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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Peninsula Open Space Trust Transfers 376-Acre Historic North Coyote Valley Wetland Complex to the Santa Clara Valley Open Space Authority for Restoration and Permanent Protection

Known as Laguna Seca, this property is an essential piece of San José's climate-resilient future



Laguna Seca, filled with water, 2021. Photo: Derek Neumann/Santa Clara Open Space Authority

Palo Alto, Calif. (November 14, 2024) — [Peninsula Open Space Trust](#) (POST) today announced the transfer of 376 acres of land in North Coyote Valley to the [Santa Clara Valley Open Space Authority](#) (Authority), a 30-year-old regional public land conservation agency that protects open space and connects people to nature. POST purchased the land in 2019 as part of a historic public-private collaboration with the Authority and the City of San José to conserve nearly 1,000 acres in northern Coyote Valley, marking a turning point toward environmental protection in the region's priorities for land use in an era of accelerating climate change.

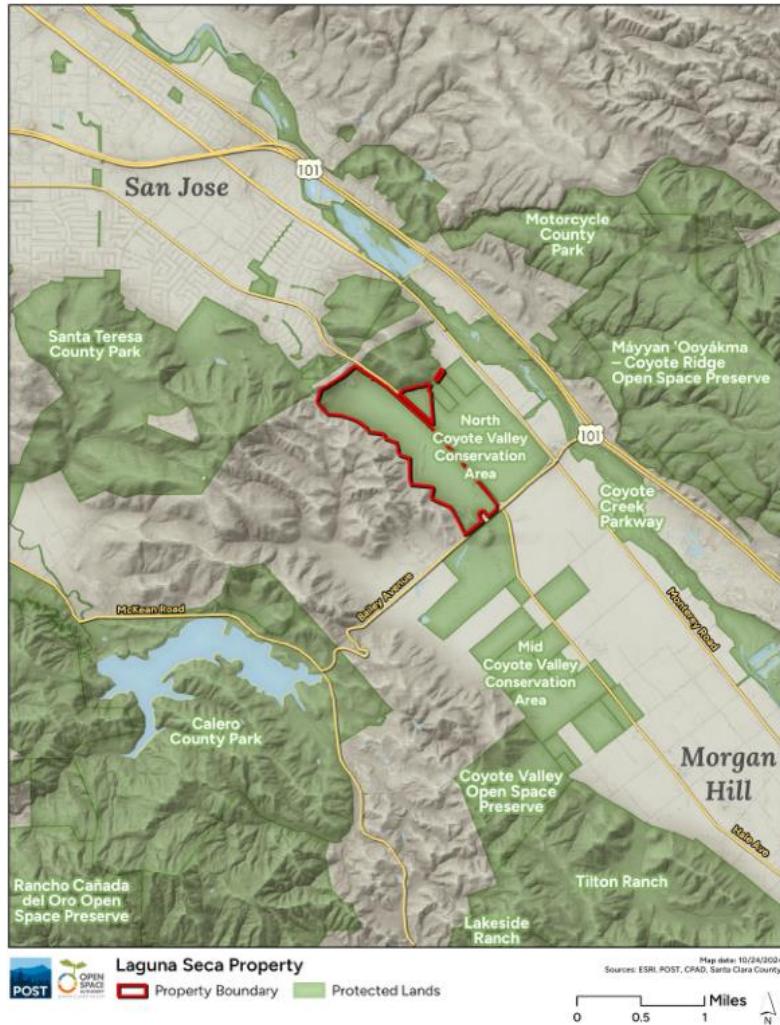
Laguna Seca is located northwest of the intersection of Bailey Avenue and Santa Teresa Boulevard at the southern edge of San José (see map below). Historically, it has been an important seasonal lake and wetland ecosystem. As the largest freshwater wetland remaining in Santa Clara County, it acts as a natural flood basin, absorbing and moderating water flow into nearby Fisher and Coyote Creeks, especially during heavy rains. This absorption function also helps recharge the underground aquifers that support the water supply for the greater San José area.

Laguna Seca also serves as a key wildlife passage, connecting the Mt. Hamilton and Diablo Range to the east with the Santa Cruz Mountains foothills to the west. The Coyote Valley corridor is vital for the east-west movement and survival of many species. It also acts as an important stop for birds on the Pacific Flyway. The historic Laguna Seca wetland complex once spanned more than 1,000 acres in a low basin where Fisher Creek meets Coyote Creek. In the past, the wetland existed nearly year-round, where water would fan out and fill the basin in the rainy season, at times up to 10 feet deep.

