coast.

LOCATION: 32025 Highway 1, Stewarts Point, Sonoma County

PROGRAM CATEGORY: Reservation of Significant Coastal Resource Areas, Public Access

EXHIBITS

Exhibit 1: [Project Location and Site Map](#)

Exhibit 2: [Project Photos](#)

Exhibit 3: [Project Letters](#)

RESOLUTION AND FINDINGS:

Staff recommends that the State Coastal Conservancy adopt the following resolution pursuant to Sections 31051 and 31350-31410 of the Public Resources Code:

“The State Coastal Conservancy hereby authorizes disbursement of an amount not to exceed one million dollars (\$1,000,000) to Sonoma County Agriculture Preservation and Open Space District (SCAPOS) to acquire property interests including a conservation easement and a public trail easement (“property interests”) over the approximately 873-acre Stewarts Point Ranch, Sonoma County Assessor Parcel Numbers 122-250-006, 122-240-002, 122-270-001, and 122-230-007 as shown on Exhibit 1 to the accompanying staff recommendation, in coastal Sonoma County.

This authorization is subject to the following conditions:

1. Prior to the disbursement of any Conservancy funds for acquisition of the property interests, SCAPOSD shall submit for review and approval of the Executive Officer of the Conservancy (the “Executive Officer”):
 - a. all relevant acquisition documents, including, without limitation, appraisals, environmental assessments, title reports, purchase agreements, conservation easement, public trail easement, recreational covenants, cultural access easement, escrow instructions and documents of title;
 - b. a baseline conditions and monitoring report; and
 - c. documentation that all other funds necessary to the acquisition have been obtained.
2. SCAPOSD shall pay no more than fair market value for the property interests as established in an appraisal approved by the Executive Officer.
3. The property interests acquired under this authorization shall be managed and operated in a manner consistent with the purposes of natural resource protection, forest stewardship, public access, open space preservation and agricultural use.
4. Conservancy funding shall be acknowledged by erecting and maintaining on the property a sign, the design and placement of which has been reviewed and approved by the Executive Officer.”

Staff further recommends that the Conservancy adopt the following findings:

“Based on the accompanying staff report and attached exhibits, the State Coastal Conservancy hereby finds that:

1. The proposed authorization is consistent with Public Resources Code Section 31051; Chapter 8, Sections 31350-31356 regarding reservation of significant coastal resource areas; and Chapter 9, Sections 31400 *et seq.*, regarding public access. The proposed project is consistent with the current Conservancy Project Selection Criteria and Guidelines.
2. The project serves greater than local needs.”

PROJECT SUMMARY:

Staff recommends the Conservancy authorize up to \$1,000,000 to the Sonoma County Agricultural Preservation and Open Space District (SCAPOSD) to acquire conservation and public trail easements (“property interests”) over the 873-acre Stewarts Point Ranch property. The proposed project will enable SCAPOSD to protect in perpetuity the property’s natural and scenic resources; promote sustainable forestry; open the coastal bluff to public access compatible with preserving existing natural conditions, including open space and grazing; and protect cultural resources.

Stewarts Point Ranch contains significant natural ecosystems - in particular, mature coastal redwood/Douglas fir forests, coastal prairie and bluffs, marine resources, riverine and riparian habitats, and wetlands. These ecosystems provide habitat for native fish and wildlife species including special status species such as northern spotted owl, marbled murrelet and salmonids. The south fork of the Gualala River, one of the key anadromous fish streams in northern Sonoma

County, forms the eastern boundary of the property. The property's scenic resources include open views of the rugged coast and Pacific Ocean and of the forested hills from Highway 1. Stewarts Point Ranch is currently leased for grazing on the coastal bluffs and also contains an area of cultural significance to the Kashia Band of Pomo Indians.

With funding assistance from the Conservancy (and the Wildlife Conservation Board (WCB)), SCAPOSD acquisition of the conservation easement over the 873-acre property will accomplish the following conservation goals: protection of 175 acres of late seral redwood forest; sustainable timber harvest management of 570 acres of "working forest"; prohibition of incompatible development and residential use; prevention of subdivision of the property; preservation of the existing natural conditions, including agricultural use; and preservation of views of the ocean and forest from Highway 1. The conservation easement allows for public access, in the form of a segment of the California Coastal Trail, as a permitted use of the property.

