

FACT SHEET: SOUTH COWELL RANCH PROPERTY INTEREST PURCHASE

The Midpeninsula Regional Open Space District (District) proposes to purchase an undivided 54% interest in the 600-acre South Cowell Ranch property and complete a subsequent land division resulting in 371 acres of the Uplands portion of the property to be owned in fee by the District. The proposed transaction will preserve coastal grazing lands, protect the Lobitos Creek watershed for salmonid habitat, and improve access to surrounding District lands. It will also improve opportunities to provide compatible trail use when planning the Purisima-to-the-Sea Trail, a regional trail envisioned to link the Bay Area Ridge Trail along the Skyline corridor with the California Coastal Trail along the San Mateo coast.

Background: Since 2006, the District has acquired five other properties along Lobitos Ridge connecting to the Purisima Creek Redwoods Open Space Preserve, totaling 1,493 acres:

- 2006: 183-acre Peninsula Open Space Trust (POST) (Forde) property
- 2009: 260-acre POST (Bluebrush Canyon) property
- 2009: 470-acre Uplands area of the University of California's Elkus Ranch property
- 2010: 340-acre POST (Lobitos Ridge) property
- 2019: 240-acre Purisima Uplands property

Location (see Attachment 1): The 600-acre South Cowell Ranch property is located approximately 3 miles south of Half Moon Bay along Verde Road, south of Purisima Creek Road. The property is in unincorporated San Mateo County, adjacent to the District's 5,038-acre Purisima Creek Redwoods Open Space Preserve (Preserve).

Funding: The District's Board of Directors will consider the purchase of the property interest, including price and terms, in fall 2020. Purchase of the property supports the District's overall coastal mission and Vision Plan Portfolio #3 *Purisima-to-the-Sea Trail, Watershed Protection and Conservation Grazing*. The purchase is eligible for Measure AA Portfolio #3 funding.

EXISTING CONDITIONS

Landscape: The South Cowell Ranch property is bisected by Verde Road and Highway 1. The portion east of Verde Road is vegetated with coastal grassland and brush, and the terrain consists of rolling hills and steep canyons rising to Lobitos Ridge. The property rises from 200 feet in elevation along Verde Road to 800 feet in elevation along Lobitos Ridge, offering panoramic views of the San Mateo coast and the Santa Cruz Mountains. The terrain west of Verde Road consists of gently sloping farmland to Highway 1 and grasslands on the coastal bluffs west of Highway 1.

Land Use (see Attachment 2): The 371-acre uplands area consists of 361-acres of grasslands east of Verde Road, which are grazed by a local rancher, and a 10-acre fallow field and vegetated drainage on the west side of Verde Road. (The rancher also grazes the adjoining 820-acres of grasslands on the Preserve to the east.) East of Verde Road, an unpaved road provides access to the

interior of the property and Lobitos Ridge. A 1-acre area just south of the access road entrance was once used as a material and vehicle storage yard but is now vacant. The Marsh family dry farms the fields west of Verde Road, growing beans, pumpkins, peas and hay. The farm area west of Verde Road is improved with a farm equipment yard and barn, and a farm stand is accessible from Highway 1. The Marsh family also grazes the land west of Highway 1. There is a single-family residence, metal barn improved with an apartment, sheds, and carport located on the east side of Verde Road.

Flora and Fauna: Coastal chaparral and grassland meadows provide rich resources for wildlife including mountain lions, coyotes, bobcats and dusky-footed woodrats. Wide varieties of birds frequent this landscape, such as loggerhead shrikes and red-tailed, Cooper's and sharp-shinned hawks.

Hydrology: The property possesses significant watershed and riparian values, including approximately 3/4 mile of perennial stream frontage along the north side of Lobitos Creek, which provides spawning and rearing habitat for steelhead trout and resident rainbow trout. The property has two ponds on the uplands area used for livestock watering, a tributary of Lobitos Creek and a seasonal creek flowing to the coast.

Coastal Service Plan Compliance: The property is within the boundaries of the District's Service Plan for the San Mateo County Coastal Annexation Area (Service Plan), adopted in June 2003. The mission of the Service Plan is *"To acquire and preserve in perpetuity open space land and agricultural land of regional significance, protect and restore the natural environment, preserve rural character, encourage viable agricultural use of land resources, and provide opportunities for ecologically sensitive public enjoyment and education."* The purchase of the property complies with and furthers the mission of the Service Plan.

Terms and Conditions: The proposed purchase price for an undivided 54% interest in the 600-acre property is \$4,750,000. POST will retain an undivided 33% interest and the Marsh family a 13% interest. Each of the owners have agreed to apply for a land division application with San Mateo County creating a 371-acre South Cowell uplands parcel to be owned in fee by the District, a 226-acre farm parcel to be owned and farmed by the Marsh family, and a 2-acre residential parcel to be owned by POST. As part of this transaction, a month-to-month grazing lease on the upland area with a local rancher will be assigned by POST to the District. The District will enter into an agreement with the other owners to allocate water use on the property from Purisima Creek.

