

SANTA MONICA MOUNTAINS CONSERVANCY

RAMIREZ CANYON PARK
5750 RAMIREZ CANYON ROAD
MALIBU, CALIFORNIA 90265
PHONE (310) 589-3200 FAX (310) 589-3207



For Immediate Release

Contact: Rorie Skei
(310) 589-3200 X 112

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CONSERVANCY CLOSSES ESCROW ON AHMANSON RANCH PURCHASE
2,983 acre Parkland Preserve a Reality

Los Angeles, CA—The Santa Monica Mountains Conservancy announces today the long-awaited purchase of the 2,983-acre Ahmanson Ranch, a stunningly beautiful property in the Simi Hills in Ventura County nestled at the western edge of the San Fernando Valley. In a simultaneous transaction with Washington Mutual Bank and the Conservancy's joint powers partner, the Mountains Recreation and Conservation Authority, the Conservancy closed escrow this morning, finalizing the largest-ever parkland purchase (both in acreage and dollar amount) in the Los Angeles and Ventura County region. The purchase price was \$150 million.

The huge property is part of a critical ecological linkage and wildlife corridor between the Santa Monica Mountains and the ranges to the north. Now under the Conservancy's permanent protection are diverse habitats and endangered species such as the California red-legged frog, the San Fernando Valley spineflower, and the Southwestern willow flycatcher. Rolling hills studded with valley oaks, sycamore-lined canyon bottoms, miles of potential trails, and vistas of unspoiled California landscapes are now part of a parkland legacy. The ranch encompasses headwaters of Malibu Creek which flows to Santa Monica Bay and supports one of the few populations of Southern steelhead trout. Historical reports indicate the fish may have traveled unimpeded upstream to streams on the Ahmanson Ranch.

The Conservancy's purchase of the ranch was made possible by the watershed protection provisions of Proposition 50, the state bond measure approved by voters in November 2002. Five million in Conservancy funds, a grant of \$10 million from the State Coastal Conservancy, and a grant of \$135 million through the Wildlife Conservation Board combined to complete the purchase price.

“This is indeed an exciting day and I'm very thrilled that the Conservancy can now offer this magnificent property of almost 3,000 acres to all the residents of California to enjoy forever, said Jerome C. Daniel, Santa Monica Mountains Conservancy Chairperson, who added “We truly appreciate Washington Mutual's willingness to sell the ranch to create a park, and so will millions of present and future residents.”

Assemblymember Fran Pavley offered, "Throughout this entire process and over many years, this has been a team effort. The community said that Ahmanson Ranch must be saved. It's a thrill to be able to say that today and forever, Ahmanson Ranch truly belongs to the people of the State of California."

State Senator Sheila Kuehl said, "This beautiful parkland will be a place of peace and enjoyment for everyone to visit; a place for family recreation and an oasis of serenity in an increasingly frantic world. I want to thank the Conservancy for their role in this historic acquisition, as well as everyone who worked doggedly to make this dream come true."

Chair Daniel and the Santa Monica Mountains Conservancy also expressed thanks to California Resources Secretary Mary D. Nichols, Governor Gray Davis, many environmental organizations and citizens, local governments such as the cities of Hidden Hills, Calabasas, Agoura Hills, Malibu, Thousand Oaks, Los Angeles, and the counties of Ventura and Los Angeles for their tremendous support in making the Ahmanson Ranch parkland a reality.

The Santa Monica Mountains Conservancy and Mountains Recreation and Conservation Authority expect to open some initial trails for hikers, equestrians, and bicyclists within two weeks time, as soon as habitat protections, signage, and some visitor-serving amenities are in place. MRCA rangers will patrol and manage the parkland, which adjoins the 2500-acre Upper Las Virgenes Canyon Open Space, and National Park Service land in Cheeseboro and Palo Comado Canyons to the west.

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