



Pacific Southwest

Banking on Conservation: Promoting California Tiger Salamander Recovery in Santa Barbara County

Grassland-covered hills dotted with stock ponds remain motionless as strong coastal winds sweep across the La Purisima Ranch in Southern California's Santa Barbara County. Beneath the hills, California tiger salamanders live out their days in small burrows, surfacing to visit the ponds on rainy nights to breed. This year, the Service approved the La Purisima Conservation Bank, the first conservation bank in the region to ensure permanent habitat protection to support California tiger salamander recovery.

The California tiger salamanders that live in Santa Barbara County are the most genetically distinct from the other populations of the species, having been separated from them for at least 740,000

The Santa Barbara County Distinct Population Segment of California tiger salamanders is a federally endangered species that will benefit from the La Purisima Conservation Bank.

years. The Santa Barbara County population was listed as endangered in 2000 under the Endangered Species Act because large portions of its habitat were rapidly degraded as land was converted for large-scale, intensive agricultural use and urban development.

"The benefit of conservation banks is that they permanently protect lands that can be conserved and managed for species that are endangered, threatened or otherwise at risk," says Steve Henry with the Service's Ventura Fish and Wildlife Office. Henry adds that landowners participating in the conservation bank program receive financial incentive to manage the habitat for the benefit of the species.

Conservation banks such as the La Purisima Ranch one offset adverse impacts to species that may occur during development projects. In exchange for perma-

nently protecting the land and managing it for certain species, the Service approves a specified number of habitat or species credits that bank owners may sell. Developers may purchase credits from conservation bank owners to mitigate adverse impacts their projects have on species.

"We are delighted to assist in the recovery of the California tiger salamander population in Santa Barbara County, while at the same time benefiting from financial rewards by helping development projects in other areas," says La Purisima Ranch landowner Brian Sweeney.

Unlike many other salamanders, California tiger salamanders only spend a very short period of their lives in water. As juveniles, they leave the water to seek underground burrows made by small mammals. They spend most of the next four to five years underground as they mature to adulthood. Adults, which measure about six to nine inches from nose to tail, migrate to breeding pools during the rainy season. Adults can travel more than a mile to these pools and therefore require large areas of upland habitat as part of their life cycle.

The La Purisima Conservation Bank preserves more than 850 acres of California tiger salamander upland habitat and six known California tiger salamander breeding ponds.

The City of Santa Maria and California Department of Transportation have already purchased credits from the La Purisima Conservation Bank to offset project impacts.

"[Conservation] banks are incredible—they provide an alternative to mitigating in road rights-of-way, and if we can put state money to use for this type of conservation, then that's ideal. Banks make so much sense," says Paul Andreano, a consulting environmental planner for the California Department of Transportation, which purchased credits for a highway widening project that includes the construction of under-crossings to reduce vehicle collisions with California tiger salamanders and other wildlife.

The La Purisima Conservation Bank is next to a 539-acre preservation area for the California tiger salamander, and is near Vandenberg Air Force Base and the La Purisima Mission State Historic Park, ensuring a large area of ecologically important habitat for many species is preserved in perpetuity. Other species protected by the conservation bank include the western spadefoot, a toad species of special concern in California, and numerous native plants, migratory and resident birds, mountain lions, and reptile species such as the coast horned lizard, also a species of special concern.

For more information about Conservation Banking visit <1.usa.gov/1nt0Qgy>.

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