

Title: The role of land trusts in enhancing wildlife connectivity: A case study from Coyote Valley, CA.

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Abstract: Land trusts are important partners for protecting and enhancing landscape connectivity and can help prioritize, catalyze, and lead wildlife crossing mitigation projects in collaboration with local transportation agencies and other partners. Coyote Valley, located south of San José, CA, is one of the last remaining wildlife linkages in the San Francisco Bay Region that connects 1.13 million acres of core wildlife habitat across two mountain ranges: the Santa Cruz and Diablo ranges. Given Coyote Valley's potential to serve as a critical wildlife linkage, Peninsula Open Space Trust (POST), the Santa Clara Valley Open Space Authority (OSA), and other partners collaborated to conduct scientific studies to better understand existing wildlife movement and develop reports establishing a vision and recommendations for enhancing wildlife connectivity. These research and planning efforts resulted in the identification and protection of over 1,500 acres of land in Coyote Valley of critical importance to wildlife connectivity and also identified Monterey Road as the greatest barrier to wildlife movement in this landscape. POST and the OSA are partnering to continue land protection efforts in Coyote Valley and to lead a master planning effort to guide the future management, restoration, and use of conserved lands to enhance its value as a regional wildlife linkage and provide other co-benefits. As part of this larger planning process, POST, in collaboration with the OSA, conducted outreach to a local transportation agency to raise awareness of the need for wildlife crossing structures along Monterey Road. As a result of these outreach efforts, the City of San José designated funding for POST to conduct a feasibility study for wildlife crossing structures along Monterey Road in collaboration with the local transportation agency and other partners. The anticipated outcome of this study, which is currently underway, is identification of a suite of wildlife crossing structures that meet the needs of focal species along with conceptual designs for such structures to inform later stages of planning. This case study demonstrates the important role that community-based partners can play in raising awareness of wildlife connectivity needs with local transportation agencies and in planning and leading wildlife crossing projects on behalf of such agencies and highlights lessons learned that can inform similar projects in other geographies.