

# SONOMA REGION CONSERVATION PLAN



**Sonoma Land Trust  
January 2007**

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**Sonoma Land Trust  
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**For Sonoma Land Trust internal planning purposes**

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# INTRODUCTION

The Sonoma Valley Region is recognized as a landscape of supreme natural beauty and land use diversity. Located in southeastern Sonoma County, at 137,630 acres (215 square miles), it represents about 14% of the County (*Figure 1: Sonoma Land Trust Conservation Regions and Figure 2: Region Overview*). The prominent scenic and natural features of the Region begin with the distinctive Sonoma Valley itself, an extraordinarily productive agricultural area of vineyards and farmland for over 100 years. This narrow valley, 17 miles in length, is framed by several mountain ranges.

Sonoma Mountain, the most prominent feature of Sonoma County, peaks at 2,276 feet and stands west of the Valley. This scenic backdrop to much of Sonoma County is a patchwork of homes, vineyards and farms interspersed with oak woodlands, redwood and fir forests, open meadows and numerous creeks and wetlands. Taylor and Bennett Mountains, at the northern extent of Sonoma Mountain, overlook the City of Santa Rosa. To the east of the Valley, the steep ridges of the Mayacamas Mountains create a geographic and political boundary between Sonoma and Napa Counties. The recognizable peaks of the Mayacamas include Bald and Hood Mountains, both topping 2,700 feet and occasionally dusted with snow in the winter.

The City of Sonoma is the urban focal point for the Region; Highway 12 is the main thoroughfare through the Region, connecting the Cities of Santa Rosa and Sonoma.

This varied topography supports an equally diverse mix of land uses and reflects a rich cultural heritage (*Figure 3: Land Use*). The Sonoma Valley has been a productive agricultural area since the earliest settlements and today it is well known for its valuable vineyard lands which make up about 13,000 acres.

Recognizing the natural beauty of the area, public and private organizations have protected approximately 28,000 acres of conservation and recreational lands throughout the Region, including state and regional parks. These areas offer recreation and education opportunities for residents throughout Sonoma County and the surrounding San Francisco Bay area. Some of California's most historic sites are found here: the Petaluma Adobe; the Sonoma Plaza, known as the birthplace of California; the Mission San Francisco Solano, the last and northernmost of the 21 California missions; and author Jack London's



home. Due to its close proximity to San Francisco, superb scenic beauty, world-renowned wineries, and diverse recreational opportunities, the Sonoma Valley Region is a highly desirable destination of national prominence.

However, the desire to live, work and play in the Region is creating pressure to convert its natural and agricultural landscapes into housing and commercial development. The primary threat to the Region's resources is the conversion and fragmentation of landscapes by inappropriate development in the rural areas of the Region. Inappropriate residential, commercial and agricultural development in rural areas can impair scenic ridgelines and other open areas, disrupt and obstruct wildlife movement, alter stream hydrology, threaten the Region's surface water quality through sedimentation and runoff, threaten the Region's groundwater and surface water quantity and quality through increased use and increased sewage treatment facilities; increase the level of noise, light and traffic, and contribute to an overall erosion of the rural character of the Region.

In the last 35 years, the population of Sonoma County has more than doubled from 205,000 to 457,000 people.<sup>1</sup> In the last twenty years the majority of the County's growth was accommodated in cities, largely due to the County's policies encouraging growth within Urban Growth Boundaries. However, during this same time 46,000 single-family homes were built in unincorporated areas. It is projected that an additional 130,000 people will reside in Sonoma County by 2025. While it is anticipated that the majority of this growth will also be accommodated within existing urban growth boundaries, there is mounting pressure to develop rural home sites. The increasing demand for rural estates, vineyard expansions and commercial development is particularly high in the Sonoma Valley Region (*Figure 4: Parcel Size*).

SLT's conservation vision for the Region is based on analyzing the Region's diverse resources and threats to those resources, and listening to our partners as to where conservation efforts are needed most. The vision calls for a dynamic landscape that is not too dissimilar to how the Region looks today. It includes a mosaic of vibrant communities, cultural sites, wildlife habitats and productive agricultural lands that are tucked within a Valley framed by two scenic ridges. The ridges include a vast system of parks, productive farms and ranches, carefully-sited residences and nature preserves. The Sonoma Valley watershed is largely restored, salmon have repopulated most creeks, and larger wildlife movement is assured both along the ridges and in specific cross-valley corridors. Existing communities have been allowed to grow within defined boundaries, and the few new rural enterprises that the local community has allowed have been sensitively sited to cause no major groundwater or traffic impacts. Finally, the Region is linked to other large landscapes throughout the Bay Area through recreation trails and wildlife corridors.