Acquisition of the trail easement will allow for the future development of a ¾-mile public access trail along a portion of the 873-acre property, the 105-acre coastal terrace west of Highway 1. After acquisition, SCAPOSD intends to transfer the public trail easement to the Sonoma County Regional Parks ("County Parks") for planning, development and management of this new segment of the Coastal Trail. Funding for preparation of the public access plan is the subject of a separate but related staff recommendation at the Conservancy's September 29, 2016 public meeting. (See agenda item #3E). The proposed trail will be designed to be compatible with preserving existing natural conditions, grazing and cultural resources and serve as a model project demonstrating how resource conservation, public access and agriculture can work well together.

Acquisition of the property interests and the consequential reduction in fair market property value will allow a local family that currently leases Stewarts Point Ranch for grazing to acquire the fee title after the acquisition of the property interests and to continue its agriculture property use while beginning sustainable forest management of the property subject to the restrictions of the conservation and trail easements.

SCAPOSD has partnered with the Conservancy on a number of Sonoma County resource conservation and public access projects and is uniquely qualified to carry out this easement acquisition. SCAPOSD has a respected working relationship with the farming and resource conservation communities and maintains ongoing stewardship obligations for over 140 conservation and agricultural easements in Sonoma County. SCAPOSD receives significant annual funds from a ¼ percent county sales tax to ensure it carries out these long-term stewardship obligations. Joint projects the SCAPOSD has done with the Conservancy include: fee title acquisition of Sonoma Mountain, Poff (Wright Hill Ranch), Montini, Roche Ranch, Skiles, Willow Creek, Saddle Mountain, and Tolay Lake; the North Slope and the Laguna de Santa Rosa trail projects; and helping to fund the acquisitions of the Estero Americano Preserve, Jenner Headlands Preserve, Estero Ranch, and the Kashia Coastal Reserve.

Site Description: The approximately 873-acre Stewarts Point Ranch, located in the small hamlet of Stewarts Point, extends from the Pacific Coast approximately two miles inland to the South Fork of the Gualala River. It is located between The Sea Ranch development to the north and Salt Point State Park to the south. The property includes almost a mile of ocean-front and almost two miles of frontage on the South Fork of the Gualala River.

Most of the ranch (approximately 738 acres) is comprised of mature redwood and Douglas-fir forest. The coastal portion of the forest, extending from the coastal terrace up to the property's first ridge, is dominated by Bishop pine. The inland portion of the forest is second growth redwood and Douglas-fir and is on fairly level ground. The third portion of the forest is located along the steep banks of the South Fork of the Gualala River and includes large old growth redwoods growing in the alluvial flat and two sag ponds along the San Andreas Fault. Northern spotted owl and marbled murrelet nesting/breeding territories have been found on neighboring properties along the Gualala River. The ranch's eastern boundary is the South Fork of the Gualala River, one of the key anadromous fish streams in northern Sonoma County. California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW) and University of California Davis surveys have documented persistent steelhead and coho runs in the river, increasing in recent years from late 20th century lows.

The approximately 105-acre coastal terrace portion of the property is comprised of grassland and is currently grazed. The terrace provides an expansive view of the Pacific Ocean from the well-traveled Highway 1. The property also provides scenic views from Highway 1 up the forested ridge from the coast, and into the forest from Stewarts Point/Skaggs Springs Road. Both roadways are designated scenic corridors in the Sonoma County General Plan as they represent the variety and beauty of the county's landscapes. A portion of the property is also in a General Plan-designated Scenic Landscape Unit as a landscape of special importance to Sonoma County.

Improvements to the ranch are minimal, and include two modest residences, a few tenant cabins, and historic barns. The approximately 1.4-acre commercial parcel that will not be included in the conservation easement includes a Post Office, four tenant cabins, a barn, and a former medical building. The ranch is surrounded by tens of thousands of acres of largely intact redwood and Douglas-fir forests.

Project History: The Conservancy's involvement with the project began in 2002 with the *Russian River/North Coast Parcel Analysis* (Sonoma Land Trust, 2002), a prioritization of conservation opportunities along the Northern Sonoma coast. The study identified four "Tier One" conservation tracts; Stewarts Point Ranch ranked second of these, scoring at the highest level for natural resource values, endangered species habitat, historical/cultural resources, coastal trail access, and scenic resources. (The Richardson Trust Property ranked first of the studied parcels; now known as the Kashia Coastal Reserve, it was acquired in part with Conservancy funds in 2015.)

