

COASTAL CONSERVANCY

Staff Recommendation
January 17, 2008

QUAIL RIDGE RESERVE LAND ACQUISITION, PHASE III

File No. 07-040
Project Manager: Betsy Wilson

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Authorization to disburse up to \$485,000 to the Regents of the University of California for the acquisition of two properties, totaling approximately 157 acres, for inclusion in the Quail Ridge Reserve, located on the south shore of Lake Berryessa in Napa County.

LOCATION: Quail Ridge peninsula located in the Lake Berryessa area of Napa County

PROGRAM CATEGORY: San Francisco Bay Area Conservancy

EXHIBITS

- Exhibit 1: [Project Location Map](#)
 - Exhibit 2: [Quail Ridge Reserve Map](#)
 - Exhibit 3: [Site Photographs](#)
 - Exhibit 4: [Letters of Support](#)
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RESOLUTION AND FINDINGS:

Staff recommends that the State Coastal Conservancy adopt the following resolution pursuant to Sections 31160-31165 of the Public Resources Code:

“The State Coastal Conservancy hereby authorizes the disbursement of an amount not to exceed four hundred and eighty-five thousand dollars (\$485,000) to the Regents of the University of California (“the University”) for the acquisition of Napa County Assessor’s Parcel Numbers 019-250-002 and 032-320-003 (“the property”), consisting of approximately 157 acres located on the Quail Ridge peninsula of the south shore of Lake Berryessa, Napa County as shown in Exhibit 1 to the accompanying staff recommendation. This authorization is subject to the following conditions:

1. Prior to the disbursement of funds for the acquisition, the University shall submit for the review and approval of the Executive Officer of the Conservancy (“the Executive Officer”) all relevant acquisition documents, including but not limited to escrow instructions, a current appraisal, environmental assessment, purchase agreement, title report, and documents of title necessary to the acquisition of the property.

2. The University shall pay no more than fair market value for the property.
3. The University shall permanently dedicate the property for habitat preservation, open space protection, and research, through an appropriate instrument approved by the Executive Officer. Promptly after acquiring each of the parcels, the University shall incorporate them into the existing Quail Ridge Reserve, for the benefit of the University of California Natural Reserve System.
4. Conservancy funding shall be acknowledged by erecting and maintaining a sign on the property, the design and location of which has been 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 project is consistent with the Project Selection Criteria and Guidelines, last updated by the Conservancy on September 20, 2007.
 2. The proposed authorization is consistent with the purposes and objectives of Chapter 4.5 of Division 21 of the Public Resources Code, regarding 31160-31165.”
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PROJECT SUMMARY:

This project will result in the acquisition by the University of California (“the University”) of two parcels totaling approximately 157 acres above the south shore of Lake Berryessa in Napa County (“the property”). The University is acquiring the property on behalf of the University of California Natural Reserve System (“UCNRS”) and the property will be incorporated into the approximately 2,000-acre Quail Ridge Reserve (Exhibit 2), one of the 35 reserves in the UCNRS system. Ownership of the Quail Ridge Reserve is a patchwork of state and federal agencies, non-profit organizations, and the University, but primary management responsibility of the Reserve lies with the UC Davis branch of the UCNRS. The Reserve is managed to accomplish two key functions: habitat protection for native plants and wildlife, and University-sponsored research and teaching.

The Quail Ridge peninsula sustains some of the last intact native grasslands in northern California, as well as oak woodlands and chaparral communities. Both parcels that are the subject of this authorization possess significant populations of native grasses and an abundance of large native oaks. The 37-acre southerly parcel (“Southern parcel”), identified as Number 40 in Exhibit 2, is owned by the Quail Ridge Wilderness Conservancy (“QRWC”), a nonprofit organization dedicated to preserving wilderness and native habitat in the Quail Ridge area. The 120-acre northeastern parcel (“Eastern parcel”), identified as Number 12 in Exhibit 2, is owned by a private trust. Acquisition of these two parcels would serve as buffers from development and enhance natural resource values of the current Reserve.

