



617 Water Street
Santa Cruz, CA 95060
831-429-6116
Fax 831-429-1166
info@landtrustsantacruz.org
www.landtrustsantacruz.org

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CONTACT: Vicki Lowell
Marketing and Communications Manager
Land Trust of Santa Cruz County
831-256-7289
Vicki.lowell@landtrustsantacruz.org

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Land Trust of Santa Cruz County Protects Habitat for Rare and Endangered Santa Cruz Long-toed Salamander

Santa Cruz, CA: Today, the Land Trust of Santa Cruz County acquired 14 acres of core habitat critical to the recovery of the Santa Cruz long-toed salamander. Located in the heart of Larkin Valley, this upland wooded habitat known as Little Glen, is adjacent to a 40-acre privately held open space, creating 54 acres of contiguous preserved habitat.

With funding from the Wildlife Conservation Board and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, this property will be protected and managed in perpetuity by the Land Trust for the benefit of the Santa Cruz long-toed salamander and other wildlife.

Connecting a Fragmented Habitat

The Santa Cruz long-toed salamander was discovered in a pond at Valencia Lagoon in Aptos in 1954. Since then, their habitat has been fragmented by highways and roads, creating meta-populations that can't breed with each other. Crossings underneath or above the highway would allow these meta populations to join others.

"The Land Trust is focused on preserving and maintaining large intact patches of habitat and the connections between them that are critical for all wildlife," said Land Trust Executive Director, Sarah Newkirk. "This acquisition is the first step in our effort to ultimately protect 350 acres of salamander habitat and construct a salamander crossing that spans Highway 1 approximately 1.5 miles south of Little Glen."

The Santa Cruz long-toed salamander spends most of its life in summer habitat—a mix of steep hillsides and ridges covered in mixed hardwood forest, north facing slopes of redwood trees, and several acres of open grasslands. The preserved area provides all those features, making it the perfect summering habitat for the salamander.

"The known range of the species is only 50 square miles spread between Aptos and Castroville," adds Newkirk. "Even small properties containing upland habitat, especially those near to known breeding ponds, are incredibly important for the recovery of the species. Given this extremely limited range, conservation initiatives like this are rare opportunities to literally save a species from extinction."



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"The Wildlife Conservation Board is excited to assist the Land Trust of Santa Cruz County in protecting these lands for the Santa Cruz long-toed salamander," said Jennifer Norris, WCB Executive Director. "Sometimes small parcels are the key to creating interconnected habitats that are essential to recovery of a species," said Jennifer Norris, Wildlife Conservation Board Executive Director.

The initiative is part of the Land Trust's 2023-2027 Conservation Roadmap and vision of a future in which the fantastic diversity of lands that define and connect people to the Santa Cruz County region—the wild and working forests, globally unique wildlife habitats, coastal landscape, and rich farming and ranching heritage—are cared for and preserved far into the future.

We are grateful to the State of California Wildlife Conservation Board and the California Department of Fish and Wildlife for partnering with us to fund this project. We would also like to thank our members, whose generous support makes this work possible.

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 all people to the vibrant natural and working lands that are essential for our community and nature to thrive together for generations to come.

For more information, visit landtrustsantacruz.org.