



Clockwise from top left: When the PCT is rerouted it will snake along Blue Ridge (elevation 5,400 to 6,000 feet) in the Tehachapi Mountains for approximately 12 miles. Here we see a view from Blue Ridge, looking northeast toward 5,700-foot peaks. • A view from the Angeles National Forest looking north at Blue Ridge in the distance. • Before ascending to Blue Ridge, the PCT reroute will likely lead through Sycamore Canyon. The canyon's oak woodlands and grass savannah are pictured here. • Liz LaPorta of the Forest Service TEAMS Enterprise illustrates the size of some of the oaks preserved on Tejon Ranch. • Grasses sway in the breeze in Sycamore Canyon.



## Trail Protection Update:

# NEW TEJON RANCH PRESERVE TO INCLUDE PCT RELOCATION

ropping north from Liebre Mountain in Southern California (Section F) the Pacific Crest Trail (PCT) strikes north across the heart of the Antelope Valley, the western arm of the infamous Mojave Desert. The route is hot, waterless, and thoroughly un-crest-like. In fact, this section of trail is so forbidding that often only those planning to hike or ride each of the PCT's miles attempt it, and many of them take an alternate route or traverse the desert in the coolness of the night.

When Congress designated the **Pacific Crest National Scenic Trail** in 1968, its intent had been for the trail to ascend into the western Tehachapi Mountains, the start of the Sierran chain, and to follow their ridges northeast along a route with all the characteristics necessary for a "crest trail," including mountain vistas, cool black oak and pine forests, and numerous springs. But there wasn't an unbroken corridor of public land available for trail building. Tejon Ranch (covering 270,000 acres 60 miles north of Los Angeles) sat atop the Tehachapi Mountains, exactly where trail planners envisioned that the PCT should go. And so, the trail was routed out of the mountains, through a small portion of Tejon Ranch property, along its fence lines and dirt roads, and down to the desert floor.

Now, 37 years later, the original vision for the PCT in this area is on the way to becoming reality. This past May, environmental and conservation leaders joined **Tejon Ranch Company** and the

**Trust for Public Land** in unveiling the plans for a 100,000-acre Tejon Ranch Preserve. After nearly two years of scientific study designed to identify the best of the natural resources on the ranch, the Preserve has been mapped out to protect a pristine, unique, and historic landscape equal to the size of Yosemite Valley. Included in the Preserve's plans is a long-hoped for realignment of the PCT surrounded by a significant corridor of public lands that will protect the PCT experience for generations to come.

"We are excited that the PCT will have a secure and permanent corridor as part of the Tejon Ranch Preserve," says **Liz Bergeron**, the **Pacific Crest Trail Association's** (PCTA) Executive Director. "This reroute will allow public access to the wonderful Tehachapi mountain country and a much improved PCT user experience."

"Certainly the area where the Tejon Ranch representatives have expressed a willingness for the trail to traverse their lands is a vast improvement over the existing trail location," says **Mike Dawson**, the PCTA's Trail Operations Director. The proposed new route will traverse the Tejon Ranch Preserve for approximately 35 miles, passing through grass savannah, under widely-reaching oak trees, and along ridgelines, offering expansive views of the Antelope Valley and beyond. "It's a landscape worthy of a national scenic trail," says Dawson, "and represents significant progress in our efforts to protect and preserve the PCT. In fact, by protecting these 35 miles of trail we will be protecting a tenth of the trail's currently vulnerable mileage."



Above: Mike McFadin, Forest Service TEAMS Enterprise, and Mike Dawson, PCTA Trail Operations Director, consult over maps as they work on the optimal trail location review for the PCT on Tejon Ranch. All photos these pages by Liz LaPorta.

In the coming months an appraisal process will be used to determine the value of the land and then funding to purchase it will be sought. Tejon Ranch and the Trust for Public Land (a national conservation organization dedicated to conserving land as parks and other resources for the public) have signed an agreement to pursue the purchase of the preserve land by a public agency or non-profit organization, using a fee structure or through conservation easements. For the PCTA, the next steps include continuing to work with the **U.S. Forest Service** and Tejon Ranch to refine the trail location and boundaries for the trail corridor. Throughout this process, says Mike Dawson, the personnel at Tejon Ranch have been, and continue to be, very helpful in providing the PCTA and its Forest Service partners (specifically **Liz LaPorta** and **Mike McFadin** of the Forest Service **TEAMS Enterprise**) the necessary access and tools for on-the-ground fieldwork and route enhancement.

“The new trail location will not be open for several years and will require a good deal of new trail construction,” says Mike Dawson. “But it’s my hope that it will be primarily built by volunteers. It will certainly be a compelling project for all those involved.”

