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**Photos:** Hi-res images may be downloaded here:

<https://www.dropbox.com/sh/sj07h6pmtvmmeid/Insxhibrwu>

# Save Mount Diablo Purchases Top Priority: 1,080 acre, \$7.2 million Curry Canyon Ranch

Walnut Creek, CA – On November 6 Save Mount Diablo announced that it had secured its top priority acquisition over the past 25 years, the 1,080 acre Curry Canyon Ranch, from the estate of Ettore and Geraldine Bertagnoli. The purchase price is \$7.2 million and the group has three years to raise the funds to permanently protect it.

“Curry Canyon Ranch is amazing in every way,” said Scott Hein, president of Save Mount Diablo, “from its huge incredible landscapes, and spectacular beauty, to its rich biological diversity and cultural history. Eight miles of fire road solving not one but four significant trail gaps. The acquisition is the culmination of decades of effort, especially over the past five years, to secure the largest and most expensive property in our history. Complete the mix in a time of significant financial challenges with two angels who agreed to loan us funds, to give us the time to raise the purchase price. This is Save Mount Diablo’s most important acquisition ever, and the most important for Mt. Diablo since North Peak was protected in 1980.”

### Top Acquisition Priority

“Curry Canyon Ranch is Save Mount Diablo’s top priority acquisition,” said Executive Director Ron Brown. “It is the single most important, spectacular, resource property remaining in Contra Costa County. On Mount Diablo only several Ginochio Ranch properties are in the same ballpark—two of them border the ranch. Curry Canyon Ranch was on our very first acquisition list 43 years ago and has been an important goal for more than 25 years. It has also been a highly desirable addition for both Mt. Diablo State Park and for the East Contra Costa County Habitat Conservancy.”

### Lush, Diverse Landscape

“This property is a Shangri-La of sycamore lined creeks, lush canyons studded with house-sized boulders rising from a fragrant isolated valley to exposed grassland ridges, with incredible views, bordered by a mile of rocky cliffs and wind caves—all supporting incredible biological diversity,” said Seth Adams, Save Mount Diablo’s Land Programs Director. “Its dry rocky areas look like Pinnacles National Park or the Mojave desert. Its canyons could be the wet Pacific Northwest.”

Curry Canyon Ranch’s topography and habitats are exceedingly diverse, ranging from Curry Creek and Canyon’s valley floor up steep wooded and shaded canyons, to ridgeline grasslands, peaks and knolls with incredible 360 degree views. It includes dense chaparral and fire-adapted knobcone pine woodland along more than a mile of exposed 50-100 foot sandstone cliffs, rock strata and wind caves—the most significant exposed rock habitats left in Contra Costa County and similar in size and beauty to Castle

Rock above Walnut Creek. Already home to rare peregrine and prairie falcons, when California condors return to Mt. Diablo it will likely be to Curry Canyon Ranch's knobcone cliffs.

Curry Canyon is the largest remaining unprotected canyon on Diablo's main peaks, between the Diablo summit and the Blackhills—4.3 miles from Curry Point within Mt. Diablo State Park, northeast to Morgan Territory Road.

Curry Canyon is the smallest part of the property however, with a half dozen other major canyons rising from the valley at 800 feet to at least six peaks. They include Windy Point, Knobcone Point, and 2080-foot Cave Point, the ranch's highest elevation and once a destination for tourists to Mt. Diablo along the historic "Curry-Cave Trail" beginning in the 1870s.

More than three miles wide, the 1,080 acre property is reached from Clayton (four miles away as the crow flies) but is closer to Blackhawk (less than one mile) and Danville (three miles). Mt. Diablo State Park surrounds the Ranch on three sides, including half of its nine mile boundary.

### **Botanically Rich, with Rare Plants and Wildlife**

"In a bio-blitz in 2009 forty scientists and experts identified 733 plant and animal species in just 24 hours," said former Save Mount Diablo president Malcolm Sproul, who is also a biological consultant and principal at LSA Associates. "I was one of the bio-blitz participants and I know Contra Costa County's resources well. In terms of biological richness, of all the remaining private properties in the county, Curry Canyon Ranch is the crown jewel."

The property includes grassland; oak savannah; blue oak woodland; chaparral; knobcone pine forest; riparian areas, boulders, cliffs and wind caves. Five ponds and more than two and a half miles of creek have been mapped. "It's mountain lion country" said Hein. "Our stewardship of this property will preserve and widen important wildlife corridors."

More than 30 species are rare, threatened or otherwise significant including peregrine falcon, Alameda whipsnake, California red-legged frog, and California tiger salamander. Four plant species—Diablo manzanita, Contra Costa manzanita, Mt. Diablo sunflower, and Mt. Diablo globe lily—are endemic to the Mt. Diablo region.

"Save Mount Diablo's diligence in bringing this multi-year negotiation to a close has been a major achievement" said Heath Bartosh, a botanist and member of SMD's Board of Directors. "This is a landscape-scale addition to the Mount Diablo wilderness and is exemplary of what Save Mount Diablo is about. This is truly a botanically rich place that still has secrets to share. Thankfully, through this acquisition, we'll have a chance to uncover them."

