



The Nature Conservancy purchases 277 acres of coastal wetlands in Ventura County

Deal is part of largest wetlands restoration project in southern California

Oxnard, Calif.—August 5, 2005—The Nature Conservancy announced today the purchase of 277 acres of wetlands at Ormond Beach in Ventura County as part of a community-wide effort to protect this key nesting ground for endangered birds. Located in Oxnard, the acquired acreage features coastal dunes and salt marshlands, habitat that has all but disappeared in southern California.

"After years of misuse of these wetlands, it's almost miraculous that large, intact dunes and salt marsh have survived here," said Sandi Matsumoto, project manager for The Nature Conservancy. "We have an exciting opportunity to preserve what remains of this fragile habitat and explore ways to restore the wetland systems to full health. In terms of conservation, Ormond Beach is a diamond in the rough."

Because of high demand for beachfront property, more than 90 percent of southern California's coastal wetlands have fallen to development, leaving animals and plants that rely on such habitat in crisis. The Ormond Beach wetlands, though degraded by years of industrial and agricultural use, harbor six threatened or endangered species, including the California least tern and western snowy plover. An additional six species of concern and more than 200 species of migratory birds are found here.

The Nature Conservancy purchased a 276-acre parcel for \$13 million from the Metropolitan Water District of Southern California and the City of Oxnard. Funding for the deal was generated through Propositions 40 and 50, parks and resources bond acts passed by voters in 2002. The grant was administered by the Coastal Conservancy and the Wildlife Conservation Board. The Nature Conservancy also purchased from private owners a one-acre in-holding within the larger parcel, which adjoins 265 acres owned by the Coastal Conservancy.

"The Ormond Beach wetlands are one of the few large-scale wetlands that remain along California's South Coast," said Sam Schuchat, executive officer of the State Coastal Conservancy. "These coastal wetlands are tremendously important to birds that migrate along the coast, and to fish that rely on the wetlands for nursery habitat."

Despite surrounding industrial activity, scientists believe that Ormond Beach presents the best wetland restoration opportunity in southern California. The Nature Conservancy plans to collaborate with the Coastal Conservancy, Ormond Beach Task Force and other local partners in an ambitious effort to restore 750 acres of what were once tidal marsh lands but were drained many years ago. The goal is to connect Ormond Beach to neighboring wetlands, including 1,500 acres at Mugu Lagoon, resulting in southern California's largest coastal wetlands.

"The community-wide effort to reclaim Ormond Beach – to protect and restore the wetlands into healthy habitat for wildlife – is nothing short of visionary, and we are thrilled to be a part of it," said Sandi Matsumoto.

The Nature Conservancy's work at Ormond Beach is part of an ongoing effort to safeguard wildlife

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habitat in Ventura County and Los Angeles County. Through a science-based planning process, the Conservancy has identified key areas along the Santa Clara River, at Ormond Beach and in the Santa Susana Mountains that must be safeguarded and connected to public lands such as Los Padres National Forest. Such networks of protected land help preserve biodiversity by giving wildlife adequate room to migrate, mate and re-establish in the event of fire or drought. To date, the Conservancy has protected more than 4,000 acres in this project area.

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