



Photographer Frans Lanting documented environmental degradation at the Santa Cruz Biotechnology site with these images and others that accompanied a report for the group Friends of the North Coast. In the photo above, goats are grazing illegally along a stream, according to the report, where they destroyed vegetation that controlled runoff and killed the willow tree in the center. The goats have browsed the native vegetation all across the site, causing considerable damage.

Frans Lanting photos/Special to the Sentinel

# The land rejoices

Goat Ranch

## Goat herd spoiled a precious piece of county's North Coast

By FRANS LANTING

The North Coast of Santa Cruz County is a world-class environment. It is the reason I came here from Holland 20 years ago, and it is an important reason why I stayed.

As a nature photographer and conservationist, I travel extensively around the world and I have worked in many of the Earth's outstanding ecosystems. Yet every time my wife and partner, Christine Eckstrom, and I return from an assignment abroad to our home on the North Coast, we realize that the Monterey Bay region is equal to many of the celebrated natural wonders on Earth.

Recently, the Nature Conservancy declared that the Central Coast of California is one of the most important hot spots of biodiversity in all of North America, an affirmation that our natural resources are as rich and unique as we all think they are.

The North Coast today owes its existence to many friends who have assured its protection. Without their efforts, our coast might look like parts of Southern California, with a nuclear power plant in Davenport, oil rigs offshore, and a 10,000-home subdivision on Wilder Ranch State Park.

Instead we have a national marine sanctuary in our back yard, and a stretch of parklands and public beaches that has made our county's North Coast a haven for beachgoers, surfers, bike-riders, equestrians, and hikers from all over the Bay Area and beyond. The recent acquisition of the spectacular Coast Dairies and Lands property for a future park adds a new treasure to the landscape.

These developments strengthen the unique resource base of Santa Cruz County, whose appeal depends on clean water, fresh air, and natural beauty.

From this environmental perspective, Santa Cruz Biotechnology's goat herd on the North Coast was an anomaly from the start. Its location on a narrow piece of land between Wilder Ranch State Park and Coast Dairies ensured maximum visibility from surrounding parklands, making it a public eyesore. The animals themselves — more than 1,600 goats — created huge



Above, contaminated storm water runs through the streets and yards in the Coast Road neighborhood downhill from the goat herd, causing county officials to post warning signs. At left is fencing on the property that was replaced with a six foot



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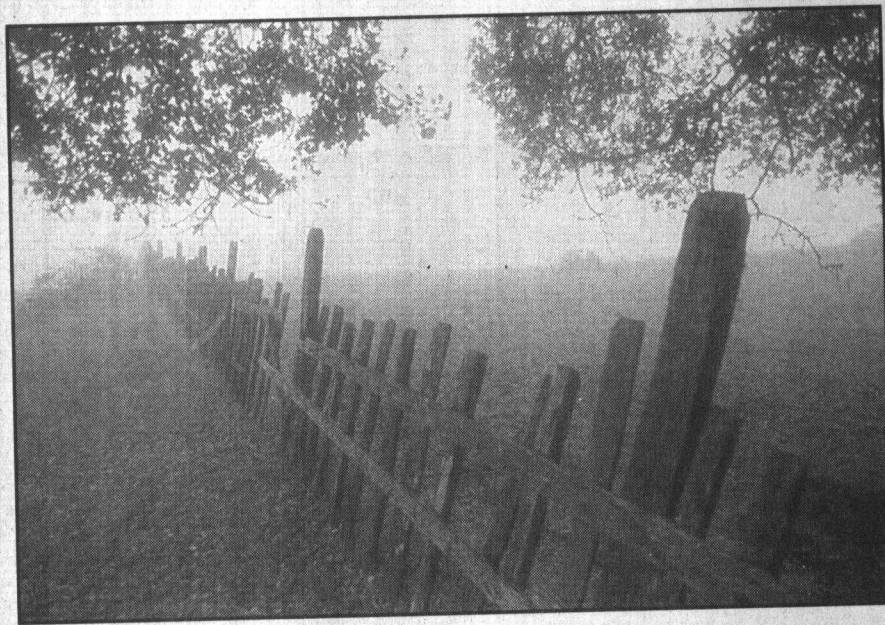
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These problems would have become clear years ago if an environmental impact report had been done first, as is required by law, but such a report was never done. Instead, Santa Cruz County struggled for four years to come to grips with Santa Cruz Biotechnology's operation, which was allowed to commence without environmental review or appropriate permits.

The neighbors struggled too. Some decided to leave — among them, an organic strawberry farmer who feared for the contamination of his produce and a nearby goat farmer concerned for the health of her animals. Others decided to stand up and bear public witness.

Christine and I are among those neighbors. We live on a small piece of land next to Santa Cruz Biotechnology's livestock facility, and during the past four years we witnessed a steady degradation of their land. We saw native habitats disappear. Coastal prairie was devoured by goats, the thin soils laid bare. The land smells bad, and so does the water that runs from the property to Wilder Ranch and through neighborhoods downstream. The property's formidable perimeter



Above, contaminated storm water runs through the streets and yards in the Coast Road neighborhood downhill from the goat herd, causing county officials to post warning signs. At left is fencing on the property that was replaced with a six-foot wire-mesh enclosure. Before the new fence was built, wildlife could easily cross from the publicly owned Coast Dairies land to Wilder Ranch State Park.

fence, several miles long, has literally and symbolically disconnected it from the rest of the North Coast.

Neighbors are not just those who live nearby. Everyone who uses and cares about the North Coast is a neighbor. Last week, after hearing the news that Santa Cruz Biotechnology has decided to comply with the state Coastal Commission's order to cease their operation and remove their goats, Christine and I drove down our road and stopped at a bend overlooking the bay. We saw something we had never seen as long as we have

lived here. Less than a mile offshore, not far from the mouth of a creek that runs off Santa Cruz Biotechnology's property, a pod of humpback whales breached and cavorted for half an hour. We rejoice for them too.

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*North Coast resident Frans Lanting is an internationally known photographer and conservationist. He has published several books on wildlife around the world, and his work has been published on an ongoing basis by the National Geographic Society.*