

SONOMA LAND TRUST  
STRATEGIC PLAN

2016 –  
2020



*To protect the land forever...*





S O N O M A C O U N T Y

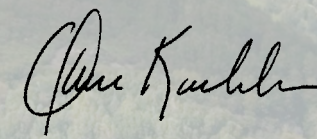
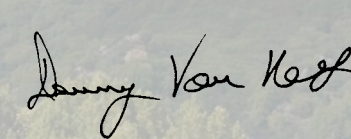
Dear Friends,

Sonoma Land Trust, founded in 1976, celebrates its 40th anniversary in 2016. We've accomplished a lot since 1976, engaging our community in protecting 81 properties totaling 48,280 acres. As we celebrate our accomplishments, we are, nevertheless, keenly aware of the complex challenges facing land protection and stewardship. Our open landscapes are threatened by development and the damaging effects of climate change — which we are already experiencing in the form of an historic drought, declining water resources and devastating wildfires.

However, every challenge also presents an opportunity. With this five-year strategic plan, we deepen our commitment to protecting and stewarding the beautiful natural, agricultural and open landscapes of Sonoma County. We pledge to preserve and enhance the resilience of our ecosystems in the face of a changing climate and to safeguard our land and water systems. We set our intention to share our love of the land with a wider number of people who call Sonoma County home by building relationships with new partners and communities. And we identify opportunities to broaden the scope of our large-scale conservation efforts, including within the massive Russian River Watershed and the county's bountiful agricultural lands.

Preparing this plan was a formidable but invigorating undertaking involving active collaboration between board, staff and partners. A select committee of board and staff members thoughtfully researched and discussed the challenges and opportunities for land protection and stewardship in our county. We reached out to our partners for their perspectives and insights. With the help of a consultant, we convened our full board and staff for a strategic planning retreat to identify our desired strategic directions and our long-range vision of success. This strategic plan is the end result of this comprehensive and thorough process.

Our 2016–2020 Strategic Plan is a call to action. With the help of our loyal supporters and partners, we look forward to celebrating the completion of its initiatives over the next five years.



Denny Van Ness  
Chair, Board of Directors

Dave Koehler  
Executive Director



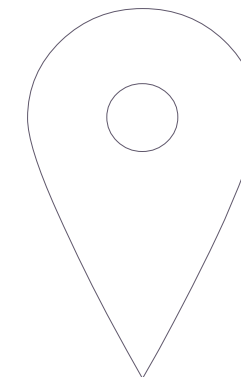
# Mission



Sonoma Land Trust protects the scenic, natural, agricultural and open landscapes of Sonoma County for the benefit of the community and future generations by:

- \* Developing long-term land protection strategies;
- \* Promoting private and public funding for land conservation;
- \* Acquiring land and conservation easements;
- \* Practicing stewardship, including the restoration of conservation properties; and
- \* Promoting a sense of place and a land ethic through activities, education and outreach.

# Vision



*Our long-range vision of success sets our sights on a 20-year horizon for achievement. Our strategic plan 2016–2020 describes the work we hope to accomplish over a five-year incremental period toward realization of this vision.*

Our vision for Sonoma County focuses on the land, waterways and viewsheds, but also extends to our larger community. We envision an expanse of large, connected natural areas under permanent protection. Our watersheds will be healthy and our streams and rivers will support robust populations of local fish and wildlife. Sonoma County's rugged and wild coast, cathedral redwood groves, critical wildlife corridors, and iconic landscapes and waterways will be protected and stewarded by a diverse coalition of nonprofits, public agencies and private landowners. This connected network of protected lands will support viable, recovered populations of our most at-risk species. Plants and animals will have room to move and the habitat refuges they need to adapt to changing climatic conditions.