The Eastern parcel is the last major private landholding on the upper portion of the peninsula. Without protection as part of the Reserve, the Eastern parcel would have excellent development potential, with relatively easy road access, spectacular views, and attractive building sites. In

addition, sale of the parcel to a private buyer could trigger development of surrounding parcels (Numbers 13, 14, and 15 in Exhibit 2) that currently do not have access easements in place.

The Southern parcel was purchased by the QRWC in 1994. This parcel includes a single-family residence and other site improvements. Although the residence is currently vacant, the QRWC usually rents out the house, using the rent payments to make the mortgage payments on the property. The QRWC planned to convert the residence into a public outreach/visitor center, but permitting and other issues made this conversion impractical. Additionally, new information became available which linked successful weed invasions to areas of public use (e.g., road, points of ingress along the shoreline); therefore, increased public access to the Reserve is likely in conflict with resource protection goals. Since QRWC cannot build a visitor center on the site, they are eager to sell the parcel and shed their landlord responsibilities. The QRWC has considered selling the parcel to a private buyer.

Acquisition of the Eastern parcel would protect most of the remainder of the distal portion of the peninsula and would provide important corridor connectivity for wildlife across University and other public lands, from the peninsula tip to Highway 128. The north and east-facing drainages on the property contain some of the most mesic, pristine native vegetation on the peninsula. The Southern parcel has large oaks, a noteworthy native grass understory, and large areas of mature chamise chaparral. Acquisition of both parcels by the University will ensure the biological integrity and protection of the rare communities via consistent integrated management.

In addition, the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation (“BOR”) has expressed a willingness to incorporate an additional area of their property, identified as the red area in Exhibit 2, into the Quail Ridge Reserve should the University succeed in procuring the Eastern parcel. The addition of BOR land to the Reserve would further increase the conservation return on the Conservancy’s funding.

The acquisition of the Southern parcel will also provide the University with much-needed facilities. Use of the Reserve for research and teaching has burgeoned over the past 3 years, in part due to the development of a wireless communications and sensor network. This innovative information transfer system currently allows for remote data collection through web cameras, audio-streaming, infrared cameras with motion detectors, and meteorological stations. The network will soon be connected to an animal tracking telemetry system for large- and small-scale animal tracking. The existing residence will provide the additional research, teaching, and on-site caretaker facilities needed to accommodate increasing academic use of the Reserve, precluding the near term need for further construction activities within the Reserve.

The Quail Ridge Reserve and the research it supports provide valuable information for agencies, non-profit organizations, and the public on best management practices in grassland, chaparral, and oak woodland habitats that occur on the reserve. Of particular relevance to regional conservation groups are research projects examining invasive species, ecosystem recovery after fire, and wildlife habitat use and movement patterns.

The Quail Ridge Reserve is one of 35 reserves in the University of California Natural Reserve System (UCNRS). The UCNRS is the largest and most diverse set of university-owned and operated reserves in the world and include examples of nearly every major ecosystem in the state. These reserves provide secure sites for long-term environmental research, education and public outreach, enable monitoring of environmental health, and provide a baseline for ecosystem restoration, in the context of California's rapidly growing population and the changing global environment. Six reserves in the UCNRS are administered by the UC Davis NRS. The

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Conservancy previously assisted the UC Davis NRS with acquiring 75 acres for inclusion in McLaughlin Natural Reserve, 549 acres for inclusion in Quail Ridge Reserve, and 59 acres in the Stebbins Cold Canyon Reserve, as well as in establishing a docent training and public education program for Stebbins.

Site Description: The two parcels that are the subject of this authorization are located within, or contiguous to, the approximately 2,000-acre Quail Ridge Reserve. The Reserve is located on the Quail Ridge peninsula on the south shore of Lake Berryessa (Exhibit 1). The topography of the Quail Ridge peninsula consists of steep hills and narrow ridgelines that are undesirable for grazing and unattractive to most recreational users. As a result, the area has had minimal disturbance and has retained outstanding examples of intact native grasslands and grassland-oak woodland complexes. Comparable outstanding examples of undisturbed native grasslands are rare in California; these grasslands are the stellar feature of this site. With the current extent of native grasslands in California at less than 1 percent of the extent before European settlement, native grasslands in California are considered critically imperiled.

