

Rail authority to buy 5,000 acres for mitigation

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Property along the Kings River is among some 5,000 acres that the state's rail project authority plans to purchase of land mitigation purposes. The California High Speed Rail Authority plans to buy around 5,000 acres in the Central Valley as partial mitigation for ecologically sensitive habitat it will be buying in Fresno, Kings, Tulare and Kern counties.

Expected to cost \$54 million, the mitigation covers the loss and modification of biological habitat caused by construction and operation of the proposed bullet train project.

In this case, the mitigation is for removal of natural habitat including wetlands of the state Allensworth Ecological Reserve area where the train line will be passing through southwest Tulare County between Fresno and Bakersfield.

Some land will be far from the proposed route and will provide an opportunity for both preservation and enhancement of native habitat still left in the greater Tulare Lake area and to the north. The old lakebed was once the largest body of water west of the Mississippi, long since drained for agriculture.

The mitigation is required under federal law.

Included in the list approved this week by the rail board is land not far from Goshen owned by the Fagundes family, the Burr Ranch in Kings County, the Buena Vista Dairy in Kern County, the Yang property near Allensworth in Tulare County, the Davis property in Kern County and the Staffel Family Trust Property in Kings County.

The 405-acre Fagundes Ranch is 12 miles north of Visalia on Cross Creek where the acquisition will preserve 8.7

acres of vernal pool fairy shrimp habitat as well land used by Swainson's hawk, the Western burrowing owl and the San Joaquin kit fox.

Also included is Peck island, some 414 acres in Fresno County between Highway 180 and East Annadale Avenue.

Another is River Ranch along the Kings River at some 362 acres. Here the authority hopes to reestablish 182 acres of oak woodland.

Lastly, the list includes 2,800 acres of land at Atwell Island where a potential vernal pool and alkali rain pool reestablishment "could be attempted," says the report.

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