

**CALIFORNIA COASTAL COMMISSION**

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## **Coastal Commission transfers 22 acres in Santa Monica Mountains near Backbone Trail entrance to public**

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Staff Report: <https://www.coastal.ca.gov/meetings/agenda/#/2018/9>

The California Coastal Commission unanimously approved a settlement that would transfer more than 22 acres of land near the Backbone Trail trailhead in the Santa Monica Mountains to the Mountains Recreation and Conservation Authority.

“Additional open space so close to the coast is increasingly rare and precious in California,” said Commission Chair Dayna Bochco. “This was a creative solution that will benefit coastal resources, threatened animals and hikers for years to come.”

The settlement, approved on Thursday at the commission’s meeting in Fort Bragg, occurred in lieu of a \$1 million fine after Victor and Susan Knipe built an unpermitted horseback riding arena largely on public property owned by the MRCA, as well as an unpermitted private riding trails, a tractor shed, tack shed, and other structures. The violations included clearance of more than two acres of environmentally sensitive habitat area.

“This is a win win,” said Lisa Haage. “The public got so much more than if we had pursued a traditionally monetary penalty, which shows a willingness of the commission to pursue creative solutions.”

The two parcels are adjacent to an estimated 2,800 acres of wilderness, half of which is public parkland land in the Santa Monica Mountains. One of the parcels being transferred under the settlement is near the Backbone Trail, and could eventually provide an access point or parking lot to the 67-mile long hiking trail.

“It is an incredible opportunity to protect sensitive habitat in the Santa Monica Mountains and open up access to a spectacular trail in one of the most highly populated areas in California,” said Jack Ainsworth, the commission’s executive director.

This land is part of a unique ecosystem comprising the largest and most pristine example of Mediterranean habitat remaining in coastal southern California. The surrounding wildlands offer near pristine, un-fragmented areas of native habitat that support native species including mountain lions, bobcats, gray foxes, coyotes, raptors, owls and turtles.

Under the agreement, the Knipes will remove the unpermitted development and restore areas impacted by the activities. They have also agreed to remove about 62 fire prone, invasive pepper trees along with a dozen other invasive trees and replace them with native trees such as oaks.

The property transferred to MRCA, as well as some of the other land, will be deed restricted to protect it for habitat conservation and open space.

Joe Edmiston, the executive director of the Santa Monica Mountains Conservancy, said they were pleased with the settlement, the environmental protections it will provide and the recreational possibilities.

“We look forward to exploring the options for public access here,” he said, “including providing a new trailhead and access to newly protected wilderness that is so rare in southern California.”

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