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Public, Private Partners Secure Permanent Protection of Banning Ranch

California Natural Resource Agency, Mountains Recreation and Conservation Authority, Trust for Public Land, and Banning Ranch Conservancy Announce the Permanent Protection of Banning Ranch

Los Angeles, CA – Today, the Trust for Public Land ([TPL](#)) in partnership with the California Natural Resources Agency ([CNRA](#)), Mountains Recreation and Conservation Authority ([MRCA](#)) and Banning Ranch Conservancy ([BRC](#)) announced the completed acquisition of [Banning Ranch](#).

Equivalent in size to 4.5 Disneylands and overlooking the Pacific Ocean, the 387-acre property between the cities of Costa Mesa, Newport Beach and Huntington Beach has long been eyed for development. The tribal and local community's decades long advocacy and TPL's five-year, \$100 million conservation campaign helped bring to a close a chapter of private ownership and begin a new chapter of community driven public and tribal access and future restoration on what is considered the last large, unprotected coastal property in Southern California.

"Millions of Californians will soon be able to enjoy this remarkable new open space overlooking the Pacific Ocean," said California Natural Resources Secretary Wade Crowfoot. *"This includes residents from nearby communities with precious few parks and open spaces. It's a great example of what we're capable of doing in California through creative partnerships."*

TPL and BRC worked to secure public and private funds – including a \$50 million lead [donation](#) from philanthropists and longtime Orange County residents Frank and Joan Randall – to purchase the property and support the conservation effort. The Randall family's generous donation was complemented by broad support from State agencies including the [Wildlife Conservation Board \(\\$15.5 million\)](#), CNRA (\$14 million), [State Coastal Conservancy \(\\$11.5 million\)](#), and the [California Department of Fish and Wildlife \(\\$8 million\)](#).

"Completing this conservation project was a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity and would not have been possible without the incredible generosity of Frank and Joan Randall, combined with the leadership and support of the Governor, local and state elected officials, tribal and community advocates, and our state funding partners. We can now officially say this land will become California's next public coastal park," said Guillermo Rodriguez, TPL's California State Director and Vice President-Pacific Region.

Thanks to leadership and advocacy through consultation from local California Native American tribes and important tribal community advocates, this property will ensure future protection of cultural resources and accessibility to local tribal communities. This property is within the ancestral homelands of local California Native American tribes including the Acjachemen and Tongva peoples and continues to have important significance since time immemorial. The site and the nearby Fairview Park and surrounding bluff areas along the Santa Ana River are believed to have been part of a native village site known as Geṇa.

“The Juaneno Band of Mission Indians is looking forward to collaborating with MRCA during all phases of the project. We are also excited to see what the future holds and in regaining an area for us to hold ceremony. Geṇa hold a special place in our hearts. We are thrilled to be able to share with the public the importance of this village, not only to the Acjachemen but to our plant and animal relatives as Cho’onom noneskinum (to all my relations),” Chairwoman Heidi Lucero, CEO Juaneño Band of Mission Indians, Acjachemen Nation.

Project partners envision turning the property into a vast public park and preserve that would provide coastal access with trails, low-cost camping and picnic sites. It is an anchor property within a nearly 1,000-acre network of protected natural lands linked by bike and walking trails and is easily accessed by public transportation.

The project also protects critical biological diversity. There are approximately 100 acres of marshes, mudflats, and riparian scrub, and 67 acres of coastal sage scrub, with critical habitat for as many as five endangered species. Protecting this property from development and repurposing it from oil extraction to public purposes aligns with California’s ambitious climate goals and the Governor’s [“30 x 30 Initiative”](#) that calls for the protection of 30% of the state’s land and coastal waters by 2030. Restoring the property can help mitigate impacts from sea level rise, sequester carbon in area wetlands, reduce the urban heat island through restoration efforts and provide habitat for native species while also allowing appropriate public access, all of which are key priorities in the Initiative.

As the property’s public land steward, MRCA will hold title while the previous oil operator undertakes at its own expense a two-to-three year process of remediation, including removal of oil infrastructure from the property, including incorporating brownfield bioremediation. During this time, no public access will be allowed, but a stewardship/management planning effort will be underway. Robust tribal consultation and community engagement will be incorporated into the development of a property management plan to inform tribal access and engagement, habitat restoration and public access plans. MRCA will also work with California Native American tribes and tribal community members who hold the property as their ancestral homeland to develop the tribal access and engagement plan that honors, elevates and protects tribal history, cultural resources, and tribal access.

Part of the Tribal Access and Engagement Plan involves a tribal selection of a formal name to reflect the cultural significance and ancestral homeland of the local California Native American tribes, as well as “The Frank and Joan Randall Park & Preserve”.

“Thank you to landowners Newport Banning Ranch and Aera Energy for their hard work. We would not be where we are today without their commitment and patience. And, having the support of and leadership from Assemblymember Cottie Petrie-Norris was very impactful to this conservation

success,” said Conservancy President Terry M. Welsh, MD. “Now that the land is protected, BRC transitions to a new role of restoration and stewardship for the Preserve and nearby coastal lands and waters. We can’t wait to get started!”

“With sweeping coastal views and fantastic recreational and habitat restoration opportunities, The Frank and Joan Randall Preserve will serve 8.4 million people who live within an hour’s drive and marks a monumental step forward in helping to close the park equity gap in Southern California,” said Guillermo Rodriguez, TPL California State Director. “Now we bring to a close a chapter of private ownership and begin an exciting new chapter recognizing and elevating the ancestral homelands of local Native American tribes combined with community driven public access and restoration.”

TPL, as part of the transaction, is also awarding MRCA a \$2 million grant to seed the future stewardship of the property.

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