

Ford Automaker's \$1.4 million gift to be used for land acquisition at lagoon

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The Ford Motor Co. announced today that it will donate \$1.4 million to help expand the San Elijo Lagoon Ecological Reserve.

The gift from Ford "really validates how important the lagoon really is," said Greg Dennis, a conservancy board member. "Of all the bird species known to occur in the U.S., nearly 40 percent have been spotted in the reserve."

Perhaps the most exciting news of 2000 involved the receipt of a \$1.4 million grant from the Ford Motor Company. County Supervisor Pam Slater was largely responsible for bringing together the Conservancy, the Ford Motor Company, and the San Diego Environmental Foundation, in a project to fund the acquisition of land for conservation purposes. The Conservancy was able to quickly exercise the grant and acquired two separate parcels totaling 33 acres of prime riparian wetlands on the northeast boundary of the reserve that puts ecologically precious habitat under permanent protection. This addition to the reserve is named the Ford Wildlife Habitat Preserve, in recognition of the source and inspiration for this significant contribution.

The acquisition provides critical wildlife habitat for mule deer, coyotes and endangered bird species such as Belding's Savannah Sparrow, Least Bell's Vireo, and the Light-footed Clapper Rail.

Kevin Johnson, acting conservancy president at the time, worked tirelessly on acquisition of the property, which was purchased for an undisclosed amount using a portion of a \$1.4 million grant from Ford Motor Company. "By adding critical buffer habitat areas and eliminating negative uses on the fringes of the lagoon, we'll be able to clean up the water quality and expand habitat for endangered species," said Doug Gibson, executive director of the Conservancy.