In addition to grasslands and oak woodlands, the area hosts extensive pristine communities of chaparral, pine-oak woodland, and riparian woodland. An unusually high diversity of oaks is found within this small peninsula - blue, valley, black, scrub, coast live, interior live oak, and oracle oak (a hybrid between interior live and black oak). The diverse vegetation communities support abundant wildlife, including mountain lions, golden and bald eagles, osprey, pygmy owls, and sixty-three varieties of butterflies.

The parcels in this acquisition are key to achieving comprehensive protection of the peninsula and in reducing future threats to the pristine nature of this area. Photographs of the property, as well as development on nearby parcels, are included as Exhibit 3.

Project History: Conservation of the Quail Ridge peninsula began in 1984 when Frank Maurer and Lenora Timm purchased 151 acres threatened by development. The Land Trust of Napa County assisted in the acquisition and received a conservation easement over the site. In 1989, Maurer and Timm created the Quail Ridge Wilderness Conservancy, which is dedicated to preserving the Quail Ridge region as a wilderness area. The QRWC continued to borrow and raise new funds to protect threatened properties as well as to maintain existing properties.

In the early 1990s, the peninsula attracted the interest of John Menke, a professor of range ecology and management at UC Davis. His interest in the area led to the eventual establishment of Quail Ridge Reserve within the UC Natural Reserve System. A research facility has since been developed on site. Research efforts focus on grasslands and invasive exotic species.

The University worked with the Conservancy to purchase six parcels, totaling 549 acres, at Quail Ridge Reserve in 2001. The addition of these parcels, one of which bisected the reserve, has made management and stewardship of the reserve more efficient and coherent. Addition of the two requested parcels would continue the consolidation of University ownership on the peninsula, thereby protecting natural resource and management integrity.

The project is also geographically and institutionally linked to the outreach education program and hiking opportunities at the Stebbins Cold Canyon Reserve. In 2001 and again in 2006, the University and the Conservancy worked with others in creating additional public trails and a very popular, well-respected outreach education program at Stebbins. The Stebbins Reserve hosts upward of 10,000 members of the public every year, which limits the ability of researchers to

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protect equipment and research sites. The outreach program was launched with Conservancy funds in 2001, and the hiking opportunities have been enhanced by recent acquisition of property at Stebbins, the result of a 2006 Conservancy grant, and by University investment in the improvement of hiking trails throughout the reserve. The availability of Quail Ridge Reserve as a protected site for university research allows the UC Davis Natural Reserve System to continue public access at Stebbins Cold Canyon Reserve.

PROJECT FINANCING:

Coastal Conservancy	\$485,000
UCNRS-designated Proposition 84 funds	<u>485,000</u>
Total Project Cost	\$970,000

The expected sources of funds are the Conservancy's FY 2005/06 and FY 2007/08 budget appropriations for the San Francisco Bay Area Conservancy Program from the Safe Neighborhood Parks, Clean Water, Clean Air and Coastal Protection Act of 2000 (Proposition 12).

CONSISTENCY WITH CONSERVANCY'S ENABLING LEGISLATION:

This project is undertaken pursuant to Chapter 4.5 of the Conservancy's enabling legislation, Public Resources Code Sections 31160-31165, to address resource and recreational goals in the San Francisco Bay Area.

The property is located in Napa County, one of the nine San Francisco Bay Area counties in which the Conservancy is authorized, under Sections 31160 and 31162 of the Public Resources Code, to undertake projects and award grants to address resource goals for the region.

Under Section 31162(b), the Conservancy may act to protect, restore, and enhance natural habitats and connecting corridors, watersheds, scenic areas, and other open space resources of regional significance. The proposed project will protect approximately 157 acres of watershed land. The property will become part of the Quail Ridge Reserve, an approximately 2,000-acre reserve, home to numerous native plant and wildlife species. Protection of the property will contribute to the ecological integrity of the entire Quail Ridge peninsula and ensure integrated management of the area. Maintaining the property in open space will also protect the scenic view to and from the property.

