

SANTA MONICA MOUNTAINS CONSERVANCY

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Santa Monica Mountains Conservancy Opens New Victory Boulevard Entrance to Upper Las Virgenes Canyon Open Space Preserve

Los Angeles city gateway to the former 5,200-acre Ahmanson Ranch provides ample parking, picnic areas, restrooms, and trail access to miles of spectacular wilderness and public parkland

West Hills—At a dedication ceremony held today on the site of what had been once envisioned as a four lane highway into the planned community of Ahmanson Ranch, the Santa Monica Mountains Conservancy opened up a long awaited Los Angeles City access point to the 5,200-acre Upper Las Virgenes Canyon Open Space Preserve.

Congressman Brad Sherman, Assmeblymembers Fran Pavley and Lloyd Levine, Los Angeles County Supervisor Zev Yaroslavsky, Ventura County Supervisor Linda Parks, and Los Angeles City Councilmember Dennis Zine were on hand to cut the ribbon on the new trailhead, which straddles the Los Angeles/Ventura County border. Now families, hikers, mountain bikers, and equestrians have easier access into one of the most magnificent parklands in the area. The new trailhead includes parking for 60 cars, as well as equestrian and bus parking, a bathroom, interpretive kiosks, and a picnic area.

At the headwaters of east Las Virgenes Canyon where the Simi Hills rise above the San Fernando Valley, park users can link up with miles of trails through rolling hills studded with valley oaks, sycamore-lined canyon bottoms and unspoiled California landscapes.

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The park connects with over 6,000 acres of the Santa Monica National Recreation Area in Cheeseboro and Palo Comado Canyons to the west.

“There could not be a more fitting name for this trailhead—the Victory Trailhead,” said Joseph T. Edmiston, Executive Director of the Santa Monica Mountains Conservancy. “The beautiful landscape you see before will only change as the seasons dictate. Today, the same gates once erected in the heat of battle been thrown open. We say: Let the people in!”

On November 7, 2003, the Conservancy purchased the 2,983-acre portion of the former Ahmanson Ranch from Washington Mutual Bank. Years before, 2,500 acres of the original ranch had been transferred to the MRCA as a developer dedication.

Preservation of the ranch for public parkland marked the close of a heated, fifteen-year Southern California land use controversy. The County of Ventura had approved a Specific Plan to create a self-contained new town of over 3,000 residences, with golf courses, open space, commercial and business centers. The saga involved the entertainer Bob Hope and his vast land holdings; local, State, and federal agencies; elected officials, environmental organizations, entertainment industry figures, neighborhood associations, businesses, lawyers, builders, grass roots groups, and scientists, all of whom had varying and often vociferous points of view about the future of the ranch. The discovery of the near-extinct subspecies of the California red legged frog and the presumed extinct San Fernando Valley spine flower finally tipped the scales.

The park purchase was made possible when the bank agreed to sell, and funding became available from California’s Water Security, Clean Drinking Water, Coastal and Beach Protection Act of 2002 (Proposition 50). The \$150 million below- appraised- value sale

price was made up of \$135 million from the State Wildlife Conservation Board, \$10 million contributed by the State Coastal Conservancy, and \$5 million from the SMMC.

MRCA rangers will patrol and manage new trailhead, which like the rest of the park, will be opened from dawn to dusk.

The Santa Monica Mountains Conservancy was established by the California State Legislature in 1980. Since that time, it has helped to preserve over 60,000 acres of parkland in both wilderness and urban settings, and has improved more than 114 public recreational facilities throughout Southern California.

The MRCA is a local government public entity established in 1985 pursuant to the Joint Powers Act between the Santa Monica Mountains Conservancy, the Conejo Recreation and Park District, and the Rancho Simi Recreation and Park District. The MRCA works in cooperation with the Conservancy and other local government partners to acquire parkland, participate in vital planning processes, and complete major park improvement projects.

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