

HEARST RANCH

Fee Acquisition Area

Summary of Resources

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Summary of Resources

I. Introduction

This document provides a summary of resources on the coastal area of the Hearst Ranch proposed for fee acquisition (the “Property”). The Property is currently part of the Hearst Ranch and is located on the west side of the federally designated All-American Road and California Scenic Highway 1. The Property includes approximately 13 miles of the Central California Coast fronting the Pacific Ocean. This area includes thirteen plant and wildlife species with special status (federal or state endangered, threatened or rare) classification. Approximately forty additional plant species are listed by the California Native Plant Society. The volume and high quality of resources on the Property are exceptional. This property is one of the last remaining privately held coastal properties of this size that offers a vast and abundant amount of natural habitat.

The Property, along with the remaining Hearst Ranch land west of Highway 1 (which is proposed for consideration easements) provides an 18-mile coastal corridor, and is located west of the historic Hearst Castle, which was donated to the State of California by the Hearst Corporation in 1957 and attracts approximately one million visitors each year. The towns of Cambria and San Simeon Acres lie to the south, and the Big Sur coast is the northern boundary of this segment of the California coast.

II. Summary

A. Resources and Habitats

The Property contains high quality habitat and resources. The conservation transaction for the Property offers the opportunity to preserve ecological resources for nearly every type of California coastal habitat. Plant and wildlife habitats on their approximate acreages include approximately:

- 70 acres of freshwater lagoons and wetlands
- 90 acres of sand dunes
- 600 acres of grasslands
- 50 acres of coastal prairie
- 250 acres of coastal sage scrub communities
- 20 acres of riparian woodland

The vast number of plant and wildlife species that are found on the Property include numerous federal and state protected, endangered, and rare species as well as other species of significant value. These species include:

- The northern elephant seal, the California sea lion and the harbor seal

- The State protected and federally threatened southern sea otter
- The federally protected white-tailed kite and peregrine falcon
- The federally threatened California red-legged frog
- The federally endangered tidewater goby and federally threatened steelhead
- Quillwort, pondweed, sedges and numerous other wetlands plants
- The San Francisco gumplant and the compact cobwebby thistle, both of which are California Native Plant Society listed plants

In addition to species that are threatened, endangered, or species of special concern, there is a vast number of other species on the Property. For example, some of the larger mammals on the Property include the following:

- Black tail deer
- Bobcats
- Mountain lions
- Coyotes

B. Visual Resources and Scenic Qualities

The Property consists of 13 miles of coastal property fronting the Pacific Ocean. The Property has long and pristine coastal bluffs and rugged coastline and provides uninterrupted views of the Pacific Ocean and adjacent areas. Preserving the Property's visual resources would ensure that the travelers on the federally designated All-American Highway and California Scenic Highway One and the visitors to the area could enjoy the unspoiled views and scenery for generations to come.

C. Coastal Access and Recreation

The Property provides significant coastal access and recreation opportunities. The Property consists of thirteen pristine beaches, including Arroyo Laguna Wind Surfer Beach and Point Sierra Nevada. Elephant seals, sea lions and sea otters inhabit the coastline and the beaches are popular tourist attractions. In addition, the Property could provide access for hiking, surfing, fishing, beachcombing, bird watching and windsurfing. The Property would also provide a vital connection for the California Coastal Trail.

D. Ecological Connectivity

The volume and the high quality of the resources on the Property are exceptional. Further, there are no privately held coastal properties of this magnitude that provide the opportunity to protect pristine natural coastal lands. A key ecological connection and wildlife corridor between Big Sur, the San Luis Obispo coastline and Cambria, the Property also offers a natural link to the Harmony Coast Ecological Reserve to the south and the Williams property to the north, as well as the Los Padres National Forest, California Coastal Monuments, and Monterey Bay Marine National Sanctuary.

The Property would contribute immeasurably to the overall goal of conserving coastal habitats from Cayucos north to the Big Sur coast and would complement the East-West Ranch acquisition in Cambria in this regard. The Property's elevation ranges from sea level at the shoreline to 50 feet in the rolling hills abutting Scenic Highway 1.

III. Resources and Habitats (All Acreages are Approximate)

A. Freshwater Lagoons and Wetland (70 Acres)

The Property's lagoons host a rich assemblage of plants. Species present in these lagoons include the following:

- Steelhead (*Oncorhynchus mykiss*)
- Tidewater goby (*Eucuclogobius newberryi*)
- One unidentified stickleback species

Valuable wetlands are also located on the Property and include the following plant species:

- Elodea (*Elodea* ssp.)
- Quillwort (*Isoetes* ssp.)
- Pondweed (*Potamogeton* ssp.)
- Sedges (*Carex* ssp.)
- Rushes (*Juncus* ssp.)
- Cattail (*Typha* ssp.)
- Mimulus (*Mimulus* ssp.)

The Property's beaches and other aquatic resources also provide significant habitat and breeding opportunities. The following species are common along beaches used as seasonal haul-out areas for breeding and rearing of the young:

- The northern sea elephant seal (*Mirounga angustirostris*)
- California sea lion (*Zalophus californianus*)
- Harbor seal (*Phoca vitulina*)
- In addition, the southern sea otter (*Enhydra lutris nereis* – Federally threatened – DFG: Fully Protected) is commonly seen in the kelp beds and ocean waters offshore from the coastal terraces of the Hearst Ranch.

B. Coastal Sand Dune (90 Acres)

A major sand dune complex is located at Point Sierra Nevada. These dunes are well vegetated and include the following plant species:

- Sand verbena (*Achillea* ssp.)
- Yarrow (*Ambrosia* ssp.)
- California saltbush (*Atriplex* ssp.)

