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POST Transfers 140-acre Pillar Point Bluff near Moss Beach to San Mateo County

Habitat-rich Bluff Top Added to Fitzgerald Marine Reserve

August 15, 2011

(Palo Alto, Calif.) —On August 9, Peninsula Open Space Trust (POST) achieved its vision for one of the most scenic spots along the San Mateo Coast when it transferred 140-acre Pillar Point Bluff near Moss Beach to San Mateo County. The county purchased the land for inclusion in the James V. Fitzgerald Marine Reserve with a \$3 million grant from the Wildlife Conservation Board. The scenic bluff top, home to a section of the California Coastal Trail and a popular spot with hikers, is a natural extension of the reserve, whose habitat-rich shoreline at the foot of the bluff is a haven for a vast array of birds and sea creatures.



Pillar Point Bluff

"Our partnership with the county to ensure permanent protection of Pillar Point Bluff illustrates what POST does best: negotiate purchases when land is for sale, hold land until a conservation partner is ready to acquire it, and improve the land for habitat and public enjoyment while it's in our care," said POST President Walter T. Moore. "We've done a lot of work at Pillar Point Bluff, improving trails, adding a small parking lot to facilitate public use, restoring the native landscape and improving wildlife habitat. We also helped line up the acquisition funding so the property could transfer to public ownership at no cost to the county. Our goal was to leave the land better than we found it, and we're glad it will continue to be in good hands with the county."

"Pillar Point Bluff is a stunning addition to the County Park system," said Assistant San Mateo County Manager David Holland. "This area provides great hiking and nature watching opportunities for the public and completes the landside portion protecting the Fitzgerald Marine Reserve. We are grateful to POST for their stewardship of this property until we could acquire it."

POST purchased the bulk of Pillar Point Bluff in 2004 and additional parcels in 2007 and 2008. Since then, POST volunteers and vendors have carried out extensive stewardship projects on the land, including removing invasive Pampas grass, re-routing hiking paths away from eroding slopes, and reseeding worn patches of bluff top with native plants. POST also removed the crumbling foundation of a former dairy barn and restored abandoned irrigation ponds used by seasonal birds and resident wildlife.

The land drains directly into Fitzgerald Marine Reserve, where seals and pelicans populate the shoreline while farther out the Pacific churns over the outer reaches of the reef. To the east, wetlands and marsh areas provide habitat for at-risk species such as the California red-legged frog, San Francisco garter snake and several types of birds. Across Highway 1, the tilled farm fields and bulky shoulders of Montara Mountain on POST-protected Rancho Corral de Tierra create a panoramic backdrop for the bluff top.

Originally Pillar Point Bluff was part of the historic Rancho Corral de Tierra land grant. Remnants of a dairy that operated during the early 1900s can still be found in the tall grass on the flats near Airport Boulevard. By 1980 the land had attracted investors eager to build a bed-and-breakfast and a business park, but the projects failed to get the necessary approvals. At that point ownerships began to change, and POST was able to work out purchase agreements.

Generous donors have helped make each step from acquisition to stewardship to public enjoyment possible. A memorial fund established by Kathy and Al Lauer of Portola Valley was a major source of funding toward the purchase of the land and installation of an important link in the California Coastal Trail named for the Lauers' late daughter, Jean. POST also received a generous grant of \$1 million for Pillar Point Bluff from the California