The study found that conservation of the ranch, located in the very center of the northern Sonoma coast, extending back to the South Fork Gualala, and surrounded by similar large tracts, was highly significant in terms of landscape-level linkages, biodiversity conservation, anadromous fish corridors, and endangered/rare species habitat. The study recommended further conservation acquisitions.

The Richardson family had owned the ranch for approximately 140 years when it needed to sell the property by 2010 to settle an estate. The family negotiated a sale to The Pacific Forest Trust (PFT) in 2008, which intended to purchase the property in fee with public and foundation funding and operate it as a model working forest. With the state bond freeze of funding conservation projects in late 2008, PFT could not complete the purchase by its 2010 contractual deadline. PFT asked Save the Redwoods League (SRL) to purchase the ranch. SRL acquired the

property in June 2010 (for the appraised value of \$11,250,000) using its own private funds and loans, so that the opportunity to conserve this ranch would not be lost.

The original project partners (SRL, PFT, the SCAPOSD, foundation funders, and the potential state funders - WCB and the Conservancy) originally planned on a fee purchase of the property by a non-profit. But after SRL purchased the property, the thinking among the partners about the best conservation outcome evolved, and the partners agreed that because the ranch has a long history as a privately-held property situated among other private ranches, a better conservation outcome would be for the property to be protected with a conservation easement and public trail easement, and the fee then sold to a private buyer to continue its agricultural activities. This would demonstrate to future buyers and neighboring landowners how conservation could work on private ranches on the northern Sonoma coast. Additionally, important in this time of limited public funding, this scenario reduces the amount of public funding needed as each original funding partner would only contribute a proportionate share of the easement property interests to fee value.

PROJECT FINANCING

Coastal Conservancy	\$1,000,000
Wildlife Conservation Board	\$3,000,000
SCAPOSD	\$2,000,000
Project Total	\$6,000,000

In addition to securing WCB funding and providing funds for 1/3 of the acquisitions costs, SCAPOSD is contributing staff time as well as transactional costs.

The anticipated source of Conservancy funding for this project is the F/Y 2016 appropriation of the Safe Drinking Water, Water Quality and Supply, Flood Control, River and Coastal Protection Bond Act of 2006 (“Proposition 84”), codified at Public Resources Code (“PRC”) section 75001 *et seq.* Proposition 84 authorizes the use of these funds for the purpose of protecting natural habitat values of coastal lands of the state and for promoting access to and enjoyment of coastal resources of the state (PRC § 75060). The proposed acquisition of conservation and trail easements will protect natural habitat values of coastal lands and help obtain public access along a coastal terrace. Conservancy projects funded pursuant to Proposition 84 must be consistent with Division 21, the Conservancy’s enabling legislation (PRC § 75060(b)). Finally, for projects that include the acquisition of property interests for natural resource protection, Proposition 84 requires the Conservancy to give priority to those properties that meet one or more of the criteria identified at PRC section 75071.

The proposed acquisition satisfies three of the specified criteria in Section 75071: subsection (a) the project will link to existing protected areas with other large blocks of protected habitat and serve to facilitate wildlife movement, botanical transfer, and result in sustainable, combined acreage; subsection (c) acquisition of the property interests will support a relatively large area of under-protected major habitat types including coastal

prairie and coastal coniferous forest; and subsection (e) the project is supported by significant non-state matching funds as the SCAPOSD will contribute twice the amount of Conservancy funding. As also required by Section 75071, Conservancy staff has submitted to the Natural Resources Agency and has posted on the [Conservancy's website](#) an explanation of how the proposed acquisition meets these criteria.

CONSISTENCY WITH CONSERVANCY'S ENABLING LEGISLATION:

This project is undertaken pursuant to Chapters 8 (Sections 31350-31356) and 9 (Sections 31400 *et seq*) of the Conservancy's enabling legislation, Division 21 of the Public Resources Code.

The proposed acquisition of property interests is consistent with Section 31350 because the project will help to acquire and protect key coastal resource lands that would otherwise be lost to public use through commercial timber harvest and potential subdivision. Consistent with Section 31351(a), this project is the result of Conservancy cooperation with the SCAPOSD, a public agency, to ensure the reservation of real property interests for natural resource protection, open space, agricultural preservation and public access, all of which are purposes of Division 21, as well as for park, fish and wildlife habitat, and scientific study in order to meet the policies and objectives of the Coastal Act and a certified local coastal program.