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<sup>1</sup> Greenbelt Alliance and Sonoma Farm Bureau, "Preventing Sprawl," pg 11.

**Figure 1: Sonoma Land Trust Conservation Regions**

## Figure 2: Region Overview

## Figure 3: Land Use



**Figure 4: Parcel Size**

## **THE REGION**

The resources of the region fall into four recognizable categories - Natural Communities, Agriculture, Scenic Open Space and Recreation. Collectively, these resources contribute to making this a vibrant Region.

### **Natural Communities**

Sonoma County is home to 14 different plant communities that support over 1,416 species.<sup>2</sup> Communities in the Sonoma Valley Region include redwood forests, Douglas-fir forests, knob cone pine forests, oak woodlands, chaparral, valley and hill grasslands, freshwater wetlands and riparian corridors (**Figure 5: Natural Resources**). Two of the Region's communities that are often associated with rare plants include serpentine soils and vernal pools.



The region supports habitats for numerous rare, threatened and endangered species. The Nature Conservancy (TNC) has identified the greater bioregion surrounding Sonoma Valley as one of the greatest “Hot Spots for Rarity and Richness” in the United States.<sup>3</sup> Sonoma County ranks second among California's 58 counties in the number of Special Status Species identified by the State.<sup>4</sup> Special “target” species in the Region identified by TNC include the pallid bat, western yellow-billed cuckoo, steelhead, Navarro roach, Pacific giant salamander, California red-legged

frog, foothill yellow-legged frog, northwestern pond turtle, Tomales isopod and California freshwater shrimp. In the area surrounding Mount Hood alone TNC has identified twelve target bird species and thirty one target plant species.<sup>5</sup>

One of the most common natural communities in the region is oak woodlands. Oak woodlands are among the County's richest wildlife habitats, hosting at least 349 animal species which rely at least partly on this community during key parts of their life cycles. Included in this list are wide-ranging species such as mountain lion, deer and raptors.<sup>6</sup> The oak woodland community is particularly threatened in Sonoma County due the fact that it is highly desired for vineyards and residential uses. Valley oak woodlands in particular are declining both in Sonoma County throughout California. They are particularly vulnerable in this region as they occur mostly in the valley floor where commercial and vineyard development pressures are greatest.

Riparian corridors are another critical plant community in the Region. In drier months many terrestrial species rely on this community for their very survival. Riparian corridors serve as wildlife corridors for large mammals such as deer, bobcats and mountain lion. Maintaining

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<sup>2</sup> SCAPOSD Acquisition Plan 2000

<sup>3</sup> Precious Heritage: The Status of Biodiversity in the United States, The Nature Conservancy.

<sup>4</sup> SCAPOSD Acquisition Plan 2000

<sup>5</sup> “Conserving the Landscapes of Sonoma County,” draft report by The Nature Conservancy, May 2003

<sup>6</sup> Connecting Communities and the Land, A Long-range Acquisition Plan (2006).

riparian cover along streams, along with woody debris and deep pools, is critical in protecting steelhead and other threatened salmonid species. Riparian habitats are particularly vulnerable to hillside vineyards, residential and road construction due to both vegetation removal and subsequent sedimentation from storm runoff. The Sonoma County Agricultural and Open Space District has mapped and identified a number of creeks in the Region as ‘Priority Riparian Corridors.’<sup>7</sup>

Sonoma Creek is one of the County’s most significant streams for steelhead and Coho salmon populations. It supports a number of other significant fish and aquatic species, including California freshwater shrimp, California roach, sculpin, Sacramento squawfish, sucker and Coho salmon.<sup>8</sup> Steelhead trout, Coho salmon and California freshwater shrimp are all species of special concern.

Because much of the natural resource data is derived from surveying public properties where access is readily available, similar resources worthy of protection on private properties may not be well represented. This underscores the vital importance of working cooperatively with private landowners to learn more about local resources and increase conservation within the Region.

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<sup>7</sup> Connecting Communities and the Land, A Long-range Acquisition Plan (2006).

<sup>8</sup> Southern Sonoma Resource Conservation District “Sonoma Creek Watershed Enhancement Plan.”

