

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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\$11 Million Award to Permanently Protect Banning Ranch

Newport Beach, California—The preservation of the Banning Ranch property is one step closer to its funding goal now that the United States Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), through the Department of the Interior, has awarded \$11 million toward the acquisition of 384-acres of coastal land in Newport Beach. With the Section 6 grant now confirmed, this brings the total funding committed to the project to \$83 million. The work is not complete however, as two remaining grants are scheduled for consideration in 2022.

This conservation transaction has been in the works since 2016 and after the appraised value of \$97 million was determined, the fundraising was kickstarted with a \$50 million donation from benefactors Frank and Joann Randall. Funds coming from Section 6 are aimed at protecting locations rich with threatened and endangered species. The entire site is within the confines of critical habitat for the federally endangered California gnatcatcher. In addition, there are other well-known, sensitive, and protected bird species such as: ospreys, burrowing owls, Belding’s savannah sparrows, and yellow breasted chats.

“We are absolutely thrilled that the Service awarded this grant—we are now only 15% away from reaching the acquisition price. The size of the award speaks volumes to the importance of the many sensitive plants and animals on the site,” states Melanie Schlotterbeck, Executive Director of the Banning Ranch Conservancy. “From the vernal pools with their San Diego Fairy Shrimp to the riparian areas with least Bell’s vireo—the site is packed with important and diverse species.”

The property owners (Newport Banning Ranch) have been working closely with The Trust for Public Land and Banning Ranch Conservancy to meet due diligence deadlines, approve remediation plans, and plan for future stewardship after the property closes escrow—which is expected in June of 2022. The Mountains Recreation and Conservation Authority has agreed to own and manage the land in the short-term.

“The Conservancy has worked toward this preservation goal for more than 20 years and we hope that by June of next year the transaction will close escrow,” commented Ms. Schlotterbeck. “Thanks to Assemblymember Cottie Petrie-Norris, a line-item budget request was confirmed in the last few weeks. We are grateful as well to the Authority that stepped into the near-term management role. We wouldn’t be here without partnerships!”

The Conservancy remains engaged in the transaction with all the partners. Once escrow has closed, the multi-year remediation effort begins and the Conservancy’s goal of an inclusive communitywide planning effort for determining the types, intensities, and locations of uses will really kick into high gear.

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*For more than 20 years, the **Banning Ranch Conservancy**’s mission has been to preserve, acquire, conserve and manage the entire Banning Ranch as permanent public open space, park and coastal nature preserve.*