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600-Acre Carr Ranch to Become Public Open Space

By Sophie Braccini



The southwest view over Carr Ranch from Rocky Ridge above Saint Mary's College shows the Sanders Ranch neighborhood, center, and the Moraga Country Club on the right. Photo Andy Scheck

permanently protect high quality Bay Area drinking water at its source. The purer the source, the better the water."

The land's run-offs drain into the Upper San Leandro and San Pablo reservoirs.

But it's not just water that the JMLT is enamored with. Eukel also talks about the beauty of the property, its miles of pristine land, its amazing views and serene beauty, and about the abundant wildlife and native plants that are found on Carr Ranch. "Carr Ranch is also home to golden eagles, mountain lions, American badgers, western pond turtles and many other species essential to our ecosystem," he adds. "The Carr family has done an excellent job managing it for all these years." The land will be accessible to the public, once the deal is completed, through existing and future trails that will run from Bollinger Canyon to the Upper San Leandro Reservoir and beyond.

Carr Ranch is accessible from Rancho Laguna Park in Moraga, off Camino Pablo at the edge of town. The Carrs, who were not available for comment, were one of the original families who developed the city as cattle ranchers, along with the Sanders, Baitx, and Trelut families.

"We have been in touch with (the Carr family) for six to seven years," explains Eukel. This type of prolonged discussion is not unusual for the land trust. As Eukel explains it, their role is not to dispute the land or fight developers. The land trust reaches out to property owners and offers them 100 percent of the appraised value of their land, while committing to maintaining it in perpetuity.

Since its creation 25 years ago, the land trust has been able to raise the funds necessary to purchase properties when an opportunity presents itself. At one time, a developer in the Alhambra Valley created a green belt that needed to be preserved, and the land trust was funded to do just that.

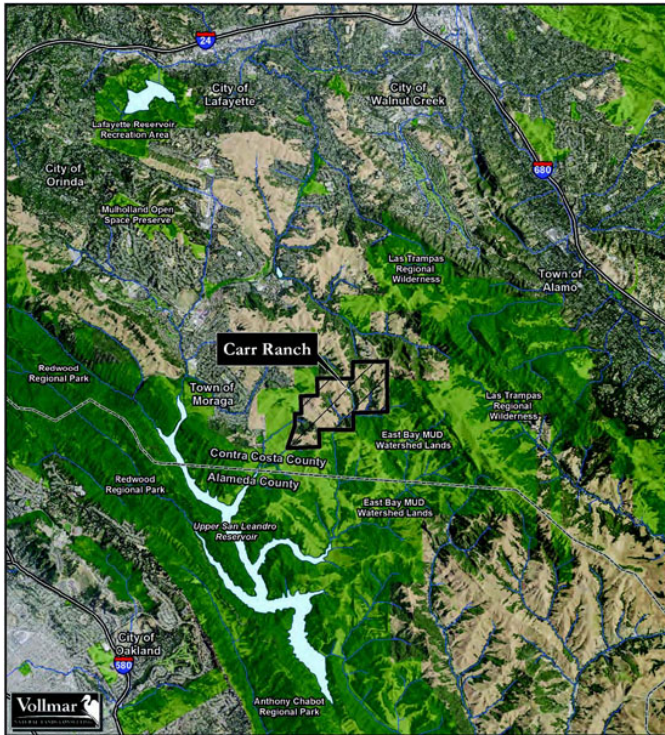
Funds come to the nonprofit through private donations and participation by public agencies interested in preserving open space in Contra Costa County. When the trust purchased the Acalanes Ridge in 2011, it was through a partnership with the cities of Lafayette and Walnut Creek, and the East Bay Regional Park District.

For almost 100 years, the 600 acres of rolling hills and spectacular views on unincorporated land at the southern border of Moraga, including grazing land, ponds, creeks and woods that extend to the San Francisco Bay, has been managed by the Carr family. After years of discussion, the family has made the decision to enter into a contractual relationship with the John Muir Land Trust (JMLT), formerly the Muir Heritage Land Trust, a nonprofit organization that manages expanses of open space in perpetuity throughout Contra Costa County.

JMLT, which owns the Acalanes Ridge, the Bodfish Preserve in Orinda, and hundreds of acres of open space in Martinez, the Alhambra Valley, Franklin Ridge and the Pacheco Marsh, launched a campaign to raise the \$7 million needed to purchase Carr Ranch with the goal to close escrow by July 2016.

"Our first purpose for this land is to protect the watershed," explains Linus Eukel, the executive director of JMLT. "John Muir Land Trust's acquisition of Carr Ranch is a one-time opportunity to

Once the land is purchased, the trust develops it for passive recreation, creating a network of trails for hikers, bicyclists and horseback riders that will sensibly protect the natural habitat. JMLT plans to offer star gazing, bird watching, and nature walks in the future. For more information on the JMLT, visit www.jmlt.org.



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