### **Recreation Opportunities**

"Curry Canyon Ranch is the missing link in four major trail connections between Rock City and Diablo's main peak, across Curry Canyon, to Highland Ridge and Riggs Canyon. When we mapped the 30-mile Diablo Trail," said Brown, "we had to loop it in and out of four canyons to travel from Rock City to Riggs Canyon, along one of our most narrow strips of state park land. Curry Canyon Ranch more than doubles the size of that corridor, includes a ridgeline connection so you can skip all four canyons or make a loop, and completes three other major trail gaps too. You can spend all day in areas so rugged and isolated they deserve the term 'wilderness'."

### **History of the Land**

Brothers Sylvester and Alfred Olofson bought from a bank an initial 320 acres along Curry Creek at a tax sale in December 1895. By 1900 Sylvester, his wife Louis and three children were living in a house they had built there, constructed of \$50 worth of lumber from the old school house at the coal mining town of

Nortonville. In 1925 Sylvester opened Curry Creek Park in the lower canyon, a private picnic area where people would come from all over the East Bay to picnic, hike, swim, and camp. He would collect 25 cents from each group. There are still remnants of the Olofson home site, including a gate, and fruit and nut trees.

Ettore Bertagnolli began acquiring land in the canyon above Curry Creek Park from Olofson heirs around 1965. He ran cattle and over time increased the ranch to its current size of 1,080 acres. An Italian American who loved to talk about playing football at Cal, Mr. Bertagnolli was a savvy real estate investor. He would say, “drive to the end of the road and buy property there.”

Throughout its entire 43 year history Save Mount Diablo has talked with Ettore Bertagnolli about acquisition of his property, and with State Park staff has conducted numerous tours, appraisals and negotiations. Mr. Bertagnolli was always willing to allow us to explore his property—but a deal was never reached.

### **The Purchase**

It wasn't until after Ettore Bertagnolli passed away however that progress began. Representatives of the Bertagnolli Estate approached Save Mount Diablo. With the help of Adam Watt and David Pierce, brokers at the time for Prudential, and Jim Sarro, an expert real estate negotiator funded by the Coastal Conservancy, a deal was signed at the appraised value of \$7,173,800.

Save Mount Diablo purchased Curry Canyon Ranch with a loan which must be repaid within three years.

### **Major Donors Critical to Deal**

“At nearly \$7.2 million, Curry Canyon Ranch is Save Mount Diablo's most costly purchase ever,” said Brown. “We knew we could make the purchase happen because of two major longtime supporters, Dave and Dana Dornsife. Five years ago when it looked like Curry Canyon Ranch might become available, we knew it would be a big ticket purchase—of over \$7 million. We approached the Dornsifes. Their response was an immediate ‘we'll loan you however much money you need to secure the Ranch.’ One meeting and a simple two page contract and we had the funds to secure the Ranch, without collateral.”

### **Next Steps**

Historically, Save Mount Diablo has acquired properties, and then transferred them to park agencies. Curry Canyon Ranch has also been a State Park priority for decades. At one point the Department of Parks and Recreation had even dedicated \$3 million to the purchase. That funding evaporated during the Great Recession, and the State is currently not acquiring new properties.

Save Mount Diablo will own and manage Curry Canyon Ranch until it can be transferred to the State, probably in phases over an extended number of years. But Curry Canyon Ranch and other recent acquisitions have required a substantial increase in the organization's capacity for owning, funding and managing properties. Save Mount Diablo currently owns and/or manages twenty properties totaling nearly 2300 acres – an area that because of Curry Canyon Ranch has doubled in size in one year

Fundraising is ongoing for acquisition of the property and for ongoing stewardship. The Coastal Conservancy and The Gordon and Betty Moore Foundation have already committed \$4.2 million. Individual contributions are going to be critical to reaching our goal. In addition to acquisition costs to permanently protect Curry Canyon Ranch, Save Mount Diablo is raising the stewardship funds needed to take care of properties for the many years that Save Mount Diablo will own them.

As part of the purchase, Save Mount Diablo agreed to place a monument on the property within a year, detailing the history of the property and of the Bertagnolli family.

Public tours will begin next year.

**Photos:** For hi-res images, please contact Ashley Rose at [arose@SaveMountDiablo.org](mailto:arose@SaveMountDiablo.org).

**Credits:** credits included in file name; almost all photos are credit Scott Hein/ [heinphoto.com](http://heinphoto.com)

Save Mount Diablo is a non-profit 501(c)(3) conservation organization, which has been preserving lands on and around Mount Diablo and educating the public to the mountain's natural values since 1971. Preserved lands have increased from 6,788 acres in one park to more than 110,000 acres in more than 40 parks and preserves. Save Mount Diablo continues to preserve, defend and restore the remainder of the mountain for people and wildlife to enjoy. Contact: Save Mount Diablo, telephone: (925) 947-3535, fax: (925) 947-0642, 1901 Olympic Blvd., Suite 320, Walnut Creek, CA 94596; [www.SaveMountDiablo.org](http://www.SaveMountDiablo.org)

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## Curry Canyon Ranch