## Figure 5: Natural Resources

## **Agriculture**

Settlement of Sonoma Valley and all of Sonoma County has been inextricably linked with agriculture.<sup>9</sup> Today Sonoma County's most important agricultural products are grapes and wine. Currently, fifty-nine percent of the County's land is in agricultural use, with almost 3,400 farms and ranches and about 80 dairies.<sup>10</sup>

According to the Farm Bureau, in 2005 Sonoma County ranked fifteenth in the State for total agricultural production. The County's gross agricultural value in 2005 was \$642.8 million, over 60% of this, or \$430.6 million, was due to grapes and wine. The top five crops in 2005, by value were: wine grapes (\$ 430.6 m); milk (\$91 m); livestock & poultry (\$40.5 m); cattle and calves (\$12.4 m); and nursery ornamentals (\$10.6 m).



Grapes were first planted in the Valley in 1824 by Padre Jose Altimira at the Sonoma Mission<sup>11</sup> and the Region supports four separate wine appellations, each of which has a unique combination of soils and microclimate that generates wines with distinct character.<sup>12</sup> The regions are Bennett Valley, Sonoma Mountain, Sonoma Valley and Sonoma Carneros.

Though wine grapes are the most dominant crop, interspersed throughout the Region are hay crops, organic vegetables, orchards, flower farms, pastures and nursery stock. Cattle for both dairy and meat production are grazed throughout the Region's hillsides. Taken together, wine grapes, grazing lands and specialty crops generate a significant part of Sonoma's County's economy. Vital working landscapes, especially in the Valley floor, also help maintain floodplain functioning and aquifer recharge.<sup>13</sup> This is particularly important in Sonoma Valley, where residents are largely dependent on limited groundwater aquifers for their drinking water.

Finally, working agricultural landscapes provide the very essence of the Valley's rural character. Without working farms and ranches the Valley would likely convert to residential and commercial uses. Because of this, SCAPSOD has identified and prioritized productive agricultural landscapes around Sonoma County. The District's Plan emphasizes the protection of properties near the urban edge; the preservation of lands important to local agricultural heritage and the connection of large, contiguous tracts of farmland to help facilitate the continued agricultural use of farms and ranches.<sup>14</sup> Areas of the Sonoma Valley Region that have this designation include the lands along Arnold Drive and Highway 116 west of the City of Sonoma and south to Highway 12, and the valley lands along Highway 12 from Oak Hill Farm north to

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<sup>9</sup> Preventing Urban Sprawl: Farmers and Environmentalists Working Together, Greenbelt Alliance, 2/04

<sup>10</sup> Connecting Communities and the Land, A Long-range Acquisition Plan (2006).

<sup>11</sup> Sonoma Creek Watershed Enhancement Plan, June 1997, pg. 9

<sup>12</sup> Lombardi Wine Website, "Sonoma County Wine Growing Appellations."

<sup>13</sup> Richard Dale, Sonoma Ecology Center, pers. comm..

<sup>14</sup> SCAPOSD Revision 205 Acquisition Plan, pg. 12

Santa Rosa Creek. For the most part, these areas also correspond to the Region's most panoramic viewsheds as viewed from major highway corridors in the Valley.

## ***Scenic open space and recreation***

Sonoma Mountain and the Mayacamas Mountains provide a scenic backdrop to the communities in, and visitors to, the Sonoma Valley Region. Driving on portions of Highway 12, Arnold Drive and Madrone Ave, which is the major east-west connector of the two, affords panoramic views of vineyards, grasslands, oak woodlands, riparian woodlands and forest-covered ridgelines. Some of the most expansive of these panoramas occur along:

- Highway 12 from Santa Rosa Creek south to Madrone Ave,
- Madrone Ave between Highway 12 and Arnold Drive,
- Arnold Drive and Highway 116 south and west of the City of Sonoma.



Hiking in any of the Region's major parks also allows one to experience highly scenic vistas, as well as infinitely varied landscapes in relatively short hiking distances.

The two major park providers in the Region are the California Department of Parks and Recreation and the Sonoma County Regional Parks Department. Between the two agencies, there are over 13,000 acres of state and regional parks which provide a variety of recreational experiences -- hiking, biking, horseback riding, picnicking, non-motorized boating, camping,

wildlife study and star-gazing at the Robert Ferguson Observatory in Sugarloaf Ridge State Park. In addition, over 3,000 acres of lands are designated to be incorporated into or managed as parks in the future. The successful expansions of these parks are due to the existence of the Sonoma County Agricultural Preservation and Open Space District.

