

Land Trust Raises \$21 Million

The Nature Connection Campaign funds will go to building an animal crossing and land protection

By [Johanna Miller](#)

January 24, 2023



PHOTO: SEBASTIAN KENNERKNECT

The Land Trust of Santa Cruz County aims to protect, care for and connect people with nature, and that can be quite costly. On Jan. 19, the organization announced it had raised \$21 million through its Nature Connection Campaign, which will fund wildlife connectivity, new trails and farmland protection over a three-year period. One of the primary projects is protecting 2,600 acres at Rocks Ranch for a wildlife crossing over Hwy 101 and Hwy 17 at Laurel Curve.

Rocks Ranch encompasses 2,700 acres of wildlands straddling San Benito and Monterey counties. The new crossings will link the Santa Cruz and Gabilan mountain ranges and provide safe passage for mountain lions and other wildlife whose habitats have been increasingly constrained by residential development and highway barriers.

From work done to create a wildlife crossing at Laurel Curve, the Land Trust says they have documented

evidence that mountain lions are on a fast track to becoming inbred due to limited movement around the state. UC Santa Cruz's Puma Project has identified cats with kinked tails—the visual hallmark of genetic mutation.

Rocks Ranch contains a 4.4-mile-long stretch of intact habitat ideal for animal movement. On its northern end, it abuts a 2.5-mile stretch of Hwy 101 that is currently a “hot spot” for wildlife/vehicle collisions.

So far, the funds raised have helped the Land Trust protect an additional 5,600 acres of land. The organization also plans on building 16 miles of new trails throughout Santa Cruz County, including 7.3 miles of trails at the newly opened San Vicente Redwoods and 7.2 miles at the Glenwood Open Space Preserve, which opened in May 2020. The total amount of protected land has reached 16,000 acres of

farmland and rare habitat throughout Santa Cruz County.

The first crossing on Hwy 17 at Laurel Curve in the Santa Cruz Mountains will be completed this month. The Land Trust expects to break ground on the second crossing by 2024.

Visit landtrustsantacruz.org for more information.