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Elkhorn Slough gets new land

SENTINEL STAFF REPORT

MOSS LANDING — The Elkhorn Slough's protected watershed, at the center of the Monterey Bay, has grown once again with the acquisition of three properties by the nonprofit land trust Elkhorn Slough Foundation.

The 140 new acres, acquired through a land donation and \$1.4 million in grants, completes a nine-mile corridor of protected wilderness, running from the shadows of the Moss Landing Power Plant to the hilltops farther inland. The protected slough had formerly stretched seven miles without interruption.

The estuary, now 3,600 acres of protected marsh, dunes and woodland, is known for its rich wildlife habitat, providing fly space to 340 bird species and a key fish nursery for the bay. Employees of the Elkhorn Slough Foundation said Wednesday they spotted a bobcat traversing through some of the newly protected lands.

Thousands of people visit the estuary annually to kayak and hike.

The new properties, acquired last month, follow more than 900 acres of land acquisition by the Elkhorn Slough Foundation during the last four years and are part of a greater effort to preserve the slough while maintaining economic use of the land, particularly agriculture.

"We've worked very hard to balance various uses on these lands," said Mark Silberstein, executive director of the Elkhorn Slough Foundation in a statement released Wednesday.

Environmentalists have attributed much of the erosion that has historically plagued the slough to farming on the steep, inland hillsides, where sediment has fallen into Carneros Creek, the slough's primary freshwater source.

The latest acquisitions are all located on a steep, east-running ridge, much of which was farmed. They include an 11-acre peak known as the Cormack property, a 95-acre parcel formerly owned by the Renteria family and the 32-acre Harris/Vasquez Ranch.

The ranch lands will be passed to the Elkhorn Slough Foundation in installments over the next five years.

The Elkhorn Slough Foundation, founded in 1982, raises funds for wetland preservation as well as manages and owns much of the estuary.

Directions To Elkhorn Slough Visitor Center From Highway 1 south:

Take Highway 1 to Moss Landing;

- At the power plant, turn left onto Dolan Road;
- Go 3.5 miles on Dolan Road, turn left onto Elkhorn Road;
- Go 1.9 miles on Elkhorn Road, turn left into the Reserve gate.

You can find this story online at:

<http://www.santacruzsentinel.com/archive/2005/January/20/local/stories/09local.htm>

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