



A recent view of the historic Nyland Ranch near San Juan Bautista. Photo: Lynn Overtree

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Land Trust acquires 540-acre property near SJB

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This week, The Trust for Public Land announced its acquisition of the historic Nyland property in San Benito County. The 540-acre land is located across Highway 156 from the City of San Juan Bautista, and is less than half a mile away from Mission San Juan Bautista and the San Juan Bautista State Historic Park.

The property, which is filled with oak studded grasslands, wetlands, and seasonal streams, once supported the indigenous Amah Mutsun people for thousands of years before the natives were taken to this mission and others as part of the Spanish conquest of California, says a press release from The Trust for Public

Land.

In response to the imminent sale of the property, The Trust for Public Land – with support from generous donors including the Wildlife Conservation Network’s new California Wildlife Program – stepped in to purchase the property, providing time for local land trusts to work together to complete fundraising that ensures the permanent protection and stewardship of the land, including possible reconstruction of an on-site barn and other grazing infrastructure.

The property, which is currently used for cattle grazing and was once the site of a land-grant era 40-room adobe, provides a scenic western gateway to San Juan Bautista and San Benito County for travelers along Highway 156, according to The Trust for Public Land. An array of native plants and wildlife can be found on the ranch, as well as a historic barn that marks a visitor’s arrival to San Juan Bautista. In addition to providing valuable wildlife habitat, the property contributes to an important regional wildlife corridor linking the Gabilan Mountains to the Santa Cruz Mountains.

“Conservation opportunities like this are rare and could not be done without partners,” said Guillermo Rodriguez, California State Director with The Trust for Public Land. “We are proud to be able to work with local land trusts to ensure the natural health and indigenous, historic and agricultural heritage of this property are preserved for future generations to enjoy.”

Conserving the property also marks the launch of a new Central Coast Climate Conservation Initiative led by The Trust for Public Land, Rodriguez added. “Working with a diversity of partners, this initiative seeks to broaden traditional land protection objectives to include both equity and climate benefits,” Rodriguez said.

This acquisition is an important milestone in efforts of the San Benito Agricultural Land Trust and other project partners to permanently protect this property. Recognizing that the property’s fourth-generation owners, the Nylands, were preparing to sell the ranch for estate purposes and shared the goal of protecting the property for public benefits, San Benito Agricultural Land Trust reached out to The Trust for Public Land for help in ensuring the property’s continued health and historic ranching uses.

The long-term vision for the property reflects this partnership and includes ownership of the land by the San Benito Agricultural Land Trust, with a conservation easement protecting wildlife habitat to be held by the Land Trust of Santa Cruz County, and a cultural easement providing access for indigenous land stewardship, cultural and educational activities to be held by the Amah Mutsun Land Trust, according to the press release. The long-time cattle grazing lessee, 101 Equipment Company, will continue to graze the property.

“Permanent conservation of the ranch will ensure this land can support viable

grazing operations that can contribute to our local economy, feed people and protect our scenic views,” said Lynn Overtree, Executive Director of the San Benito Agricultural Land Trust. “We are excited about managing these 540 acres, which completes a chain of protected lands from Rocks Ranch to San Juan Bautista, and we are honored to continue the Nyland family’s loving stewardship legacy.”

Valentin Lopez, President of the Amah Mutsun Land Trust and Chairman of the Amah Mutsun Tribal Band, said, “The Amah Mutsun people have lived in Popoloutchum, which is now recognized as San Benito County and beyond for millennia. Our ancestors worked to fulfill their sacred obligation to take care of Mother Earth and all living things for thousands of years. Today we are happy to return to Popoloutchum through this Cultural Easement. This easement will ensure this land remains undeveloped and intact. We hope to share our traditional indigenous knowledge and practices regarding land management with our partners and the public so we can all learn from each other.”

The property supports native habitat for numerous wildlife species, including raptors, migratory birds, and waterfowl along with mountain lion, black bear, fox and bobcat. Several rare species call the ranch home, including the California red-legged frog, California tiger salamander and the western pond turtle.

The project does not include lands north of Highway 156 known as “Nyland Ranch,” which are separately owned.

“After 10 years leasing this ranch from the Nyland family, it will be a bit of a change for us, but we think we can have a compatible working relationship with the organizations involved,” said rancher Cole Warren of 101 Livestock Auction. “We’re glad the land won’t be converted to houses and that our cattle grazing operation will continue under the new ownership.”