

Media Release, Friday, November 4, 2011

Contacts:

Ron Brown
Executive Director

w/925-947-3535 & c/925-683-5665
rbrown@SaveMountDiablo.org

Seth Adams
Land Programs Director

w/925-947-3535 & c/925-381-0905
sadams@SaveMountDiablo.org

Title: Saving Thomas Twice: Save Mount Diablo Acquires 145 acre property for \$1.4 million, Gateway to Nortonville Canyon and Kirker Pass Between Concord and Pittsburg, while Strengthening the Urban Limit Line.

Images: please follow this link to a selection of hi-res images with caption information included in the file names.

<https://www.yousendit.com/download/T2dmRkJaY3lqY3JOTzhUQw>

Credit: Scott Hein, www.heinphoto.com

Captions: At bottom

Full Article: http://www.savemountdiablo.org/lands_acquisition_Thomas.html

This is the second time that Save Mount Diablo has saved Thomas. Save Mount Diablo recently acquired the 145 acre Thomas Home Ranch at auction—probably competing with a developer—for \$1,376,500. Working with Gloria Thomas, who was born on the Thomas Home Ranch in 1928, the non-profit land preservation organization also helped stop a proposal from 1996-1998 to annex over 2,700 acres stretching through the property up Nortonville Canyon to overlook Clayton. More than 1,500 houses were proposed.

The Thomases, who moved to the area to work in the mines further up the canyon in Nortonville homesteaded the property in 1869, loved their land and resisted the outsiders who wanted a piece of it. Save Mount Diablo's purchase ends the threat of development on the property and strengthens the Urban Limit Line at its northern border, however there are two development projects currently proposed at the property's boundary.

Thomas Home Ranch is a gateway to Nortonville Canyon and Kirker Pass, a half mile south of Pittsburg. The acreage includes a historic 1880's farmhouse and barns, an old mining cabin, two long creek segments, a variety of sensitive species and spectacular views. The property is a critical link in a wildlife and recreational corridor between Black Diamond Mines Regional Preserve and a new regional park proposed at the Concord Naval Weapons Station. A large eight foot diameter cattle tunnel under Kirker Pass Road will provide safe access both for people and wildlife.

Ron Brown, Save Mount Diablo's Executive Director explains, "The other bidder was almost certainly a developer. This is the second time that SMD has saved the property. Working with the Thomas family we also stopped its development in the late 1990s. A number of family members have thanked us recently for making sure the property will finally be preserved for good, but we can only do it with the continued support of our donors."

Also known as "Thomas North," the Thomas Home Ranch is being acquired at the same time that East Bay Regional Park District is purchasing the 160-acre "Thomas Central" and 852-acre "Thomas South," just a few months after their purchase of the 798-acre Barron property, another Thomas property and the final gap between Mount Diablo State Park and Black Diamond Mines. Although those properties are bigger, they are also more rugged and remote. The Home Ranch was far more developable, threatened and expensive.

It was a close call. The East Bay Regional Park District was interested in purchasing the property but a variety of problems, including developer competition, timing, and technical issues related to funding threatened to get in the way. Save Mount Diablo stepped in to help.

“The Park District is very grateful for Save Mount Diablo’s role in protecting this strategic property at the mouth of Nortonville Canyon,” said Nancy Wenninger, Assistant General Manager/Land Division for the district. “We were very interested in this acquisition but we weren’t going to be able to complete the purchase. Save Mount Diablo’s ability to move quickly and be flexible really made the deal happen. The property is important by itself, but it will also help preserve open space further up the canyon and includes an important trail connection which will help make the final link between Black Diamond Mines Regional Preserve and Concord Naval Weapons Station. Over the years SMD has been one of the District’s most valuable allies and has helped us achieve success many times. We have a great partnership.”

