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**Contact:**

Peggy Flynn

Community Relations Manager

[Sonoma County Agricultural Preservation and Open Space District](#)

(707) 565-7347 office

(707) 293-4592 cell

## **District Acquisition Creates Legacy Project**

*Agreement includes charitable pledge for future regional park development*

*SANTA ROSA, Calif.* – In a move to protect land for a potential 1,076-acre regional park on the northern edge of the Santa Rosa urban area, the Sonoma County Board of Supervisors, acting as the District's Board of Directors, approved the purchase of nearly 461 acres of property from John and Martha McCullough for \$8,463,000.

The property represents one of three parcels that would comprise the prospective park. The District initially purchased the 340-acre Cresta property in 2007, which is contiguous to the McCullough property. Located north of Santa Rosa, the McCullough Ranch represents the first of potentially two acquisitions. The District holds a right-of-first offer on an additional 275 acres and will require partner funding to purchase.

"This project exemplifies our efforts to conserve and protect our County's scenic heritage," said Valerie Brown, First District Supervisor. "Providing recreational lands for people who live in or visit Sonoma County is fundamental to our social and economic prosperity."

The McCullough property is a diverse landscape providing a mix of grasslands, chaparral, and oak, Douglas fir, and redwood woodlands. It also encompasses approximately 1.7 miles of Mark West Creek, a stretch of the creek that is known to support both steelhead and Coho salmon. The ranch also features exceptional views due to its high ridges and has an existing trail system for access throughout the property. Public access is currently provided on the portion of the property that is protected by a District-held conservation easement. These guided tours will continue and the District will explore additional public access and recreational options in the interim as the properties are being assembled for park development.

"It is important to us that the ranch be dedicated as parkland," said property owner John McCullough. "We want to preserve the rural character and the natural resources that this property provides. Folks that have come out to our ranch enjoy a diverse experience, from the ridge, to the valley, to the creek—this property has endless opportunities for outdoor recreation and education."

The agreement also includes an \$850,000 charitable donation by the McCulloughs to the Regional Parks Foundation for the planning, restoration, development, and maintenance of the property for use as a park. Additionally, some of the funds may be used for fundraising for the acquisition of the second parcel.

"This is a prime area for parkland and we are committed to bringing this park to fruition," said Mary Burns, Director of the Sonoma County Regional Parks Department. "Our newest challenge is securing adequate funding for public access from state, local and private funders, to safeguard these resources for future generations and to meet the needs of a growing population."

In the vicinity of McCullough Ranch and adjacent to the Cresta property, are other protected properties, including Pepperwood Preserve and the Lang and Guttman conservation easements that are held by the District. These properties, along with the current and proposed District acquisitions, represent nearly 4,600 acres of protected habitat in that area.

“Guided by the County’s General Plan and working with Regional Parks, we pursued opportunities for outdoor recreation and resource protection in this area and focused on the availability and quality of those resources,” said Bill Keene, Interim General Manager of the District. “This property is a great example of the value of private land stewards and the commitment it takes to protect our open spaces for future generations.”

For FY 09-10, the District anticipates expending approximately \$30 million for acquisitions, in addition to projects under its Matching Grants Program.

**About the Sonoma County Agricultural Preservation and Open Space District**

The Sonoma County Agricultural Preservation and Open Space District permanently protects the diverse agricultural, natural resource and scenic open space lands of Sonoma County for future generations. Since 1990, the District has protected approximately 76,000 acres. Agricultural and open space lands have been protected through a 1/4-cent sales tax approved by voters in 1990 and reauthorized in 2006. For more information, please visit [www.sonomaopenspace.org](http://www.sonomaopenspace.org)

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