The well-being of our communities is intrinsically linked to the health of our lands. Sonoma County's rural character will be preserved with open space as the connective tissue between our towns and cities. Our working farms and ranches — the backbone of our agricultural heritage and local economy — will be vibrant and prosperous, providing our commu-

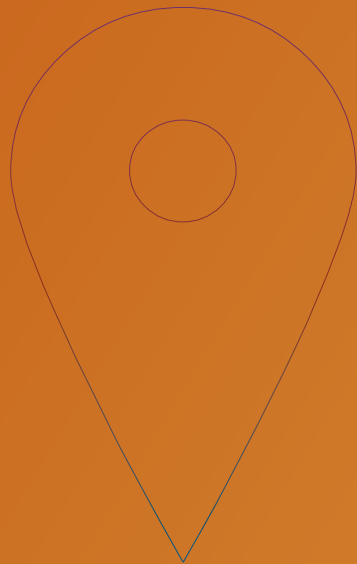
nity with healthy, local foods grown in a manner that preserves the health of our soils, water and other natural resources. Our working forests will be managed for economic and ecological health. Residents and visitors alike will have abundant opportunities to enjoy the natural wonders and agricultural bounty of our county, with plenty of places for families to gather, learn, recharge and recreate. We envision a future where all members of our diverse citizenry act to protect and steward the lands and communities that make Sonoma County special.

In order to accomplish all of the above, we envision Sonoma Land Trust as an economically sustainable, financially secure organization with an endowment and land protection fund that enables the organization to be nimble and act swiftly when land protection opportunities arise. We are an instrumental leader in coalitions and collaborations. We use the best available science to ensure that our projects support water quality and quantity, groundwater recharge, fish and wildlife habitat, food production, ecosystem functioning and climate change resilience.



# Core Values

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*Integrity*

*Collaboration and Partnerships*

*Fiduciary Responsibility*

*Respect*

*Teamwork, Creativity and Innovation*

*Inclusion and Public Benefit*



## **INTEGRITY**

We strive for excellence and professionalism in all facets of our organization. We honor our commitments and remain true to our mission. We practice professional confidentiality concerning land transactions and donor relations.

## **COLLABORATION AND PARTNERSHIPS**

Conservation is a social endeavor. We embrace collaboration and partnerships within the thriving network of volunteers, landowners, public agencies, non-governmental organizations and academic institutions concerned with land conservation in Sonoma County in order to enhance our efforts on a landscape scale.

## **FIDUCIARY RESPONSIBILITY**

We are responsible stewards of public and private donor dollars in order to uphold our commitment “to protect the land forever” on a county-wide scale.

## **RESPECT**

We treat one another and our partners, landowners, donors and community members with dignity, respect and integrity. We carry out ethical transactions with landowners and other parties.

## **TEAMWORK, CREATIVITY AND INNOVATION**

We respect and support one another in our efforts to reach our shared mission, vision and goals. When faced with challenges, we work collaboratively by leveraging our individual skills and expertise to develop innovative, creative solutions and achieve maximum impact.

## **INCLUSION AND PUBLIC BENEFIT**

Our land protection and conservation efforts provide benefits to our entire community and the future generations of Sonoma County. We value inclusion of diverse partner organizations and community members in our efforts to fulfill our mission.





*Complete key projects that protect and steward treasured landscapes of Sonoma County to safeguard our land and water systems, retain ecological functioning and build resilience in the face of climate change.*



A Swainson's hawk, a resident and migratory bird of prey, listed as a threatened species due to habitat loss, seems to be expanding its range and is now being seen more often in southeast Sonoma County.

### 1.1 CORE PROGRAMS

Expand implementation of our existing core land protection and stewardship programs.

#### *A. SONOMA COAST PROGRAM*

Protect and restore the natural and working landscapes of the Sonoma Coast to ensure the region's ecological and economic health. Primary tactics will be acquisitions, restoration, constituency building, partnerships and securing the required resources and capacity needed to ensure long-term stewardship.