The proposed project helps meet the objectives of the Sonoma County Local Coastal Program. (See "Consistency with Local Coastal Program Policies" below). Additionally, the acquisition also implements several Coastal Act policies (see "Consistency with Conservancy's Project Selection Criteria and Guidelines, 3. Promotion and Implementation of State Plans and Policies" below).

Consistent with Section 31352(a)(1), the Conservancy may assist SCAPOSD by providing a grant to acquire the property interests because SCAPOSD's limited financial resources prohibit it from acquiring the property without further financial assistance. The acquisition cannot occur without the Conservancy's financial support because of the significant costs of this property acquisition due to the value of the timber on the property and the limited grant funds available for such acquisitions.

Thus, the proposed funding authorization is consistent with Chapter 8 because it protects a key coastal property that otherwise would be lost to public use; the acquisition serves several purposes of Division 21; and it protects important natural resource habitats and provides public access consistent with the policies and objectives of the Sonoma County Local Coastal Program and the California Coastal Act.

This proposed acquisition is also consistent with Section 31400 that directs the Conservancy to assist in establishing a system of public accessways to and along the coast and Section 31400.1 that allows the Conservancy to grant funds to the SCAPOSD to acquire and provide for management of this public accessway. Consistent with Section 31400.1, the Conservancy may grant funds to the SCAPOSD because the proposed acquisition serves more than local public need. Surveys conducted by Sonoma County Parks in 2015 have shown that state parks in coastal Sonoma County receive over four and one-half million visitors per year, and the number of coastal Sonoma County Regional Parks visitors exceeds one million. These visitors come from throughout California.

Consistent with Section 31400.2, the Conservancy may provide up to the total cost of the acquisition of interests in lands. Consistent with this section, the amount of funding for this project has been determined by the total amount of funding available for coastal public accessway projects, the fiscal resources of the SCAPOSD, the urgency of the project, and the application of the Conservancy's project selection criteria and guidelines (See "Consistency with Conservancy's Project Selection Criteria and Guidelines" below).

Section 31400.3 enables the Conservancy to assist public agencies in developing and implementing a system of public accessways to and along the state's coastline. The proposed project will further these goals because acquisition of the trail easement will allow for planning and future development of a ¾-mile public access trail along the coastal terrace. Concurrently with staff's recommendation to fund the property acquisition, staff is recommending in a separate authorization Conservancy funding for the preparation of a public access plan for the property. (See September 29, 2016 Conservancy public agenda item #3E). The goal of the public access plan is to recommend improving and enhancing public access in a heavily-visited coastal region through creation of two segments of the California Coastal Trail.

**CONSISTENCY WITH CONSERVANCY'S 2013 STRATEGIC PLAN
GOAL(S) & OBJECTIVE(S), AS REVISED JUNE 25, 2015:**

Consistent with **Goal 1, Objective E** of the Conservancy's 2013-2018 Strategic Plan, the proposed project will secure property interests to facilitate future development of the California Coastal Trail after completion of a public access plan and its environmental documentation.

Consistent with **Goal 2, Objective B**, the proposed project will open a coastal area that is currently closed to the public after completion of a public access plan and its environmental documentation.

Consistent with **Goal 2, Objective G**, the property interest acquisition will result in the future development of a new coastal accessway after completion of a public access plan and its environmental documentation.

Consistent with **Goal 4, Objective A**, the proposed project will protect an 873-acre significant coastal resource property.

**CONSISTENCY WITH CONSERVANCY'S
PROJECT SELECTION CRITERIA & GUIDELINES:**

The proposed project is consistent with the Conservancy's Project Selection Criteria and Guidelines, last updated on October 2, 2014, in the following respects:

Required Criteria

1. **Promotion of the Conservancy's statutory programs and purposes:** See the "Consistency with Conservancy's Enabling Legislation" section above.
2. **Consistency with purposes of the funding source:** See the "Project Financing" section above.

