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News-Press photo by LEN WOOD

Santa Rosa Island's Vail and Vickers ranch, on the side facing the mainland, has the island's only functional pier.

Channel Islands park growing

Santa Rosa Island to join system

By Hillary Hauser
News-Press Staff Writer

Santa Rosa Island will officially be welcomed Monday into the Channel Islands National Park — now that it's been bought seven years after passage of the law that targeted it for the park.

U.S. Sen. Pete Wilson, Reps. Robert J. Lagomarsino and Elton Gallegly and the island owners are scheduled to take part in a formal announcement of the island's acquisition during a 9 a.m. ceremony Monday at the Channel Islands National Park Headquarters in Ventura.

In a news release, Wilson declared: "The Channel Islands National Park is unique in the nation's park system, and the acquisition of Santa Rosa Island is a great step forward in preserving these beautiful islands

and enhancing the public's enjoyment of them."

While the law establishing the park off the Ventura and Santa Barbara counties' coast included Santa Rosa Island, the actual purchase was delayed for years by negotiations and court suits.

The federal government's purchase of Santa Rosa from the Vail and Vickers families is the culmination of six years of haggling between the island owners and the National Park Service. The sale had a rocky road since 1980, when then-President Jimmy Carter signed a bill creating the Channel Islands National Park.

The legislation, authored by Lagomarsino, provided for acquiring private property within the park boundaries — including Santa Rosa and the east end of Santa Cruz Island — but the sale of both properties was

temporarily blocked by a Chumash Indian lawsuit.

In 1984, Chunie Frances Herrera filed suit in the U.S. District Court in Los Angeles alleging that Santa Rosa and Santa Cruz were never transferred to the state in the Treaty of Guadalupe Hildago of 1848. In April 1986, a federal appeals court ruled that the Indians lost their chance to claim the land 133 years ago, when they failed to present a claim to a U.S. commission created after the Mexican War.

The case was taken to the U.S. Supreme Court, but on Dec. 3, 1986, Herrera was denied a hearing. When the case was not reappealed, the way was cleared for the Santa Rosa Island sale.

Sale of the private land on Santa Cruz still is pending. Congress has yet to allocate the needed funds.