

Developers, nonprofit save habitat

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By [Melissa Flores](#)

206 acres containing endangered species preserved in South San Jose area

In an era when talk-show hosts and partisans profit from divisiveness, a South Bay coalition is holding class on what collaboration is all about.

A new agreement between the Silicon Valley Land Conservancy and private developers has set aside 206 acres of critical habitat for threatened species in southern San Jose. The agreement, announced July 25, shows how developers and nonprofits can work together to preserve open space.

The Silicon Valley Land Conservancy, a nonprofit environmental group, brokered the deal with Lennar Homes and KB Homes, the builders of a 213-home community under construction south of the Hwy. 85 and Hwy. 101 interchange in south San Jose. The preserve is adjacent to the development along the Basking Ridge.

"As cities continue to grow into rural lands, it is necessary for all of us to work together to protect threatened critters," said Craig Edgerton, the executive director of the Silicon Valley Land Conservancy. "This is another example of how the Land Conservancy has continued to partner with government, business and other environmental organizations to do what's right."

Agreements to set aside land by developers are becoming more common, Edgerton said, especially in lands where endangered species have been found. One of the requirements for developing in the area included setting aside land for the critical habitat.

"The U.S. Fish and Wildlife services also stepped in," Edgerton said.

Metcalf Partners, a partnership between Lennar Homes and KB Home, own the 206 acres, but SVLC will hold a conservation easement that protects the land from future development.

"In almost every new home community we build, KB Home seeks to create greenbelts in the open spaces we preserve," said Drew Kusnick, KB Home South Bay division president. "This partnership is a natural extension of our efforts to help preserve our natural environment across California and the nation."

SVLC plans to restore the preserve to permanent habitat for the California Red Legged Frog and the California Tiger Salamander. The frog has been listed as a federally threatened species since 1996, when environmental factors and loss of habitat brought it close to extinction. The tiger salamander is also listed as a federally threatened species. Disruption of its habitat from development has been the main cause of its decline. The salamander needs seasonal ponds for breeding, upland grasses and mammal burrows to survive.

As they move forward with the restoration, SVLC will restore existing wetlands at Basking Ridge and create new ones near upland grasses for additional habitat.

The conservancy was founded in 1998 and currently manages or owns nine properties. They oversee nearly 1,600 acres of protected land. The mission of the nonprofit is to preserve critical habitat for endangered or threatened species, preserve agriculture and to provide open space in Silicon Valley.

"We have established a reputation of cooperation to ensure that critical habitat is preserved," said Don Gralnek, board president of the Land Conservancy.

As the Coyote Valley Planning Task Force moves forward with plans to develop the region south of San Jose to Morgan Hill, Edgerton said the SVLC will stay involved in the planning.

"The land conservancy is working very closely with the task force on Coyote Valley," he said. "The real part that is difficult is the greenbelt, the southern part of Coyote."

Without endangered species, preserving the land may be a harder sell to developers.