

Coastline

GAVIOTA COAST CONSERVANCY NEWSLETTER

FALL / WINTER 2021



Photo: Ray Ford

Alisal Fire on the Gaviota Coast

BY GUNER TAUTRIM

My first view of the fire was on Monday October 11 at 2:13 PM. The first thing to assess is where it's coming from. It seemed that it was on the backside of the Santa Ynez range somewhere between Tajiguas and Baron Canyon. We've yet to find out where the source was but I believe it was Alisal Ranch that reported the fire first and therefore it got the name the Alisal fire. The day had extremely strong winds so even though it was far away I knew that we were down wind and had the potential to be in harm's way.

What some might not realize is that the night before, hundreds of miles away, an event happened that would make all the difference to us. A winter storm blew through the Sierra Nevadas and dumped snow, all within the perimeter of the Sequoia fire. This massive fire had been going on for some time and suddenly snowfall slowed it in its tracks. First responders woke up Monday morning and many were relieved of duty.

Later that afternoon when the Alisal fire broke out many of those resources from all over the western United States were

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Planning Commission Denies ExxonMobil Trucking Proposal

The Santa Barbara County Planning Commission voted on November 3, 2021 to deny ExxonMobil's proposal to transport oil by tanker trucks along the Gaviota Coast that would allow them to restart three drilling platforms. These three offshore platforms near Santa Barbara were shut down in 2015 after the Plains All American Pipeline ruptured and spilled thousands of gallons of oil along the California coast. ExxonMobil's plan called for up to 70 oil-filled truck trips per day on coastal Highway 101 and hazardous Route 166, 24 hours a day.

The revised final environmental document considered by commission members concluded, in the event of an oil spill from a tanker truck, there would be significant, unavoidable impacts on wildlife and cultural resources. Gaviota Coast Conservancy was one of 35 community and conservation organizations, who urged Commissioners to reject the project.

The organizations cited the project's threat of additional offshore oil spills, adding to climate change problems through high levels of greenhouse gas emissions, and creating hazards for motorists and communities with dangerous oil tanker truck crashes.



The Alisal Fire boundary. Guner Tautrim is a GCC Board member, Orella Ranch location indicated by the arrow.

OPPORTUNITIES FOR RESTORATION AND CONSERVATION ABOUND

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Monday, approaching Refugio from the north

diverted our way. Helicopters and planes, that would normally take 2 to 3 days to get here, were already in California and in route. Unfortunately, the winds were so strong on Monday that much of the fire suppressing aircraft were unable to fly. Evacuation orders were in place by early afternoon Monday and I went to help friends evacuate at Arroyo Quemada and Tajiguas. To my surprise the fire had already made its way down to the freeway and was threatening the communities I was helping evacuate. By the time everyone was out, the fire had jumped the freeway almost exactly where the Refugio oil spill crossed the freeway.



View from my driveway on Monday

Once back home we began our fire preparation rituals pulling out fire hose, cleaning any gutters, raking up any dead matter from under the trees around the structures etc. That night the winds were calm and we managed to get some sleep.

Tuesday morning, we woke early and decided how best to use our time. A quick quad ride up to the back of the canyon gave me a great view of the action

going down in Refugio. At that time (9am Tuesday) the fire was engulfing the west side of Refugio - from the ridge all the way to the beach. Knowing that it would likely jump to the east side and come down Venadito canyon, I raced home and helped with the evacuation items. With the cars packed and parked on the frontage road we decided to shelter in place and protect our homestead. I wouldn't suggest disobeying evacuation orders but, in our circumstance, we live so close to the ocean that I have never feared for our lives fighting a wildfire (remember we just went through this some years ago on the Sherpa Fire).

This fire was different than the Sherpa in that it was approaching us on two sides.

One of the fronts was coming down Venadito Canyon to our west and one was coming down Las Flores Canyon to the north and east. Not knowing which one would reach us first was unnerving. Soon time would tell and the eastern fire line was obviously winning the race. Since our neighbor to the east has done very little to graze or do any fire mitigation the fire burned intensely and moved quickly on that property. At 4:15 PM the fire was eminent and that's the time to call 911. No fire engines were in sight at that time.

