

Gaviota Creek Watershed Restoration Program

FISH AND WILDLIFE IN THE GAVIOTA CREEK WATERSHED

The Gaviota Creek watershed offers a unique opportunity to protect and restore fish and wildlife once found throughout Southern California. Gaviota Creek is largely spring-fed, affording perennial water flows and over-summer habitat which support a number of sensitive species of fish, frogs, and turtles. More than 70% of the watershed is either public land or private ranches with conservation easements. Strong support from Caltrans, State Parks, and adjacent property owners for the Watershed Restoration Plan developed by Coastal Ranches Conservancy in 2015 has resulted in a number of restoration projects moving forward:

KEY PROGRAM ELEMENTS

	<u>Responsibility</u>	<u>Status</u>
Restore 32 miles of Southern Steelhead Habitat	Caltrans	Construction Begins 2027
Improved Wildlife Crossing of Highway 101	Caltrans	Complete Study in 2023
Gaviota Creek Estuary and Floodplain Improvements	State Parks	Under Consideration

PROGRAM BENEFITS

INCREASE BIODIVERSITY

- Restore the local population of endangered Southern California Steelhead
- Improve biodiversity and carbon sequestration by restoring the Gaviota Creek estuary and floodplain

ADAPT TO INCREASED FLOODING AND CLIMATE CHANGE

- Help develop a plan to reduce flooding of Gaviota State Park campground and access road
- Enlarge Gaviota Creek Estuary to increase flood-water capacity and habitat for sensitive species
- Remove unnecessary roads and other structures from the floodplain

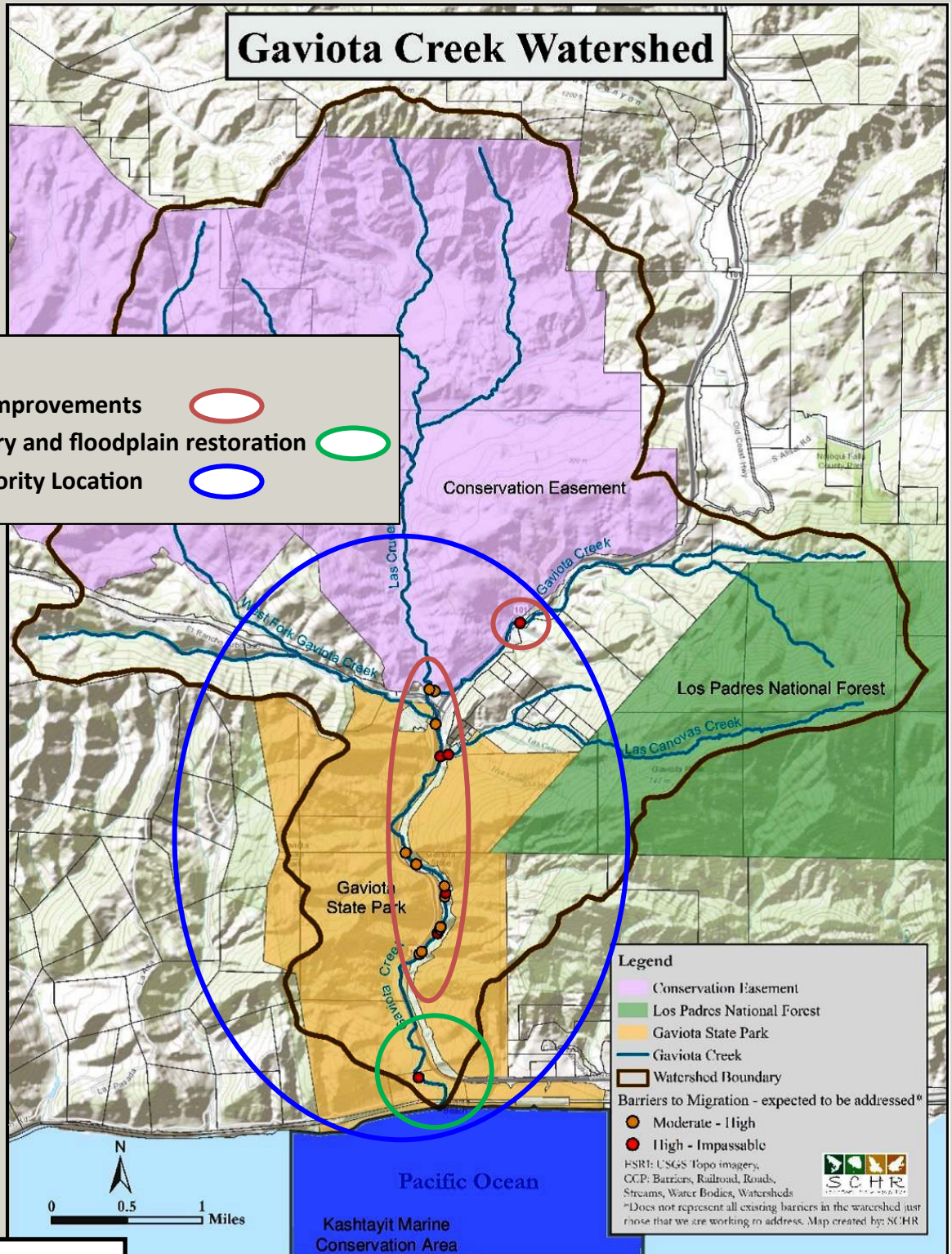
IMPROVE HIGHWAY SAFETY

- Reduce wildlife/vehicle conflicts and deaths of wildlife in the Gaviota Pass, incl. mtn. lions
- Rebuild Highway 101 support structures that are failing next to Gaviota Creek