#### *B. WILDLIFE CORRIDOR PROGRAM*

Expand protection of the Marin Coast to Blue Ridge Linkage by conserving key private lands, enhancing wildlife permeability on public and private lands, and implementing land management practices that protect wildlife habitat and provide space for species to move throughout their range, especially as the climate changes.

#### *C. SONOMA BAYLANDS PROGRAM*

Restore marshes and create linkages to other Baylands habitats, upland habitats and protected lands, and support compatible agricultural land uses through the continued implementation of the Baylands Habitat Goals Report recommendations for Sonoma County.

#### *D. SONOMA VALLEY/SONOMA MOUNTAIN PROGRAM*

Build a connected system of protected lands that preserve biodiversity, unique and/or rare natural resources, wildlife movement and scenic vistas through implementation of the 2007 "Sonoma Region Conservation Plan." Priority conservation areas will be those lands identified in the Wildlife Corridor Program and the "Making the Connections" map in the 2007 Plan.

#### *E. CONSERVATION EASEMENT PROGRAM*

Advance our use and stewardship of conservation easements by enhancing relationships with conservation easement landowners, monitoring terms of the easements and promoting beneficial private land conservation practices.

### 1.2 NEW PROGRAMS

Develop and implement new land protection and stewardship programs.

#### *A. RESOURCE PRESERVE SYSTEM PROGRAM*

Develop a comprehensive program plan for our properties ("Resource Preserves" representative of our county's diverse landscapes) to guide stewardship activities and act as gateways for research, learning and public service.

#### *B. AGRICULTURAL LAND CONSERVATION*

Enhance relationships with the agricultural sector in Sonoma County and determine feasible projects to undertake.

#### *C. RUSSIAN RIVER WATERSHED PROGRAM*

Implement a core land protection and stewardship program within the Russian River Watershed and develop the program's geographic scope, conservation priorities, implementation timeline and funding sources.

### 1.3 SCIENCE-DRIVEN CONSERVATION

Continue to produce and integrate conservation science and the science of climate change into our conservation strategies, including a watershed-scale approach to project planning and mapping, to ensure our projects achieve multiple benefits to water quality and quantity, groundwater recharge, fish and wildlife habitat, food production, and ecosystem functioning and resilience.

### 1.4 PARTNERSHIPS AND COLLABORATIONS

Continue to strengthen and build relationships with partner organizations and as members of regional conservation planning initiatives in order to achieve maximum conservation impact across the landscape.



## 2

***Build a broad and diverse constituency base with an array of fresh voices for conservation actively engaged in programs and projects that enhance the well-being of our communities.***

### 2.1 COMMUNITY CONSERVATION

Provide leadership and support for community-oriented conservation projects compatible with our organizational strengths, mission and vision.

#### A. SONOMA DEVELOPMENTAL CENTER

Protect the natural resources of the Sonoma Developmental Center property and realize the community-based vision for the site as articulated by the Transform SDC Coalition.

#### B. SOUTHEAST SANTA ROSA GREENWAY

Secure the Southeast Santa Rosa Greenway acquisition and realize the Southeast Santa Rosa Greenway Campaign vision for the site.

### 2.2 DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION

Identify and implement initiatives aimed at improving the cultural relevancy, diversity and inclusivity of our programs, operations and projects.

### 2.3 PUBLIC RECREATION

Strengthen existing and build new partnerships with local peer nonprofit and agency organizations in order to provide recreational opportunities to a broader range of public audiences in a manner compatible with the ecological health of conservation lands.

### 2.4 ENGAGING OUR COMMUNITY THROUGH OUR RESOURCE PRESERVES

Use our Resource Preserves to accomplish long-term stewardship goals and as portals for the educational and outdoor activities of our On the Land Program.

#### INTER-DEPARTMENTAL INTEGRATION

Integrate our On-the-Land Program and Development activities into our comprehensive Resource Preserve System Program Plan.

