

**SANTA MONICA MOUNTAINS CONSERVANCY**

RAMIREZ CANYON PARK  
5750 RAMIREZ CANYON DRIVE  
MALIBU, CA 90265  
PHONE ((310) 589-3200



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

**SANTA MONICA MOUNTAINS CONSERVANCY DEDICATES  
FORMER AHMANSON RANCH TO THE PUBLIC**

*New 2,983-acre Upper Las Virgenes Canyon Open Space Preserve is the most significant parkland purchase in Southern California history*

Calabasas, California—At a ceremony marking over fifteen years of community effort, and attended by hundreds, Secretary for Resources Mike Chrisman was the opening speaker dedicating the 2,983-acre former Ahmanson Ranch as permanent public parkland. The stunningly beautiful park in the Simi Hills in Ventura County nestled at the western edge of the San Fernando Valley was named the Upper Las Virgenes Canyon Open Space Preserve. It was the first dedication of Southern California public parkland of the Schwarzenegger Administration.

“The dedication of this new park and open space preserve is the result of more than fifteen years of the collaborative efforts of hundreds of citizens and environmental organizations working together in a public private partnership,” said Secretary Chrisman. “I congratulate the visionary work that brought us to this dedication today.”

Also speaking at the event were Congressman Brad Sherman, Senator Sheila Kuehl, Assemblymember Fran Pavley, Ventura County Supervisor Linda Parks, Los Angeles County Supervisor Zev Yaroslavsky, and Los Angeles City Councilmember Dennis P. Zine. Their efforts alongside many hundreds of citizens, local, state, and federal agencies, other elected officials, environmental organizations, entertainment industry figures, neighborhood associations, grass roots groups, and scientists provided leadership

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through years of intense public land use debate, litigation, and, ultimately, purchase of the property.

“Throughout this entire process and over many years, this has been a team effort,” said Assemblymember Fran Pavley. “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.”

The Santa Monica Mountains Conservancy, in a simultaneous transaction with the Conservancy’s joint powers partner, the Mountains Recreation and Conservation Authority, purchased the property from Washington Mutual Bank last November. It was the largest-ever parkland purchase (both in acreage and dollar amount) in the Los Angeles and Ventura County region. 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.

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 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.

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“The beauty of this vast parkland is astounding. It is extremely gratifying to know that every future generation will be able to experience the extraordinary peace and sanctity that we are experiencing here today,” said Jerome C. Daniel, Chairman of the Santa Monica Mountains Conservancy.

Also at the dedication was the family of George E. Barrett Jr., one of the original landowners of the ranch. George E. Barrett, Jr. was a wealthy financier who made his fortune on Wall Street and acquired properties in Southern California. The Barrett Ranch was used by Barrett to raise horses, vacation, and allow for motion picture filming. Mr. Barrett built the ranch house that stands today around 1938. According to his daughter-in-law Muriel Barrett, he loved the unobstructed 360 degree view from the house, looking over the then rural San Fernando Valley and points south, west, and north. The only trees were the native oaks that are still standing. Barrett also owned vast holdings in Malibu. Today many of the beautiful lands bought by Mr. Barrett as investments, are now protected parkland, including this park, Cheeseboro Canyon to the west, parts of Point Dume, Escondido Canyon, and Latigo Canyon in Malibu.

The Santa Monica Mountains Conservancy and Mountains Recreation and Conservation Authority have opened trails for hikers, equestrians, and bicyclists. The park is currently accessed from the northern end of Las Virgenes Canyon Road in Calabasas. In the months ahead, a new trailhead and parking lot will be built at the western end of Victory Boulevard in Los Angeles. MRCA rangers 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. The Santa Monica Mountains Conservancy is a State Agency dedicated to the preservation and acquisition of open space and parkland throughout Southern California.

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