Big Steelhead in Arroyo Hondo Creek, near Gaviota Creek

GAVIOTA CREEK WATERSHED RESTORATION OVERVIEW



STAKEHOLDERS and SUPPORTERS

- CalTrans
- Ca. State Parks
- Ca. Dept. of Fish and Wildlife
- Ca. Coastal Conservancy
- NOAA/NMFS
- Santa Ynez Band of Chumash
- County of Santa Barbara
- Coastal Ranches Conservancy
- Gaviota Coast Conservancy
- South Coast Habitat Restoration
- Los Padres Forest Watch
- S. B. Channelkeeper
- Environmental Defense Center

GAVIOTA STATE PARK IMPROVEMENTS

The primary watershed restoration projects take place within Gaviota State Park. For many years, the Park has experienced frequent closures due to flooding. Gaviota State Park's last General Plan was done in 1979 and a new plan update that solves the flooding issues and responds to the habitat restoration needs of the Park is way overdue.



Coastal Ranches Conservancy anticipates that Park will expand the estuary and make the stream bank improvements that are required based on permits received in the 1990s. These improvements will help moderate the flooding risk but won't eliminate the risk.

A new planning process would also be an opportunity to determine the best long-term solutions for a State Park that will continue to be at increased flood risk due to sea level rise and climate change. Larger-scale solutions like relocating the Park's access road, moving the campground inland away from the floodplain, and building a new bridge over Gaviota Creek should be considered in the planning process.

Flooding at Gaviota State Park in January of 2023

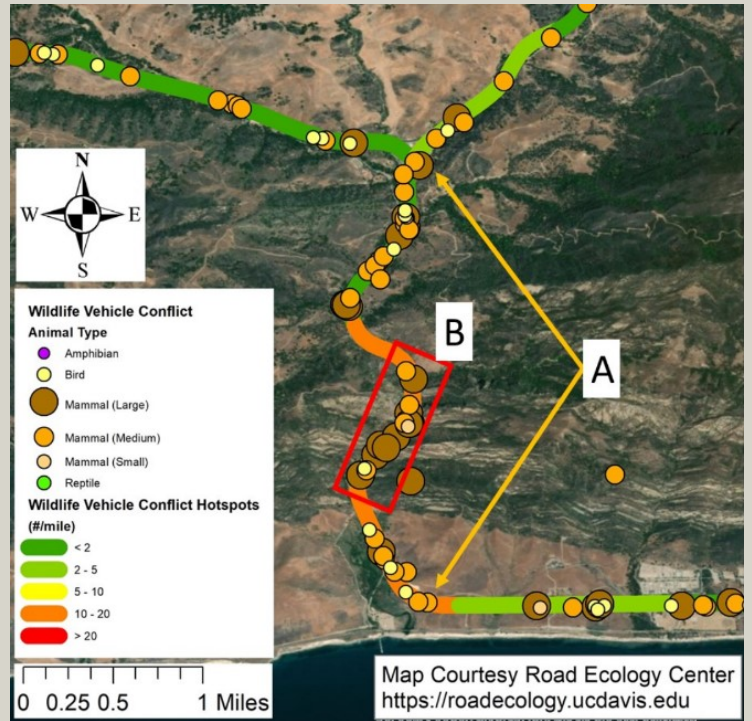


Gaviota Creek's Estuary. The area to be restored is to the left of the parking lot in this photo.

