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Key Land Purchase along Upper Pajaro River Preserves Agriculture, Floodplain Protection, and Wildlife in Santa Clara County

San Jose, CA, February 24, 2015: The Santa Clara Valley Open Space Authority has purchased a critical 183-acre parcel of farmland in South Santa Clara County where the Pajaro River and Llagas Creek intersect. By permanently protecting this land, the Open Space Authority is helping sustain the region's agricultural economy, helping preserve the Soap Lake floodplain, and preserving a critical wildlife corridor.

Along the southern border of Santa Clara County just a half-mile south of Gilroy, the property, previously owned and farmed by the Montes family, was a high conservation priority for the Open Space Authority and others. The property is within one of the ten Conservation Focus Areas targeted for protection in the Authority's *Valley Greenprint*.

"The Montes farm is a great example of how we can use our conservation resources wisely to protect lands that offer multiple benefits," said Matt Freeman, Assistant General Manager of the Open Space Authority. "The Open Space Authority and our partners are helping to sustain regional agriculture while also protecting a critical floodplain and a significant wildlife corridor."

With generous assistance from other organizations for whom protection of the parcel was also a high priority, the Open Space Authority purchased the productive row crop farm from José and Anna Montes for \$2.8 million. The Montes family has farmed in the region for many years.

Protection of the Montes farm is a prime example of a collaborative conservation project as outlined in the Open Space Authority's 2014 *Santa Clara Valley Greenprint*, which identified goals, priorities, and strategies for land conservation.

Through a grant from its partner The Nature Conservancy, the Authority received \$650,000 towards the land purchase from the Living Landscape Initiative Challenge Grant Program of Resources Legacy Fund, which is funded by the Gordon and Betty Moore Foundation. In addition, the California Department of Water Resources and the Pajaro River Watershed Flood Prevention Authority contributed \$490,000 towards the purchase.

"This project is key to providing a range of community benefits, from wildlife protection, to flood management, to supporting the local agricultural economy," said Michael Mantell, president of Resources Legacy Fund. "It is just the sort of multi-purpose conservation project our communities need."



Recently used to grow tomatoes, peppers, and leaf lettuces, the Montes farm is part of a complex of protected, highly productive large farms in a landscape that is still largely agricultural. Together with half a dozen other nearby farms and ranches protected by the Open Space Authority, The Nature Conservancy, Silicon Valley Land Conservancy, and others, the Montes farm creates a buffer of more than 1,800 acres of preserved fertile farmland between Gilroy and Hollister, supporting local agriculture and providing the region with locally-grown food.

Along the Upper Pajaro River, the Montes farm is located within the Soap Lake floodplain. As land within the floodplain is developed, the risk of flooding to downstream communities of Watsonville and Pajaro increases. Left undeveloped, this parcel and other lands in the area are able to absorb and store rainwater and runoff, reducing the need for additional levees and costly stormwater infrastructure downstream.

This purchase also protects a critical linkage connecting hundreds of thousands of core wildlife habitat areas in the Santa Cruz, Gabilan, and Mt. Hamilton Ranges. Preservation and restoration of the wildlife corridor along the Upper Pajaro River will allow animals to move between these habitat remnants, while also offering opportunities for plants and animals to adapt to a changing climate.

The Open Space Authority will continue the farm's current lease through 2015 while it prepares a comprehensive conservation and management plan to identify opportunities for long-term agricultural viability, flood control, and habitat restoration. The Open Space Authority will also identify opportunities for public access and environmental education. A new section of the Bay Area Ridge Trail along the property's northern border will eventually connect to other trails, connecting the southern loop of the Bay Area Ridge Trail.

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The Santa Clara Valley Open Space Authority conserves the natural environment, supports agriculture, and connects people to nature, by protecting open spaces, natural areas, and working farms and ranches for future generations. Since 1993, the Open Space Authority has protected more than 16,000 acres of open space, preserving the region's scenic beauty, protecting water resources and other natural capital, and providing outdoor recreation opportunities for Santa Clara County residents. In November, 2014, the voters passed Measure Q with an overwhelming majority of votes. Passage of Measure Q will enable the Authority to continue to invest in open space and natural resource protection.