Above the Thomas Home Ranch is a rugged open space corridor stretching from Black Diamond north toward Suisun Bay. Its protection decreases development threats to the canyon and pass area. It’s a critical recreational connection, historically important, and biologically rich. “Thomas’ location is very strategic in terms of its relationship to the Urban Limit Line, Pittsburg, Kirker Pass and the entrance to Nortonville Canyon and the resources there,” said Malcolm Sproul, Save Mount Diablo’s Board President. “It’s the northwestern most extension of the San Joaquin Valley, with similar habitat and environmental conditions. There was even a confirmed San Joaquin kit fox sighting at the far end of the canyon in the early 1990s.”

Save Mount Diablo’s purchase ends the threat of development on the property and strengthens the Urban Limit Line at its northern boundary, however the Seeno development companies’ Montreux development project—including 161 acres—and the city of Pittsburg’s proposed two-mile James Donlon extension road project (also known as the Buchanan Bypass) are both located at the Thomas Home Ranch’s northern boundary.

Ultimately Save Mount Diablo will transfer the property to the East Bay Regional Park District. “Thomas is one of the best examples of the importance of our organization,” said Brown. “It underscores our flexibility and ability to step in and acquire an important piece of land. This is why we exist—we can act quickly when others may not be able to.”

At their 30th anniversary in 2001 Save Mount Diablo awarded the Thomas family a Mountain Star Stewardship Award for their care of their property for more than 130 years: “The family has resisted Pittsburg’s efforts to annex and develop their ranch lands. Without their commitment to their land, the scenic Black Diamond foothills of Mount Diablo would have long since been paved over.”

Thomas Home Ranch will not be open to the public for some time. Save Mount Diablo will lead guided tours on the property on Saturday, November 12th and December 3rd. There is more information about Thomas Home Ranch and the tours at SaveMountDiablo.org.

Summary

Who: Save Mount Diablo, non-profit organization in Walnut Creek, CA

What: Save Mount Diablo has acquired the 145 acre Thomas Home Ranch, Gateway to Nortonville Canyon and Kirker Pass.

Where: Thomas Home Ranch is in the Kirker Creek/Pittsburg area at the intersection of Kirker Pass and Nortonville Roads, just south of Pittsburg.

When: Acquisition finalized in October 2011

Why: The Thomas family has long resisted development of their land. Save Mount Diablo assisted them in protecting it from annexation to Pittsburg from 1996-1998. Thomas Home Ranch has two long creek segments, a variety of sensitive

species and spectacular views. In addition to being a gateway to Nortonville Canyon and Kirker Pass, the property is a critical link in a wildlife and recreational corridor between Black Diamond Mines Regional Preserve and a new regional park proposed at the Concord Naval Weapons Station, and a large cattle tunnel under Kirker Pass Road will provide safe access both for people and wildlife. Thomas Home Ranch will ultimately be transferred to the East Bay Regional Park District.

How: Save Mount Diablo saved the Thomas Ranch in just a few days through an auction, and had to pay the \$1,376,500 purchase price in cash. Funding was provided by Save Mount Diablo's Mary Bowerman Fund – member's donations at work. Save Mount Diablo is only able to move quickly because of the generosity of its members and donors.

Events: Save Mount Diablo will lead guided tours on the property on Saturday, November 12th and December 3rd at 9:30 am. There is more information about Thomas Home Ranch and the tours at SaveMountDiablo.org.

Captions:

Barn- The Thomas house and barns were built in the 1880's.

Kirker Creek- This section of Kirker Creek is one two long creek segments on the property making it a natural wildlife corridor.

Map- Thomas Home Ranch, # 14 (a.k.a. "Thomas North"), is a critical link in the wildlife and recreational corridor between Black Diamond Mine and anew Regional Park at the Concord Naval Weapons Station. Credit- Tom McCormack, Save Mount Diablo.

Tunnel- A large eight foot diameter cattle tunnel under Kirker Pass Road will provide safe access both for people and wildlife.

View- View of the 145 acre Thomas Home Ranch

Wetlands- Wetlands on the property created by Hess Creek a tributary to Kirker Creek

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 100,000 acres in 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

###