The Draft Sonoma County Outdoor Recreation Plan proposes over 15 multi-use trails and bikeways throughout the region. Many of the proposed locations will connect the state and regional parks, communities and other areas of interest, traversing hillsides, ridge tops and along the valley floor. The Bay Area Ridge Trail is a 500-mile multi-purpose trail connecting parks and preserved open spaces along the ridgelines of the San Francisco Bay Region.<sup>15</sup> The trail travels north up the Mayacamas Ridge. Eventually it will connect Hood Mountain Regional Park, Sugarloaf Ridge State Park, Jack London State Historic Park and Annadel State Park.

Sonoma County still lags far behind Marin County in providing outdoor recreation opportunities for its residents; Marin's parklands make up over 50% of the total area of the county, in contrast to Sonoma County where approximately 19% of the County is protected as parkland. In the Sonoma Valley Region, parks represent an even smaller area at 9%. The existing parks in the Region form the nucleus for a potentially outstanding public access system. Key challenges to achieving this goal include: expanding existing parks, completing trail connections between existing parks, and providing management for public land that has already been acquired as an

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<sup>15</sup> Sugarloaf Ridge State Park, Final General Plan and EIR, page 2-4

addition to the park system, but which lacks public funding to open them to the public. One of the primary goals of the conservation vision presented in this plan is to complete the BART within the Region and to complete trail links between existing parks and protected areas.

### ***Conservation efforts in the region***

Over the past thirty years SLT and several conservation organizations and agencies have been actively working to protect resources in various parts of the Region, and their pioneering work provides the backbone of this Plan. Over 28,000 acres, or roughly 20%, of the Region is already protected. The majority of the protected lands are located on either side of the Valley, up on Sonoma Mountain and in the Mayacamas mountains. They protect not only complex terrestrial and riparian ecosystems for the benefit of humans and wildlife, but also the stunning scenic backdrop to the valley below. Protected properties are listed in **Appendix A** and shown on ***Figure 7: Making the Connections and Figure 8: Sonoma Land Trust, Conservation Planning - Winter 2007.***



# CONSERVATION STRATEGY

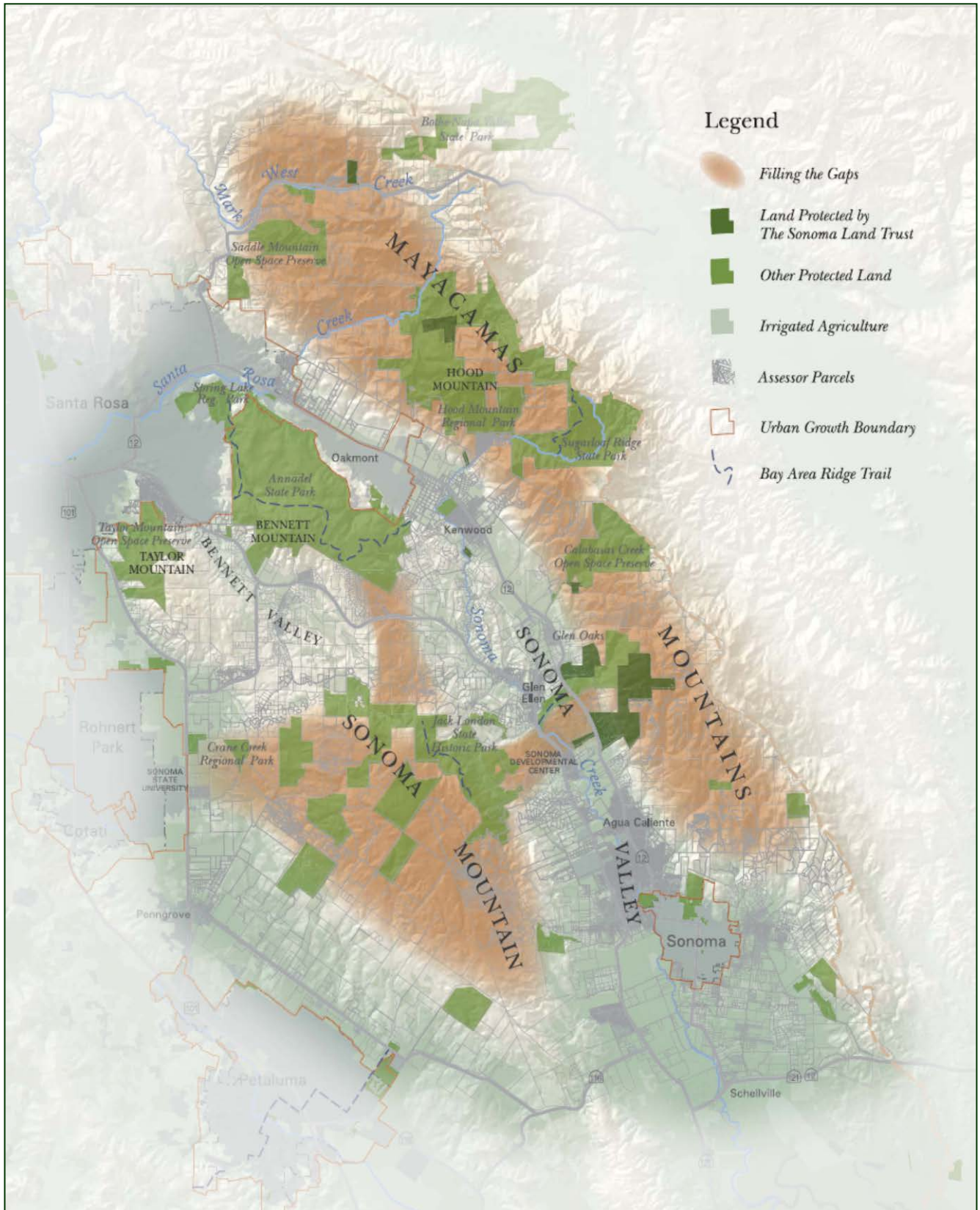
Our vision for the region is a result of conversations with over 30 organizations, agencies and individual experts who live in, work in and understand the Region's critical resources, threats to those resources and available conservation opportunities. To better understand the region, we also reviewed dozens of publications and sources of information written and/or sponsored by many of these organizations. We asked for and received many recommendations about what SLT should focus on in our conservation work throughout the region. Many of the comments were similar in nature, and we have sorted, combined and categorized them in order to derive common themes, objectives and directives. A list of participants is included in **Appendix D**.