3. **Promotion and implementation of state plans and policies:** By securing property interests that will facilitate the future development of the Coastal Trail and protect natural coastal resources, the proposed acquisition project serves to promote and implement several state plans, including:
 - *Coastal Act (1976)*, Public Resources Code Sections 30210 and 30214 on public access and recreation that call for “maximum access, which shall be conspicuously posted, and recreational opportunities shall be provided for all the people consistent with public safety needs and the need to protect public rights, rights of private property owners, and natural resource areas from overuse.” Public Resources Code Section 30240 requires environmentally sensitive habitat areas be protected against any significant disruption of habitat values.
 - *CA Climate Adaptation Strategy/Safeguarding California: Reducing Climate Risk Plan (July 2014)* by creating a large scale well-connected sustainable system of protected areas and by conserving forestland to sequester carbon to enhance biodiversity and habitat (page 59).
 - *Completing the California Coastal Trail Report (2003, Coastal Conservancy)*, which identifies the need for state agencies when using grant funds as part of a land acquisition project within the coastal zone to provide an easement for non-motorized public passage along the existing or potential route of the Coastal Trail (page 44 #4).
 - *California Wildlife Action Plan, 2015 Update*, by furthering the following statewide-recommended actions: d) state and federal agencies should work with cities and counties to secure sensitive habitats and key habitat linkages; and g) federal, state, and local agencies and nongovernmental conservation organizations, working with private landowners and public land managers, should expand efforts to restore and conserve riparian communities. In addition, recommended actions for the marine region include: d) the state should increase efforts to restore coastal watersheds.
4. **Support of the public:** Project letters are included in Exhibit 3.
5. **Location:** The proposed project would be located within the coastal zone of Sonoma County.
6. **Need:** Without Conservancy support, SCAPOSD will be unable to close the funding gap to purchase the easements over Stewarts Point and will thus lose the opportunity to protect the valuable natural resources of this coastal property and open to the public nearly a mile of coastal trail after preparation of a public access plan and its environmental documentation.
7. **Greater-than-local interest:** The proposed project is of statewide significance because of the landscape-level linkages, biodiversity conservation, anadromous fish corridors, and endangered/rare species habitat it will provide. Additionally, the future new segment of the California Coastal Trail will add to the network of nearby coastal trails, including those at The Sea Ranch and at Gualala Regional Park, approximately six to ten miles to the north, and

to Stillwater Regional Park and Salt Point State Park, approximately five to ten miles to the south.

8. **Sea level rise vulnerability:** While Sonoma County's dynamic coast will evolve under rising sea level and the bluff edge will erode over time, the primary use of the coastal terrace is grazing, which is adaptive to changes along the coastline. The conservation easement allows for public access on this portion of the property, and the public trail easement locates the future Coastal Trail through the central portion of the coastal terrace, with a segment along the edge of the bluff on north edge of the parcel. As the edge erodes over time, the public trail easement will allow for relocation of the trail on a more stable place on the bluff. In addition, the conservation easement prohibits residential development on the bluff and only limited expansion of agricultural-related buildings in this area.

Additional Criteria

9. **Resolution of more than one issue:** The project will result in multiple benefits that include permanently protecting the property's significant natural resources with a conservation easement, extending the California Coastal Trail by .72 miles, and maintaining the existing small-scale agricultural use on the coastal bluffs.
10. **Leverage:** See the "Project Financing" section above.
11. **Innovation:** The proposed project will serve as a model to demonstrate how private ranching interests can be compatible with public access and conservation.
12. **Readiness:** SCAPOSD has completed an appraisal, secured funding from the Wildlife Conservation Board (WCB) and is ready to complete the acquisition once it obtains the gap funding.
13. **Realization of prior Conservancy goals:** See "Project History" above.
14. **Cooperation:** SCAPOSD is collaborating with Sonoma County Regional Parks, WCB, Save the Redwoods League, the Kashia Band of Pomo Indians and the potential future landowners to realize protection of the property and provide future public coastal access compatible with private agricultural uses.
15. **Vulnerability from climate change impacts other than sea level rise:** The property's location in the northern coastal region of Sonoma County makes it well suited to adapt to a changing climate, because it contains two major continental biomes: temperate coniferous forest and Mediterranean shrublands and woodlands. The diverse climatic conditions that exist at this ecotone produce suitable habitat for a wide range of plant and wildlife species adapted to one or both biomes, thus allowing for a gradual retreat of species. Maintaining an intact transition zone between these biomes for species movement is a primary driver for conservation in the northern coastal region of Sonoma County.

Furthermore, the property's proximity to protected lands will allow species to migrate without impediment as circumstances may require and increases the overall resilience of the ecosystem to disturbances. Located in the center of the northern Sonoma coast, the property extends between the Pacific Ocean and the South Fork of the Gualala River. While the property is not directly adjacent to protected land, it is surrounded by similar very large

tracts, and close to an existing network of over 90,000 acres of protected lands within this region, running between Sonoma County and The Conservation Fund's protected working forestland in Mendocino County.