WILDLIFE CROSSING IMPROVEMENTS

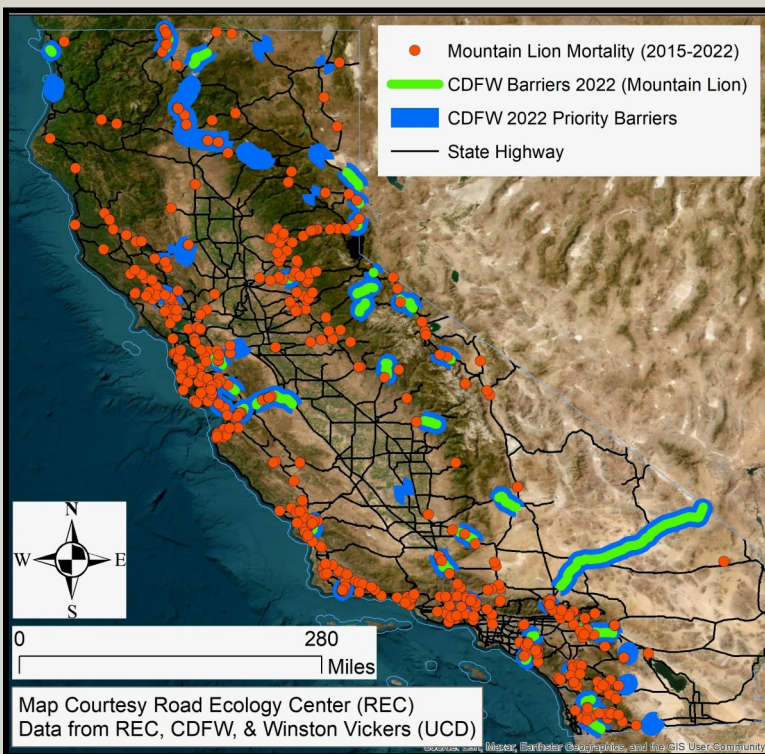
The 20 miles of the Gaviota Coast between Ellwood and Gaviota State Park is excellent wildlife habitat. However, Highway 101 along the coast and inland to Nojoqui Summit acts as a barrier to wildlife movement and causes many wildlife deaths. Large mammals like mountain lions and black bears have big home ranges of 50 to 100 miles and sooner or later these animals must cross Highway 101. Too often, this results in the animal's death and damage to the vehicle and driver that hits them. Studies of roadkill on the five mile stretch of highway around the Gaviota Pass indicate it is among the top 15% of all high-roadkill locations in the entire State. One or two mountain lions are killed crossing the highway here each year; an exceptionally high rate.

In recognition of the importance of this area for wildlife, CDFW has recently added the Gaviota Pass to its State-wide list of 62 high priority locations for wildlife crossing improvements. This is the only location listed in Santa Barbara County.

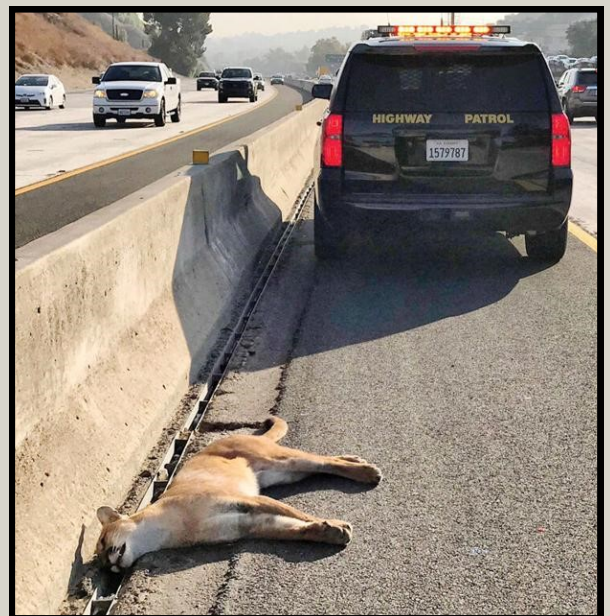


Gaviota Pass Roadkill Locations

Caltrans' 18 month-long wildlife crossing study of the Gaviota Pass region is nearly completed. A final report with recommendations will be issued in 2023. Coastal Ranches Conservancy applauds Caltrans for recognizing the seriousness of the problem.



Mountain Lion Roadkill Locations in California



SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA STEELHEAD RESTORATION

The Gaviota Creek watershed has long been a route to travel from the Santa Ynez Valley to the coast. In the early 1950's Highway 101 construction included the building of 12 check dams on Gaviota Creek to prevent the road from being undermined. These check dams make it virtually impossible for the Creek's steelhead population to move upstream from the ocean and caused the steelhead population to crash by the 1970s. Only small numbers of resident fish remain today.

Southern California Steelhead are a highly endangered species. The blockage of steelhead passage has happened in many places in Southern California and efforts are underway to remedy this on the Santa Ynez, Ventura, and Santa Clara rivers locally. In each of those watersheds, the solutions are extremely difficult to implement: time-consuming, controversial, and expensive.

Gaviota Creek, on the other hand, flows largely across public lands and removal of these barriers is much less expensive than removing a large dam. As a result, the restoration of Gaviota Creek's steelhead can be accomplished with the next 6-8 years at a cost of roughly \$1.5 million per mile, or a total of \$30-40 million. Gaviota Creek offers the most immediate and cost-effective opportunity to restore healthy populations of this species. After years of advocacy by Coastal Ranches Conservancy, Caltrans has recognized the importance of removing the check dams from Gaviota Creek and is currently preparing an EIR for this project, slated to begin in 2027.



A Typical Fish Passage Barrier on Gaviota Creek



Steelhead Rescue Operation by Caltrans & CDFW

Comparison of Southern California Steelhead Restoration Projects

Location	County	Miles of Habitat Potentially Opened	Estimated Cost	Cost per Mile of New Habitat	Years to Completion
Gaviota Creek	Santa Barbara	32 miles	\$30-40 million	\$1.5 million	7-10 yrs.
Matilija Creek	Ventura	17 miles	\$180 million	\$10 million	Unknown
Malibu Creek	Los Angeles	18 miles	\$200 million	\$11 million	Unknown