“With this transfer, public ownership of Coyote Valley continues to grow. A key priority for us, in partnership with POST and the City of San José, is planning the restoration of the Laguna Seca landscape to increase the abundance of groundwater and re-establish the floodplain after more than a century of drainage and encroachment,” said **Andrea Mackenzie**, general manager of the Authority. “The seasonal wetlands that appear here are just a small example of what can happen at a larger landscape scale. With this transfer, the Authority will continue our work to restore the Laguna Seca so that it can provide its many benefits to people and wildlife.”

“Having the Authority take ownership of Laguna Seca from POST is a significant milestone in a journey we began more than five years ago, in partnership with the City of San José,” said **Walter T. Moore**, president of POST. “The public’s consistent support for conserving Coyote Valley’s ‘last chance’ landscape is vital to realizing all the benefits this landscape can provide. And no organization is as prepared as the Authority to advance its long-term environmental health and continue this important work.”

POST transferred the property to the Authority for \$16 million, which is approximately 60% of POST’s original purchase price of \$21.16 million in 2019. To fund the purchase, the Authority received \$6 million from the California Natural Resources Agency’s Urban Flood Protection grant program and \$10 million from a state budget allocation administered by California State Parks. The Authority’s board voted to authorize the transfer on August 22, 2024.



History of Laguna Seca

Indigenous peoples have lived in and stewarded Coyote Valley for millennia, relying on Laguna Seca, Coyote Creek and the surrounding area to provide a variety of resources. Their descendants continue to live across the region and work to preserve its cultural and environmental resources. Partnerships with modern-day Indigenous groups inform future uses and restoration of the area.

Laguna Seca, also referred to as *La Laguna Zeca* ("the dry lake"), was first documented by European settlers on October 31, 1797. It later became the namesake for Rancho Laguna Seca (Alvires), also known as Refugio de la Laguna Seca, a Mexican land grant awarded on July 22, 1834, to Juan Alvires by Governor José Figueroa.

In 1916, Laguna Seca was completely transformed and repurposed for agricultural use, disrupting the marshland ecology of the basin including the species that called this wetland home. A variety of highly destructive tactics, including draining, ditching, clearing, burning and disking were done to make the area viable for agriculture and have had severe lasting effects on the landscape. Modern-day Laguna Seca is now dry for most of the year and typically gathers visible water only during the rainy winter seasons.

Laguna Seca was long slated to become part of a 6.6 million square-foot tech campus. In 2019, POST, the Authority and the City of San José partnered to acquire it for conservation, along with other nearby land parcels. That 2019 conservation acquisition was supported by a unanimous vote from the San José City Council and by a broad public mandate to fund environmental investments in Coyote Valley by passing Measure T.

Looking Ahead

The permanent protection of Laguna Seca presents a unique opportunity to restore its full natural wetland functions and re-establish a diverse, expansive valley floor ecosystem. The wetland is making it a crucial habitat for biodiversity conservation, and restoration will benefit a wide range of threatened species, including rare plants, amphibians and water birds. The Authority and its partners have been working to sustainably manage the local groundwater aquifer and creeks and have been conducting native plant and riparian restoration work, trash clean-ups and invasive species management. Scores of local volunteers have had a major hand in this work over the past five years.

In addition to supporting wildlife, the restoration of Laguna Seca re-establishes its function as a natural flood basin for the region. By absorbing and moderating water flow, Laguna Seca can help reduce flood risks downstream along Coyote Creek, such as the urban areas of San José that experienced devastating flooding in 2017 following heavy rains. Enhancing both environmental sustainability and flood protection makes the restoration of Laguna Seca a vital ecological project with far-reaching effects. Efforts to restore Laguna Seca will be ongoing and are expected to take many years, depending on available funding.

The Authority is currently working with POST and the City of San José on the [Coyote Valley Conservation Areas Master Plan](#) (CVCAMP), a comprehensive plan for Laguna Seca and other recently protected properties on the Coyote Valley floor now totaling more than 1,500 acres - and expected to grow with anticipated additional land protections and transfers to the Authority.

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About the Peninsula Open Space Trust (POST)

POST protects open space on the Peninsula and in the South Bay for the benefit of all. As a private nonprofit land trust, POST has been responsible for preserving more than 89,000 acres since its founding in 1977. POST works with private landowners and public agencies to create a network of protected lands so that present and future generations benefit from the careful balance of rural and urban landscapes that makes our region extraordinary. Visit openspacetrust.org for more information.

About the Santa Clara Valley Open Space Authority

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 Authority has protected almost 30,000 acres of open space, natural areas and working lands, watersheds, and wildlife habitat – providing ecologically friendly outdoor recreation and preserving the natural beauty and environmental health of the Santa Clara Valley. For more information, please visit openspaceauthority.org.

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