NEXT STEPS

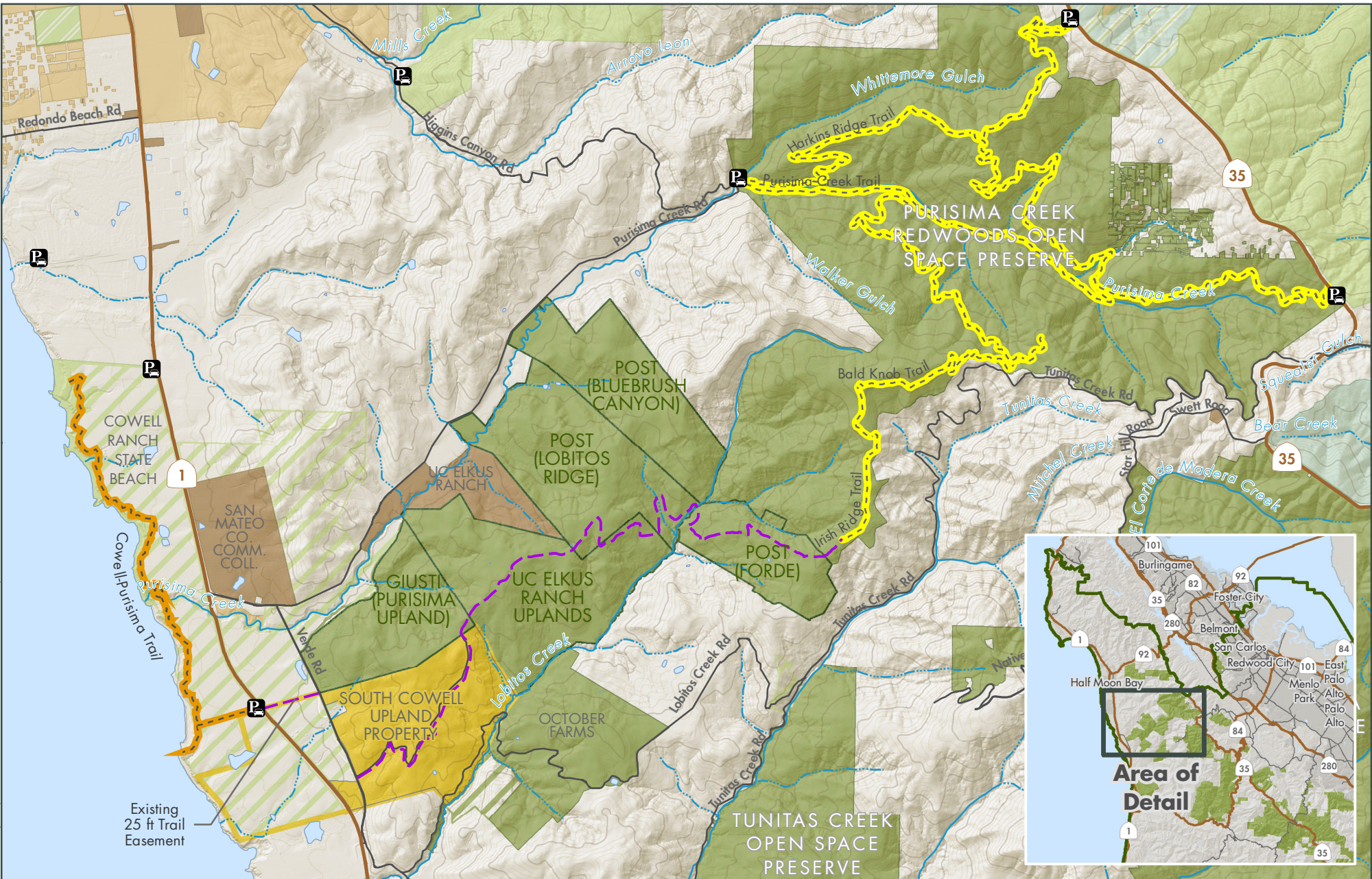
Environmental Review: Environmental review in compliance with the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) is underway for the proposed purchase.

Board Action: The District's Board of Directors will consider the purchase of the 54% undivided interest in the South Cowell Ranch property at a public meeting in the fall of 2020 as an addition to the Purisima Creek Redwoods Open Space Preserve. Included for consideration at that time will be the property's Preliminary Use and Management Plan, which is expected to propose a status quo management approach of the uplands area. The District will manage the uplands area as a closed area pending further planning as described below.









Planning: If purchased, a land division plan allowing the District to secure sole interest in the uplands area will be submitted to the County and subject to public review and comment. A future feasibility study for the alignment and parking options for the Purisima-to-the-Sea Trail may include the uplands area, with sufficient buffers to protect residential uses on Verde Road, grazing, and farming uses. Subsequent public access planning will include consultation with private property owners on Verde Road and appropriate agencies and organizations. It will include general public meetings to gather input and to review draft and final plans. Further environmental review will be prepared as needed.