The proposed project is consistent with Section 31163(c) in the following respects:

- (1) The project is consistent with the Napa County General Plan and the cooperative agreement that created the Quail Ridge Reserve. The project is also consistent with the *Blue Ridge-Berryessa Natural Area Conservation Framework*, which promotes voluntary ecosystem management of a 300,000-acre area that includes the Quail Ridge Reserve.
- (2) The project involves expansion of a Reserve that is owned by multiple agencies and will support research programs that serve a regional need, including research projects on invasive species, ecosystem recovery after fire, and wildlife habitat use and movement patterns.

- (3) The project can be implemented in a timely way since agreement with the landowners has already been achieved.
- (4) The project provides benefits that would be lost if the project is not quickly implemented, specifically preventing the sale of either property to a private party which could result in development of the Eastern parcel and improper land management on both parcels.
- (5) The University is applying for 50% matching funds that were specified to be granted to the UCNRS for matching grants for land acquisition and for construction and development of facilities that will be used for research and training to improve the management of natural lands and the preservation of California's wildlife resources. In addition, technical assistance is being provided by the University and UC Davis NRS to acquire and maintain the property.

**CONSISTENCY WITH CONSERVANCY'S 2007
STRATEGIC PLAN GOAL(S) & OBJECTIVE(S):**

Consistent with **Goal 10, Objective D** of the Conservancy's 2007 Strategic Plan, the proposed project will result in the acquisition of 157 acres of upland habitat in the San Francisco Bay Area.

**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 September 20, 2007, 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. **Support of the public:** The project is supported by U.S. Congressman Mike Thompson, State Senators Darrell Steinberg and Patricia Wiggins, State Assemblymembers Noreen Evans and Lois Wolk, the Blue Ridge Berryessa Natural Area Conservation Partnership, and the Putah Creek Discovery Corridor Cooperative. In addition, the project is supported by all of the constituent agencies involved in the reserve: University of California, Land Trust of Napa County, California Department of Fish and Game, U.S. Bureau of Reclamation, U.S. Bureau of Land Management, and the Quail Ridge Wilderness Conservancy. Letters of support are attached as Exhibit 4.
4. **Location:** The property is located within Napa County and within the jurisdiction of the San Francisco Bay Area Conservancy.
5. **Need:** To date the grantee has invested significant staff time in negotiation and support of this acquisition. The funds that the grantee is applying for in March 2008 require an irrevocable commitment of fifty percent matching funds.

6. **Greater-than-local interest:** The acquisition of these properties and their inclusion into the UC Natural Reserve System will promote quality scientific research that could have application throughout California and the country. Acquisition of the property is key to protection of the grasslands they contain and to maintaining the biological integrity of the Reserve.

Additional Criteria

7. **Urgency:** The area immediately surrounding the Quail Ridge Peninsula is being developed rapidly, compromising wildlife corridors, animal movement, and visual integrity of the landscape. These particular parcels provide important potential habitat connectivity with public lands south of Highway 128. The 120-acre Eastern parcel faces imminent danger of residential and/or agricultural development if it is sold to a private party. The acquisition of existing infrastructure and buildings on the 36-acre Southern parcel would provide much needed facilities for education and research, thereby precluding development of undisturbed land with excellent habitat value in the Reserve's interior.
8. **Leverage:** See the "Project Financing" section above.
9. **Readiness:** All of the parcels to be transferred involve willing sellers that are anxious to sell. The University will make application for UCNRS-designated funds as soon as they have a firm commitment of the required 50% matching funds. The project is expected to close escrow in fall 2008.
10. **Realization of prior Conservancy goals:** "See "Project History" above."
11. **Cooperation:** The existence and management of the Reserve is based on the cooperation of many private and public entities: QRWC, Land Trust of Napa County, California Department of Fish and Game, U.S. Bureau of Land Management, U.S. Bureau of Reclamation, and the University of California.

COMPLIANCE WITH CEQA:

Acquisition of the Quail Ridge property is categorically exempt from the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) in that it involves the acquisition of land in order to preserve open space, wildlife habitat, and existing natural conditions (14 Cal. Code of Regulations Section 15325). Staff will file a Notice of Exemption upon the Conservancy's approval of the project.