



PRESS RELEASE



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Coastal Commission Requires Restoration on the Gaviota Coast

Commission Approves Agreement with Owners of Cojo Jalama Ranches That Requires Comprehensive Restoration and Penalties for Coastal Act Violations

SANTA BARBARA, *Calif.* – Today, after an extensive process of investigation and negotiation, the California Coastal Commission issued a Cease and Desist Order and Restoration Order concerning the Cojo Jalama Ranches (formerly known as Bixby Ranch). Over the past six years, the Environmental Defense Center (“EDC”), on behalf of its client, California Native Plant Society (“CNPS”), has been urging strong enforcement in response to the environmentally-destructive and unlawful development activities that occurred on the Ranches, which are known as a biologically diverse and unique stretch of coastal land on the Gaviota Coast. Because Cojo Jalama Ranches provide habitat for many rare and protected species, including red-legged frog and Gaviota Tarplant, EDC and CNPS tenaciously sought full restoration of the damaged habitats, including restoring oak woodlands, creeks, and native grasslands, and provided support for the Commission to maintain a strong position in its negotiations with the landowners.

Today’s Orders are a significant and necessary step to offset the harmful impacts to coastal resources caused by these unpermitted activities and set forth a host of mandatory actions—including extensive restoration, a meaningful penalty component, and enhanced public access.

“EDC applauds the actions that the Coastal Commission took to restore this special stretch of the coastline, which is home to numerous threatened and endangered plant and animal species afforded protection under the Coastal Act and Local Coastal Program,” said Maggie Hall, Staff Attorney at EDC, which represents CNPS in this matter. “The requirements of the Orders are essential to recovering this important stretch of the Gaviota Coast after years of intense and unpermitted grading and development.”

“Of particular concern to CNPS was the damage to the Gaviota Tarplant – a plant that occurs only along the western Santa Barbara County coast and that is seriously threatened by energy development projects and invasive weeds – caused by the unpermitted activities,” said David

Magney, Rare Plant Program manager with CNPS. “Fortunately, the Orders emphasize restoring this important plant.”

Cojo Jalama Ranches occupy an 11-mile swatch of coastline on either side of Point Conception, and comprise over 24,000 acres of rural agricultural land that has supported cattle ranching and dry land farming for over a century. Called “*Humqaaq*” by the Chumash native Americans, the land remains predominantly undeveloped and supports a proliferation of rich biodiversity, including 1,400 plant and animal species, 60 of which are rare, and 24 of which are listed as threatened or endangered species.

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Violations of the California Coastal Act and the Santa Barbara County Local Coastal Program on the Property were first discovered in late 2010/early 2011 and include grading and removal of native vegetation, such as the state and federally-endangered Gaviota Tarplant; installation and maintenance of thirty-seven water wells; pouring concrete in a coastal creek to install or improve three stock ponds; placement of dirt and rocks to construct a road down a bluff face to the beach; construction of sixteen additional unpermitted roads in pristine oak woodlands; and grading and disking of the former Cojo Marine Terminal site. The Terminal once served oil tankers but has since been removed and the site was restored to native grassland and shrub habitats as required by Santa Barbara County. It was the grading and removal of this Tarplant restoration area that triggered the Commission’s investigation into the Ranches’ unpermitted activities.

The Orders seek to remedy the violations on the Property by providing enhanced public access, significant habitat restoration, and a financial penalty of \$500,000. Notably, approximately 500 acres will be restored, including planting of oak trees on 200 acres. The sixteen roads on the Property will be fully abandoned, along with restoration of the impacted habitats. Since the roads act as corridors for invasive plant incursions and can impede wildlife movement, full abandonment of these road segments is a critical element of the Orders. The Orders also require the revegetation of the 5.9-acre Cojo Marine Terminal with coastal sage scrub and native grasses to provide for the survival of the endangered Gaviota Tarplant. The requirements set forth in the Orders are crucial to offset the long-standing impacts to the species and habitats at the Ranches.

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The Environmental Defense Center, a non-profit public interest law firm, protects and enhances the local environment through education, advocacy, and legal action and works primarily within Ventura, Santa Barbara, and San Luis Obispo counties. Since 1977, EDC has empowered community-based organizations to advance environmental protection. EDC’s focus areas include protection of the Santa Barbara Channel, ensuring clean water, preserving open space and wildlife, and addressing climate and energy. Learn more about EDC at www.EnvironmentalDefenseCenter.org.

The California Native Plant Society has saved special plants and wild places for more than 50 years. 10,000 CNPS members in California and Baja California promote native plant

appreciation, conduct scientific research, restore local biodiversity, and work for conservation-focused land management practices that protect California's native plant heritage for future generations. More info about California plants, places, and about CNPS can be found at <http://CNPS.org>.