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# Coastal Commission Announces Deal to Save Laguna Beach Open Space

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SAN FRANCISCO, Dec. 16, 2010 /PRNewswire-USNewswire/ -- The California Coastal Commission today took final action to permanently protect 75 acres of undeveloped land in the southern section of the City of Laguna Beach, known as the Hobo Aliso Ridge. The settlement with Driftwood Properties, LLC addresses the unpermitted clearance of several acres of rare habitat, as well as the unpermitted placement of several thousand sandbags, gravel/dirt berms, drainage pipes, and other development within an environmentally sensitive area. The habitat that was cleared included one of the last places on earth where the rare and threatened Big-leaved crownbeard plant is found.

The Commission and property owner worked closely together over the past several months to reach this resolution. The property owner has agreed to: 1) remove all unpermitted development from the property; 2) remove non-native plants that have been limiting the growth of native species; 3) dedicate an open space conservation and public access easement over the entire 75 acre property; 4) transfer the protected 75 acres to the City of Laguna Beach; 5) record a right to purchase agreement in favor of the State Coastal Conservancy over an additional 80 acres of land adjacent to the property; and 6) dismiss all litigation against the Commission.

"We commend the property owner for working with our enforcement staff to resolve this long-standing dispute by ensuring permanent protection of these environmentally sensitive lands," said Peter Douglas, Executive Director of the Coastal Commission. "This coastal sage and chaparral habitat found at this site is among the rarest on California's coast. This agreement protects 75 acres with the potential for a total of 155 acres of permanent protection for this valuable habitat," he said.

Coastal sage scrub and chaparral plant communities are a vanishing habitat in Southern California and an iconic feature of the coastal hillsides that back Laguna Beach. This habitat supports exceedingly rare ecosystems. This particular area contains the Big-leaved crownbeard (a plant officially listed by the federal government under the Endangered Species Act as rare and threatened) and also provides habitat for the federally listed California gnatcatcher and the rufous-crowned sparrow, a California Species of Special Concern.

The settlement was finalized by the Commission's issuance today at its hearing in San Francisco of Consent Cease and Desist and Restoration Orders. "This action underscores the benefits of working cooperatively to resolve difficult issues in a mutually acceptable way," says Mr. Douglas. "We worked with both the State Coastal Conservancy and City of Laguna Beach, as well as the property owner, in a collaborative effort to come to this great resolution. Our hope is that this will send a strong message to others that working cooperatively to resolve outstanding Coastal Act violations is good for both the environment and the community, as well as saving time and money in unnecessary litigation," he said.

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