We learned on the Sherpa fire that a call in to 911 must be done at the right time. Too early and the fire department will show up and then leave because you are not eminently threatened. Too late and, well, you're too late. Dispatch at 911 asked how close is the fire? And my response was "15 to 20 minutes from reaching our structures." Within 15 minutes we had all hands on deck. Our fire hoses were wide open fighting back the flames that were quickly approaching. Within 20 minutes the first fire engine arrived. Knowing our terrain better than anyone, we knew exactly what needed to be done. The additional help from the

fire engine, and soon after a second one, was comforting insurance. Once the fire engines arrive, they are assigned to your location until the threat is over. That means they spent the whole night which was a great comfort. The condition when the fire arrived was somewhat favorable - winds weren't too crazy and the relative humidity was rising.

Our success can be summarized in three words: preparation, practice and commitment. I'd like to thank the helping hands that were committed to that success. My dad Mark, Sequoia and Kai my sons, Heidi, my wife, Jack, Jenya, Tristin, Zoe and Cole. A good team makes all the difference.



Fire approaching Orella Ranch on Tuesday 4 pm

Postscript - The rain storm that arrived close on the heels of this burn came down nice and slow. We received 1.5" and the top of Refugio received just over 3". From what I have heard there was no damage caused by this storm event.



Wednesday, Refugio Road "switchbacks"

Gaviota Coast

BY JEFF JOHNSON

I have photographed many oceans, waves and beaches and the heights of many mountains. Returning home to Santa Barbara, I am always refreshed by our ocean, beaches and mountains. To feel the sand between my toes at the beach. To be renewed by the scent of the chaparral. To hear the chatter of the soaring hawks.

It is not accidental that our homeland shelters us with such grace and that the Gaviota Coast continues to host the flora and fauna of our past while supporting a ranching community of the future.

It has taken the work and dedication of multi-generations of stewards and conservationists to maintain the rural character of the Coast. "Standing on the shoulders of giants", the Conservancy – with our support – will continue this work.



Jeff Johnson is a longtime resident of Santa Barbara. Jeff is a freelance photographer, surfer, climber, director, writer,

brand ambassador and film maker, receiving international attention for his 2010 film, 180° South.

His stories and photographs have appeared in *The Wall Street Journal*, *The Surfer's Journal*, *Alpinist*, *Surfer magazine*, *Climbing magazine*, and *Outside magazine*.

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Photo: Shaw Leonard

GCC Vision for the Gaviota Coast

Conservation efforts are accelerating on the Gaviota Coast.

BY PHIL MCKENNA

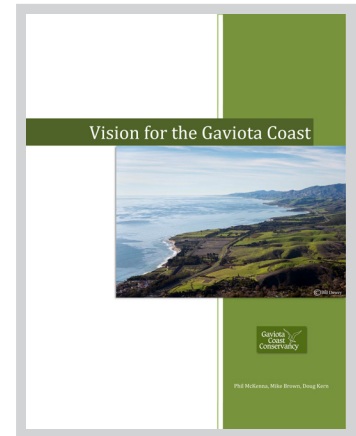
The Gaviota Coast is the largest, intact example of Southern California's Mediterranean coastline. The Gaviota Coast is among the top four areas in the United States with the greatest number of endangered species. The Gaviota Coast is a region of state, national and global and cultural significance.

While it is literally true that every location is unique, some are more so than others. GCC created its "Vision for the Gaviota Coast" and this new document highlights some of the areas the Gaviota Coast Conservancy has identified as being "...more so than others".

The Gaviota Coast Conservancy is proposing a number of projects on the Gaviota Coast that help to restore environmental integrity, provide climate change benefits, revitalize the agricultural economy, create new jobs, provide appropriate public recreation. We wish to acknowledge and honor the Indigenous communities in this region and recognize that the Gaviota Coast is part of the homeland of the Chumash people.

This document offers an inventory of exceptional projects and properties. This inventory is not exhaustive of the opportunities that present themselves, but is representative of the potential that is present. There is a theme running through

many of the projects: restoration and recreation. Humans are a part of nature, but we have become overbearing. Restoration of the natural landscape helps to rebalance our relationship with nature; adding to rather than taking from. Recreation that is respectful of our environment will help to maintain our connectivity to the land, air, and water that sustains us and to the plants and animals that cohabitate with us.



