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Campaign to save Harvey Ranch a success

By Vera Kochan



Amazing open space views come with the hiking trails at Harvey Ranch. Photos courtesy John Muir Land Trust

After giving themselves approximately one year to raise the \$4 million necessary to save the 126-acre Harvey Ranch as a gateway to over 15,000 acres of wilderness, the John Muir Land Trust, whose mission is to "protect and care for open space, ranches, farms, parkland and shoreline in Contra Costa and Alameda Counties" announced that the Dec. 31, 2022 deadline was met with success.

Hoping to preserve the Harvey Ranch land for future generations, the new acquisition will join the three protected landscapes of Las Trampas Regional Wilderness, San Leandro Watershed, and Painted Rock Preserve (which includes Carr Ranch, Buckhorn Creek, and Rocky Ridge). JMLT was tasked by property owner Charlene Harvey to help her fulfill a dream that she and her late husband, Jim, shared to preserve the location against development.

The \$4 million goal covers the cost of acquiring Harvey Ranch which includes appraisals, surveys, natural resource assessment reports, title research, legal fees, staff time, and the actual purchase price for transferring title.

"The residents of Lamorinda and supporters across the Bay Area have provided the means for us to achieve another hugely significant win for conservation," stated JMLT Executive Director Linus Eukel. "Soon everyone will have a chance to enjoy Harvey Ranch's spectacular scenic views. Most importantly, we've added an additional layer of protection for a vital wildlife refuge. Preserving and keeping wildlife corridors intact is a huge priority as we take action to mitigate the impact of global climate change."

The ranch itself is a habitat for countless animals, reptiles and raptors. Making the area their domicile are gray foxes, deer, opossums, raccoons, jackrabbits, weasels, bobcats, mountain lions, Northern alligator lizards, gopher snakes, Western pond turtles, red-tailed and Cooper's hawks, golden eagles, great blue herons and great egrets, to name a few. Threatened and endangered species such as the Alameda whipsnake and the California red-legged frog also call Harvey Ranch home.

The new acquisition will also provide magnificent hiking trails for nature lovers of any age and ability. From short walks to miles of trails with varying terrain, there is something to see and enjoy for everyone. Equestrians will even be allowed access to centuries-old ranch roads.

According to JMLT, virtually all of the campaign funding came from private individuals and institutions. This included an amazingly generous \$1 million matching gift from a single anonymous donor. A \$550,000 grant from the Gordon and Betty Moore Foundation acknowledged JMLT's efforts of continuous preservation to the area; and during the Moraga Town Council's Sept. 14 meeting, members unanimously approved a \$250,000 contribution for the purchase of Harvey Ranch open space (the payment comes from Fund 100 - One-Time Developer Fees, Palos Colorados). Other large individual contributions helped to close the funding gap as the deadline neared.

"At stake was the potential loss of untouched land that will now become a gateway to pristine wilderness, a new staging area with trailheads and trail connections, quick access to amazing views and pathways, an enhanced buffer for wildlife, a protected view shed, and a keystone element of the natural environs of Saint Mary's College," said Eukel. "What a wonderful way to start the new year! We are so grateful to the JMLT community for making this possible."

A property dedication and grand opening to the public is being planned for late spring 2023.

For more information about the John Muir Land Trust visit: jmlt.org.



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