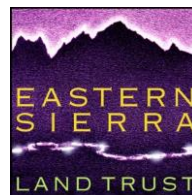




SAN DIEGO
COASTKEEPER



December 12, 2022

Paul Souza
Regional Director, Pacific Southwest Region
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
2800 Cottage Way
Sacramento, CA 95825

RE: Proctor Valley, San Diego County, California—*Support for public funding and acquisition*

Dear Director Souza:

The undersigned environmental groups and land trusts strongly support the public funding and acquisition of this critical 1,291-acre property. Proctor Valley would *link together* the San Diego National Wildlife Refuge and the State of California Rancho Jamul Ecological Reserve, establishing an interconnected preserve with resilience to climate change. *Because this location is so strategic, it has value far beyond the acreage involved.*

Proctor Valley is a gentle landscape of low elevation coastal sage scrub, which has been largely eliminated by decades of agricultural land conversion and urban development. Unless acquisition succeeds, it too will be lost.

Two divergent species, small and large, demonstrate the unique value of the site. The valley supports important habitat for both the endangered Quino checkerspot butterfly and the golden eagle. Both species are known to vanish from areas that become fragmented by development. Acquiring Proctor Valley for perpetual conservation would support them both, as well as a suite of other sensitive species.

The federal and state lands surrounding Proctor Valley—the Wildlife Refuge-Ecological Reserve Complex—are the ecological *centerpiece* of the region's Natural Community Conservation Plan /Habitat Conservation Plan (NCCP/HCP), the San Diego Multiple Species Conservation Program (MSCP). As you know, the MSCP is an innovative federal-state-local partnership to resolve conflicts between endangered species and economic growth, allowing development in less sensitive locations. The MSCP is nearing completion, but its biological success rests on conserving Proctor Valley.

If 1,119 housing units (approved in 1992, before MSCP adoption) are constructed in Proctor Valley, the development will block connectivity between the Otay Mountain and San Miguel Mountain. A busy two-lane highway would run the length of the valley, obstructing east-west movement. The ecological value of all the state, federal, and local investments over the last 30 years in building an *intact* Wildlife Refuge-Ecological Reserve Complex—totaling well in excess of \$100 million—would be greatly reduced.

Standing in Proctor Valley, one wouldn't guess that the populations of San Diego, Chula Vista, and the South Bay—which include many disadvantaged communities—are so close by. But if we don't act to preserve this land while there is a willing seller, the experience of place and history will be lost irretrievably.

The timeline to complete this acquisition is short; we must act now. The purchase and sale agreement with the landowner (GDCI Proctor Valley, LP) provides only 14 months to complete the transaction. We encourage you to support the use of funding from state and federal sources to complete this once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to secure lands for the Rancho Jamul Ecological Reserve and San Diego National Wildlife Refuge. The property superbly meets many objectives—biodiversity, climate resilience, access—of the state and federal 30X30 programs.

For people and nature, Proctor Valley is an investment to realize the conservation potential of San Diego's precedent-setting habitat plan—a great legacy for your agency and one of the most significant conservation achievements in recent United States history.

Yours truly,

Jay Ziegler
The Nature Conservancy, California

Pamela Flick
Defenders of Wildlife

David Brunner
California Council of Land Trusts

Walter T. Moore
Peninsula Open Space Trust

James R. Strittholt, Ph.D.
Conservation Biology Institute

Howard Penn
Planning & Conservation League

Brianna (Bri) Fordem
Anza Borrego Foundation

Peter Broderick
Center for Biological Diversity

Deborah L. Rogers
Center for Natural Lands Management

Janet Cobb
**California Wildlife Foundation/
California Oaks**

Paulina Torres
Natural Resources Defense Council

Jun Bando, PhD
California Native Plant Society

Kay Ogden
Eastern Sierra Land Trust

Sonia Diaz
Outdoor Outreach

Travis Longcore
Los Angeles Audubon Society

Elizabeth Lambe
Los Cerritos Wetlands Land Trust

Jess Morton
Palos Verdes/South Bay Audubon Society

David Hogan
The Chaparral Lands Conservancy

Richard Halsey
California Chaparral Institute

Jill Bays
Transition Habitat Conservancy

Dan Silver
Endangered Habitats League

Brian Elliott
Pomona Valley Audubon Society

Pam Heatherington
Environmental Center of San Diego

Claire Schlotterbeck
Hills for Everyone

Ron Forster
Escondido Neighbors United

Lisa Ross
Sierra Club, San Diego Chapter

Mike McCoy
Southwest Wetlands Interpretive Association

Michael Wellborn
Friends of Harbors, Beaches & Parks

Ann Van Leer
The Escondido Creek Conservancy

Kim Kolpin
Bolsa Chica Land Trust

Bridget Fithian
Sierra Foothill Conservancy

Susan Sheakley
Sea & Sage Audubon Society

Phillip Musegaas
San Diego Coastkeeper

Jim Peugh
San Diego Audubon Society

Catherine Rich
The Urban Wildlands Group

Cheryl Goddard
San Dieguito River Valley Conservancy