Redwood forests occur only within reach of summer fog, and their production can buffer the effects of climate change and changing weather patterns. Redwood forests intercept summer fog, and the resulting fog drip contributes to groundwater recharge, which helps maintain year-round stream flows. In addition, redwoods are highly resilient to climate change, and are naturally resistant to fire. The conservation easement will protect numerous existing large redwoods and requires the average size of the trees in the forest in general to increase over time.

16. **Minimization of greenhouse gas emissions:** The late seral forest reserve will prohibit all tree cutting and will continue to sequester carbon as trees grow larger. Because tree growth in the working forest will always exceed the timber harvest rate, and carbon is stored in wood products, carbon retention will exceed carbon loss. Restrictions on timber harvesting in the conservation easement are more stringent than allowed by the Forest Practice Rules; therefore, the project will sequester more carbon than would otherwise occur. The project will also result in fewer greenhouse gas emissions as there will be fewer log trucks on the road and less gas-powered equipment such as tractors, saws, loaders, and chippers. In addition, the conservation easement limits development on the coastal bluff while allowing for grazing; therefore, the grasslands will also continue to sequester carbon.

The eventual construction of the public trail will result in minimal production of greenhouse gas emissions as the trail is at this point conceptually an unpaved trail constructed by grading native soils with minimal additional amenities. This trail concept is subject to future environmental review when the public access plan is developed and approved and therefore the concept is subject to change. However, during the planning process, greenhouse gas emissions of the public access plan will be fully examined for any possible environmental effects. It is unlikely that there will be many additional vehicle trips directly associated with the public trail as most visitors will likely be heading elsewhere - north or south on Highway 1 or coming to Stewarts Point for the post office, store or gas station – and will decide to enjoy a walk on the coastal terrace, taking in expansive views of the Pacific Ocean and the interior forests.

CONSISTENCY WITH LOCAL COASTAL PROGRAM POLICIES:

The *Sonoma County Local Coastal Program* (LCP), certified in 1981 and revised and incorporated into the *Sonoma County General Plan 2020 (2008)*, identifies the need for public action and assistance to resolve existing problems in special resource areas including coastal prairie and grassland, and coastal woodlands. The proposed project advances policies of the General Plan which establishes that “environmentally sensitive habitat areas shall be protected against any significant disruption of habitat values” (policy 30240) and calls for protecting and enhancing public access to the coast (policy 30212 *et seq*).

The proposed authorization advances numerous goals of the *Sonoma County General Plan 2020* by protecting the largely open, scenic character of an important Scenic Landscape Unit; preserving the roadside landscape of scenic Highway One (Goal OSRC-3); preserving the unique

rural and natural character of the area (Goal OSRC-6); protecting the County's natural habitats (Goal OSRC-7); preserving, sustaining and restoring forestry resources for their conservation, recreation and open space values (Goal OSRC-12); and protecting significant archaeological and historical sites that represent the ethnic, cultural and economic groups that have lived and worked in Sonoma County, including Native American populations (Goal OSRC-19).

COMPLIANCE WITH CEQA:

Acquisition of the property interests over Stewarts Point Ranch is categorically exempt from the requirements of the California Environmental Quality Act under 14 Cal. Code of Regulations Section 15313, acquisition of lands for wildlife conservation purposes, because the acquisition purposes include preservation of fish and wildlife habitat and preservation of access to public lands and waters where the purpose of the acquisition is to preserve the land in its natural condition; Section 15316, transfer of ownership of land in order to create parks, because the land is in a natural condition and the management plan, also referred to as the public access plan, for the future County park has not yet been prepared; and Section 15325, transfers of ownership in land to preserve existing natural conditions and historical resources, because the proposed project involves the acquisition of ownership interests in land to preserve open space and wildlife habitat or restore natural conditions, including plant or animal habitats; to allow continued agricultural use of the property; and to protect historical resources. Staff will file a Notice of Exemption upon approval of the project.

A CEQA analysis of the possible significant environmental effects of opening the property for public access including any recommended public access improvements cannot be provided as part of this proposed project, namely the acquisition of a trail easement for future public access, and its consistency with CEQA. At this time, no public access plan exists, only public access concepts that have not been approved by a public agency and that do not contain sufficient detail for an analysis of any possible significant environmental effects.

Consistent with Section 15262, the public access plan will incorporate environmental considerations into project conceptualization, design and planning.