Public Participation: Interested parties are encouraged to contact Jasmine Leong, Real Property Agent I, at the District office (650) 691-1200, extension 516, or at jleong@openspace.org, to request that their names be added to the public notification list for this proposed property purchase.

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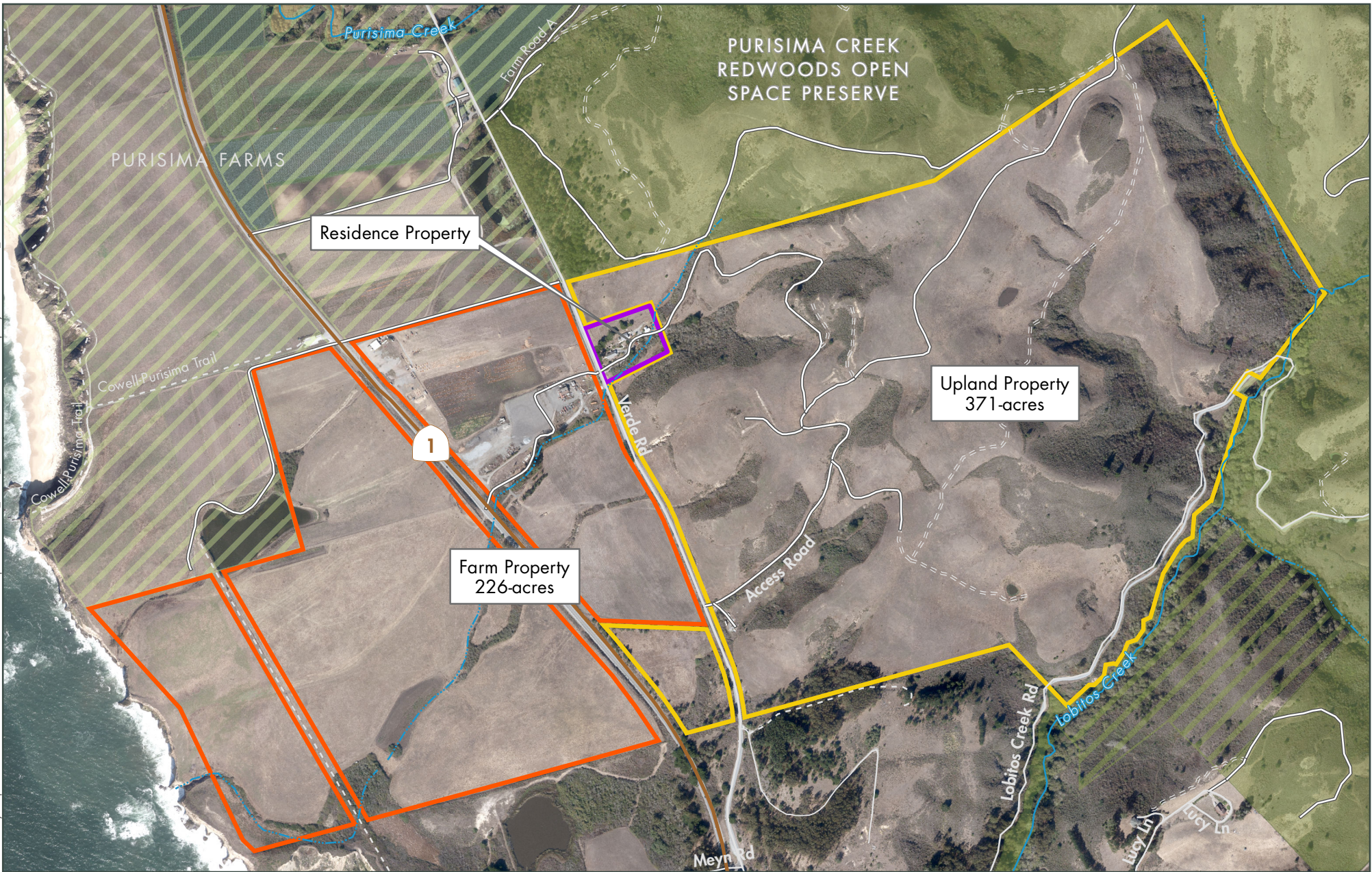
Attachment 1: Purisima-to-the-Sea Trail and South Cowell Ranch

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|  MROSD Preserves | <u>Purisima-to-the-Sea Trail</u> |  Existing Cowell-Purisima Trail |
|  POST Easement |  Conceptual Trail Extension |  South Cowell Upland Property |
|  MROSD Conservation Easement |  Existing Trail, Open to Public |  Larger South Cowell Ranch property |



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 8/31/2020



While the District strives to use the best available digital data, these data do not represent a legal survey and are merely a graphic illustration of geographic features.



Attachment 2: South Cowell Ranch Proposed Area of Land Division

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|  Purisima Creek Redwoods OSP |  Proposed Upland Property |
|  Chamberlain-Lundell Conservation Easement |  Residence Property |
|  Purisima Farms Conservation Easement (POST) |  Farm Property |

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