

\$24 million California ranch could become part of Bay Area Ridge Trail

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Views of 1,921-acre Mead Ranch, which was acquired by the Peninsula Open Space Trust in early 2026 to be set aside for protection.

Teddy Miller / Peninsula Open Space Trust

A swatch of picturesque open space in the Santa Cruz Mountains that could one day help connect the Bay Area Ridge Trail has been acquired and set aside for protection by conservationists.

On Tuesday, the Peninsula Open Space Trust announced it had purchased a historic 1,921-acre ranch in the range's eastern foothills in Santa Clara County for \$24 million. The parcel, called Mead Ranch, is wedged between a pair of open space preserves west of Morgan Hill within a grassy, oak-studded landscape that conservationists have highlighted as a critical corridor for ranging wildlife like mountain lions, which were recently listed as a threatened species in California.

The newly acquired property fits like a puzzle piece into a patchwork of 50,000 acres of open space in and around the South Bay's Coyote Valley, the narrow lowland area where the Santa Cruz Mountains meet the southern tail of the Diablo Range. POST has [purchased and helped conserve several large parcels](#) there in recent years.

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"What we've seen is, in fact, this is pretty much one of the most vital linkages ... not just for apex species like mountain lions and bobcats but for a lot of other plant and animal species," said Marti Tedesco, POST's senior manager of media and communications.

That includes the bay checkerspot butterfly and likely the monarch butterfly, California tiger salamander, western pond turtle and other endemic species.



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There's no firm plan to open the property to public access but it could, POST says, make for an appropriate connection along the in-progress Bay Area Ridge Trail. The trail calls for establishing a 550-mile loop that [would support multiday thru-hiking around the region](#). About 415 miles of the trail have been laid down; the new property would add 1.5 miles.

"You can see there's an obvious gap in the Ridge Trail there and there might be a couple of routes where a trail could go," Tedesco said. "But until we get out there and we know where the key species and habitats are, we can't really talk about a route."



"We don't want to set expectations that we can't deliver on, but we're excited to have the keys to the gates so we can figure out how to make that happen," she said.

Gregory Thomas is The Chronicle's Editor of Travel and Outdoors, focusing on California activities and destinations. Before that, he served as Senior Editor at Outside Magazine in New Mexico where he edited news, enterprise stories, and features in print and online. He's worked at a tech-media startup, reported for major metro newspapers, written features for national magazines, and done his share of internships. He holds a Master's degree in journalism from UC Berkeley.