- Dune morning glory (*Calystegia* ssp.)
- Dune evening primrose (*Camissonia* ssp.)
- Iceplant

Dune scrub communities on the Property include plants such as:

- California sagebrush (*Artemisia* ssp.)
- Coyote bush (*Baccharis pilularis*)
- Coastal buckwheat (*Eriogonum parvifolium*)
- Sage (*Salvia* ssp.)
- Thrift (*Armeria maritima*) occurs along the dune/grassland boundaries

The dunes also include numerous California Native Plant Society (CNPS) listed plants including:

- Compact cobwebby thistle (*Cirsium occidentale* var. *Hoover* – CNPS List 1B: RED 2-2-3)
- Branching beach-aster [(*Corethrogyne leucophylla* (Lindl.) Jeps.] – CNPS List 3: RED 1-2-3)
- San Francisco gumplant (*Grindelia hirsutula* var. *maritima* – CNPS List 1B: RED 2-2-3)

In addition, numerous shorebirds are found at or near the coastal sand dunes and other birds have been observed along the shoreline in rocky intertidal areas and on off-shore rocks.

These birds include:

- California Brown Pelican (*Pelecanus occidentalis californicus* – Federal and State endangered)
- Western snowy plover (*Charadrius alexandrinus nivosus* – Federally threatened – DFG:CSC)
- Long-billed curlew (*Numenius americanus* – DFG: CSC)
- Marbled godwit (*Limosa fedoa*)
- Killdeer (*Charadrius vociferus*)
- Several species of sandpipers
- Black oystercatcher (*Haematopus bachmani*)

C. California Grassland and Coastal Prairie (650 Acres)

The Property has exceptional grasslands and coastal prairie. The coastal prairie (approximately 50 acres) features deep adobe soil that retains moisture for long periods of the winter, spring and summer months. Some special status species occur in these areas, including:

- Blue-eyed grass (*Sisyrinchium bellum*)
- Goldfields (including *Lasthenia macrantha* – CNPS List 1B: RED 2-2-3)
- The flowering lilies (including the Arroyo de la Cruz mariposa lily – *Calochortus clavatus* var. *recurvifolius* List 1B: RED 3-2-3; and the Large-flowered mariposa lily).
- The Arroyo de la Cruz mariposa lily (*Calochortus clavatus* var. *recurvifolius* – CNPS List 1B:RED 3-2-3)
- The large-flowered mariposa lily (*Calochortus weedii* var. *Purdy* – CNPS List 1B: RED 2-2-3)
- Nuttal’s milk-vetch (*Astragalus nuttallii* – CNPS List 4:RED 1-2-3)
- San Luis Obispo sedge (*Carex obispoensis* Stacey – CNPS List 1B: RED 2-2-3).

In addition to the plant species, significant wildlife species have been observed on the Property, including the following:

- White-tailed kite (*Elanus leucurus* – California Species of Special Concern, DFG:Fully Protected)
- Golden eagle (*Aquila chrysaetos* – California Species of Special Concern, DFG:CSC)
- Northern harrier (*Circus cyaneus* – DFG:CSC)
- Peregrine falcon (*Falco peregrinus anatum* – State endangered, DFG: Fully Protected)

D. Coastal Scrub Communities (250 Acres)

Approximately 250 acres of coastal scrub communities have been identified on the Property, the majority of which consists of northern coastal scrub with approximately 30 acres of sea bluff coastal scrub. Northern coastal scrub tends to be located on north-facing exposures and includes the following plants:

- Coyote bush (*Baccharis pilularis*)
- Coastal golden-yarrow (*Eriophyllum staechadifolium*)
- Figwort (*Scrophularia californica*)
- California sagebush (*Artemisia californica*)

Sea bluff coastal scrub is primarily located on the face of coastal terrace bluffs and inland along a narrow stretch of coastal terraces. Plants in this area include:

- California aster (*Lessingia filaginifolia*)
- Beach sagewort (*Artemisia pycnocephala*)

- Coastal buckwheat (*Erigonum parvifolium*)
- Coastal golden-yarrow (*Eriophyllum staechadifolium*)
- Goldenbush (*Isocoma menziesii*)
- Iceplant

E. Riparian Woodland (20 Acres)

Approximately 20 acres of riparian woodland is present on the Property. In addition, streambed/floodplain areas that are essentially unvegetated total approximately 31 acres within the Property. The California red-legged frog (*Rana aurora draytonii* – federally threatened, DFG:CSC) is present in some of these areas. Western pond turtles (*Clemmys marmorata* – Species of Special Concern, DFG:CSC) have also been observed. Significant cover and forage is provided in these areas for wildlife.

IV. Cultural Resources

Archaeological sites are located on the property. No historic sites are identified on the Property. However, the Property is immediately proximate to notable sites, including the Piedras Blancas Lighthouse, Old San Simeon Village and San Simeon Point. The area has an interesting history and portions of the Hearst Ranch were utilized for grazing by Missions San Miguel and San Luis Obispo in the late 1700's and early 1800's. Rancho Piedra Blanca was a Mexican land grant of 48,806 acres that George Hearst purchased as part of the Hearst Ranch in 1865. The Piedra Blanca Lighthouse complex that abuts the Property was built in 1875 and has been placed on the National Register of Historic Places. The lighthouse complex is administered by the U.S. Department of Interior Bureau of Land Management. Seaweed harvesting occurred along the north coast of San Luis Obispo County from the late 1870's into the 1900's. The site of a Chinese seaweed farmer's compound is located near the mouth of Arroyo de los Chinos.