We encourage you to download your copy and join us in this vision for conserving this precious coastal area. Download the GCC Vision document at https://www.gaviotacoastconservancy.org/Vision_Document

**Your Assistance is
Urgently Needed and
Appreciated!**

Donate

to the

**Gaviota Coast
Conservancy!**

**Protecting the Gaviota Coast
Since 1996**

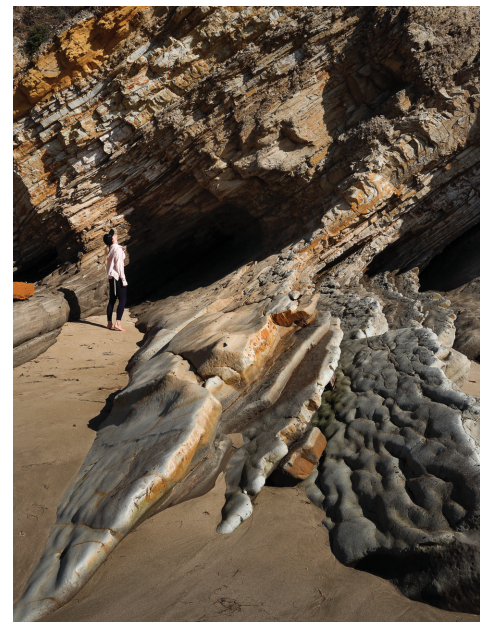


Photo: Sally Berry

Opportunities

Finding permanent protection for coastal lands.

BY DOUG KERN

Gaviota Coast Conservancy is seeking permanent protection for critical properties along the Gaviota Coast. We do this work in close cooperation with other environmental organizations and government agencies in the greater Santa Barbara area.

Beginning in far western Gaviota Coast is Vandenberg Space Force Base and the site of many endangered species and precious habitat. As a military base, it has significant protection from human disturbance. On occasion though, there are proposals for Vandenberg that would heavily impact special habitat areas, and not be associated with the Vandenberg mission, such as the proposal last year for five golf courses with lodges and clubhouses that remains on the Space Force books. GCC is on watch to oppose this entirely unnecessary and off-mission development.



Photo: Shaw Leonard

To the east is the Dangermond Preserve. This amazing 24,000 acres has significant protection by The Nature Conservancy, which is currently taking inventory of the magnificent natural and

cultural resources there, planning for limited and managed access in the future.

Continuing to the east is 14,400 acres of Hollister Ranch, and as many of you know, GCC is working very closely with agencies and the landowners to produce a landmark agreement for limited, managed public access that is respectful of private property and natural and cultural resources.

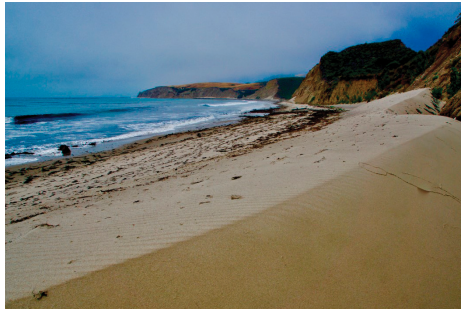


Photo: Tamlor Chase

Between Gaviota State Park and Isla Vista the Gaviota Coast shows off some of its most iconic and beautiful scenery. Within this area are numerous private properties that are on the market. GCC is working with our partners and willing landowners to make these acquisitions



Photo: Shaw Leonard

to preserve the environmental integrity, rural character of the Coast and make it accessible in a limited, managed way so that it stays protected for future generations.

These are expensive properties and will need the support of everyone who wants to leave a legacy of protecting the Gaviota Coast.

There are many conservation opportunities available and now is a time where we have willing sellers and funding available through private philanthropy and the California State 30x30 initiative.

Please contact me if you have any questions or would like to become involved in this process.

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Photo: David Austin

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Coming Events

11/29 Beach Hike
12/31 New Year's Eve hike

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