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**Nature Connection Campaign Reaches Goal
with Strong Support from Community**

**Rocks Ranch Property Protected for Second Wildlife Crossing
over HWY101**

Santa Cruz, CA: The Land Trust is excited and humbled to share that we've reached our goal of raising \$21 million through our Nature Connection Campaign, a three-year effort aimed at funding wildlife connectivity, new trails, and farmland protection. This is a celebration of an incredible community coming together to support mission-driven work.

Chief among the projects this campaign supports is the protection of 2,600 acres at Rocks Ranch for a wildlife crossing over HWY101. This is the next critical step in establishing a linkage between the Santa Cruz and Gabilan mountain ranges. The first crossing on HW17 at Laurel Curve in the Santa Cruz Mountains will be completed this month. Together, these crossings will provide safe passage for mountain lions and other wildlife whose habitats have been increasingly constrained by residential development and highway barriers.

"Funds raised during the three-year campaign are already being put to work, and the wildlife crossings are just one part," said Laura Dannehl-Schickman, Development and Communications Director at the Land Trust. "We are also 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 of 2020. The support also helped us protect an additional 5,600 acres of farm and grazing land." This brings the Land Trust's total protected lands to 16,000 acres of farmland and rare habitat throughout Santa Cruz County.

Why Rocks Ranch

From our previous work at Laurel Curve, we have documented evidence that mountain lions are on a fast track to becoming inbred due to limited



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movement. The 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 that is highly permeable to animal movement. On its northern end, it abuts a 2.5-mile stretch of HW101 that is currently a “hot spot” for wildlife/vehicle collisions—evidence of the area’s high frequency of use by wildlife. Protecting Rocks Ranch from intensified land use will help safeguard this critical landscape linkage and conserve important habitat for rare and endangered species.

Caltrans has initiated a Project Initiation Document (PID), which puts us four years ahead of where we were at this point with the HW17 wildlife crossing. And, thanks to our pioneering work at Laurel Curve, the policy and process tools are already in place.

This work would not be possible without the generous support of our community. The deep love for Santa Cruz’s wild spaces brings the community together in a powerful way—together, we are ensuring our incredible landscape is protected and enjoyed by all county residents for generations to come. Special thanks to the Wildlife Conservation Board who awarded the Land Trust of Santa Cruz County a grant of \$4 million to support the purchase of Rocks Ranch.

About the Land Trust of Santa Cruz County

The mission of the Land Trust of Santa Cruz County is to protect, care for, and connect people to the extraordinary lands that make this area special. For more information, visit LandTrustSantaCruz.org