#### ON THE LAND PROGRAM

Provide opportunities for SLT members and other members of our community to attend outings at our Resource Preserves. Outings will be designed to increase an understanding of and support for the organization's mission.

#### SONOMA LAND AND WATER APPRENTICESHIP PROGRAM

Determine the feasibility of implementing a Sonoma Land and Water Apprenticeship Program, a two-year program for recent college graduates to gain practical natural resource stewardship experience while assisting SLT with essential land management tasks at our Resource Preserves.

### 2.5 BROADEN COMMUNICATIONS REACH AND IMPACT

Identify new key target audiences and best ways to reach them; update the organization's website and other communications tools accordingly; and maintain a fresh, effective social media presence, strong earned media results, and dynamic print and digital publications.

### 2.6 CROSS-DEPARTMENTAL INTEGRATION

Integrate planning and activities of Development, On the Land, Acquisitions, Stewardship and Communications programs to maximize community outreach effectiveness.





# 3

*Sustain a strong team of board, staff and volunteers to foster a positive, thriving organizational culture and provide sufficient capacity to achieve the goals of this strategic plan.*

### 3.1 ORGANIZATIONAL HISTORY

Increase knowledge of the organization's history by sharing stories of its founding, its people and its major milestones in order to build upon the contributions of the past and inform the decisions we need to make going forward.

### 3.2 CULTURE OF LEARNING

Foster a supportive environment of continuous learning by encouraging growth in professional skills and abilities; interacting with peers and colleagues; and building knowledge of the larger external operating environment of community, partner organizations and policy trends.

### 3.3 INTERNAL COLLABORATION AND COMMUNICATION

Strengthen the staff's active collaboration and shared knowledge at all levels, supported by an effective organizational structure and internal communication tools.

### 3.4 LAND TRUST ALLIANCE ACCREDITATION

Renew our Land Trust Alliance (LTA) accreditation in 2018 to ensure that we continue to meet and exceed LTA's high standards for land conservation, stewardship and nonprofit management.

### 3.5 STAFF CAPACITY AND WELL-BEING

Provide all staff members with adequate resources and capacity to achieve the initiatives of this strategic plan while also ensuring a positive workplace environment that promotes healthy work/life balance and employee well-being.

### 3.6 BOARD OF DIRECTORS GOVERNANCE

Support and mobilize the board of directors so that they are fully informed and passionately engaged in their governance role; build and maintain a strong partnership between the board, management staff and board committees; and provide appropriate forums for issues the board may identify for research and discussion.

### 3.7 VOLUNTEER PROGRAM

Build a volunteer program that is fully integrated into the organization and implement a plan that focuses volunteer involvement toward advancing programmatic goals and priorities.





# 4

*Raise the necessary funds to achieve the organization's goals and ensure our long-term financial security.*

#### 4.1 ANNUAL GIVING PROGRAM

Grow our annual giving program's ability to support the operating needs of the organization when combined with other revenue sources.

#### 4.2 CONSERVATION EASEMENT ENDOWMENT FUND

Increase the Conservation Easement Endowment Fund to \$5 million to ensure the long-term stewardship of lands protected by conservation easements and support the costs for the required annual monitoring of the easements.

#### 4.3 LAND PROTECTION FUND

Increase our existing Land Protection Fund to \$10 million to ensure Sonoma Land Trust can act swiftly and nimbly when priority land protection opportunities arise.

#### 4.4 OPERATING RESERVE FUND

Build our operating reserve fund in order to allow the organization to weather a recession or other adverse conditions.

#### 4.5 LEGACY LEAGUE AND PLANNED GIVING

Strengthen SLT's Legacy League — our planned giving program — to maximize the long-term impact from philanthropic giving through sound and timely gift planning.

#### 4.6 GRANT WRITING

Increase our capacity to cultivate relationships with and pursue private and public funding.





*The land belongs to the  
future ... That's the way it  
seems to me.*

— *Willa Cather*

J O I N U S !

