

NEWS RELEASE

For Immediate Release: May 7, 2012

Contact: Pete Dufour, (530) 823-4668
pdufour@sierranevada.ca.gov

Kathleen Goldstein, The Nature Conservancy
(202) 841-0295, kgoldstein@greenfishcommunications.com
John Donnelly, Wildlife Conservation Board
(916) 445-0137, JDonnell@dfg.ca.gov



Fifty-Mile Corridor Linkage Completed for Wildlife and Threatened Species *Tollhouse Ranch Purchase Also Protects Ranching Heritage*

Auburn – A consortium of conservation organizations, private foundations and California state agencies announced today the completion of a massive land conservation project that preserves a 50-mile swath of land in the Tehachapi Mountains, protecting many rare species and their ability to freely migrate within a habitat that connects the California coastal range, the Sierra Nevada, and Southern California mountains.

Located east of Bakersfield, Tollhouse Ranch will continue to serve as a working ranch operated by its former owner.

The Sierra Nevada Conservancy (SNC) provided \$500,000 in funding, through a Proposition 84 grant, to contribute to the purchase of the 15,000-acre Tollhouse Ranch (also known as Rudnick Ranch) by The Nature Conservancy. This purchase completes the final key land link of a five-year plan to preserve this corridor and protect plants and animals from the squeeze of commercial and home development.

Black bear, deer, the California Condor, hawks and threatened salamanders are among the animals protected, in addition to creeks, riparian areas, oak woodlands and a variety of rare plant species.

“This acquisition secures the continuation of the ranching heritage in this region of the Sierra, and helps to protect California’s unique biodiversity for generations to come,” said Sierra Nevada Conservancy Executive Officer Jim Branham. “This is the perfect example of a public/private partnership coming together with multiple benefits to the public.”

Other partners include the Wildlife Conservation Board, California Department of Fish & Game, National Fish and Wildlife Foundation, the David and Lucile Packard Foundation, and Caltrans.

“Preserving this piece of land is critical for people and nature,” said EJ Remson, Senior Program Manager, The Nature Conservancy. “Here we can ensure preservation of California’s ranching heritage that is being replaced by urban sprawl, while protecting our natural resources, open space and watersheds; a global challenge in today’s urbanizing world.”

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This linkage protects the ability of plants and animals to shift their ranges and reach the places they need for food, to raise their young, and to find suitable climate conditions.

“This linkage connects the most bio diverse region in North America – the California Southern coast - to the rest of the continent,” said John Donnelly, Executive Director, Wildlife Conservation Board. “The area is on the boundary of four diverse ecoregions that contain varied habitats that support species that are not typically located in close proximity. For example, the area has forests close to the desert, so species from both ecosystems are found there.”

Through the protection of the blue oak woodlands, grasslands, and streams on the Tollhouse ranch and the 79,000 additional acres of surrounding ranches that have previously been conserved, wildlife are ensured migratory access to the Sierra Nevada and the Coastal Range.

On Tollhouse Ranch alone, five very rare plants have been identified by botanists along the property boundary, including a large stand of the endangered Bakersfield cactus. Caliente and Walker Basin Creeks support two rare salamander species, and restoration of portions of these creeks should enhance habitat for these species as well as for breeding and migratory birds. The rare burrowing owl has been documented along the ranch boundary and many other rare birds are expected to benefit from the ranch, including band-tailed pigeon, Cooper’s hawk, golden eagle, California Condor, oak titmouse, Lawrence’s goldfinch and sharp-shinned hawk.

Animals will have the ability to respond to climate change over a relatively short distance from the low elevation areas on the ranch to nearby peaks in the Sequoia National Forest that rise over 8,400 feet.

“We’re very pleased to join with Walmart’s ‘Acres for America’ program to support this rare and beautiful habitat, which is home to so many California species,” said Mike Chrisman, Director of National Fish and Wildlife Foundation’s Southwestern Partnership Office.

The Nature Conservancy is a leading conservation organization working around the world to protect ecologically important lands and waters for nature and people. The Conservancy and its more than one million members have protected nearly 120 million acres worldwide. www.nature.org/california

Sierra Nevada Conservancy (SNC) is a state agency whose mission is to improve the environmental, economic, and social well-being of the Sierra Nevada Region. In its first five years, the SNC, which receives no general fund tax dollars, has awarded approximately \$40 million in grants for projects including forest thinning, conservation easements and acquisitions, and watershed and habitat restoration. www.sierranevada.ca.gov

The Wildlife Conservation Board (WCB) was created by legislation in 1947 to administer a capital outlay program for wildlife conservation and related public recreation. The primary

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responsibilities of WCB are to select, authorize and allocate funds for the purchase of land and waters suitable for recreation purposes and the preservation, protection and restoration of wildlife habitat. WCB approves and funds projects that set aside lands within the State for such purposes, through acquisition or other means, to meet these objectives. WCB can also authorize the construction of facilities for recreational purposes on property in which it has a proprietary interest. www.wcb.ca.gov

National Fish and Wildlife Foundation (NFWF) Established by Congress in 1984, sustains, restores and enhances the nation's fish, wildlife, plants and habitats. Working with federal, corporate and individual partners, it has awarded more than 11,000 grants to 3,800 organizations and leveraged \$576 million in federal funds into \$2 billion for on-the-ground conservation. www.nfwf.org

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