## ***Summary of Community Recommendations***

- \* ***Build a connected system of protected lands.***  
Connect and expand the existing nuclei of protected lands, to protect biodiversity, unique and/or rare natural resources, wildlife movement and scenic preservation.
- \* ***Expand outdoor recreational opportunities where appropriate.***  
Where it is appropriate and feasible, expand a diverse array of recreational opportunities on and between protected lands.
- \* ***Increase protection efforts on the valley floor.***  
Preserve land on the valley floor, including agricultural, scenic and specifically, riparian natural resource preservation.
- \* ***Maintain community identity.***  
Preserve the land between and around cities for open space and agricultural uses to help maintain community identity and preserve the scenic quality of the Region.
- \* ***Secure protection of larger parcels.***  
Preserve larger parcels from further fragmentation or conversion, including agricultural, scenic and natural resource preservation.

Protection of the valued qualities of this Region calls for a focused conservation strategy. Although we will work with our partners on exceptional opportunities that arise anywhere in the Region, we will focus our land protection efforts within priority conservation areas identified as "Filling the Gaps" on ***Figure 7: Making the Connections and Figure 8: Sonoma Land Trust, Conservation Planning - Winter 2007***. The reason for this is that our analyses identified some strategic opportunities for linking already protected areas. If successful, we will add significant pieces to the Region's conservation backbone. Projects in the priority conservation areas all have the potential to generate considerable support both from the local community as well as from the entire region since they often involve connections between regional and state park systems. We anticipate that well-placed projects in the first five years of the initiative will create a momentum that will carry over and ensure that the larger 'vision' is realized over time.

Figure 7: Making the Connections



**Figure 8: Sonoma Valley Conservation Region  
Target Projects: Winter 2007**



# CONSERVATION PRIORITIES

## *The Annadel to Jack London Corridor*



*Springtime view of lupine and oaks on the Dinner property*

### **Objective**

To protect the wildlife habitat, scenic resources and priority oak woodland, riparian corridors and other natural areas located between the protected lands on the North Slope of Sonoma Mountain and Annadel State Park.

### **Significant Resources**

- Area anchored by approximately 7,827 acres of land protected on the North Slope of Sonoma Mountain and the 4,920-acre Annadel State Park.
- Priority oak woodlands, riparian corridors, open meadows, and seasonal wetlands.
- Scenic backdrop to Bennett Valley, and Bennett Valley Road, a County scenic corridor.
- Potential recreational trail linkages from Jack London State Park to Annadel State Park.

## Strategies

- Secure a protected wildlife corridor with appropriate trail linkage between the protected lands on the North Slope of Sonoma Mountain to Annadel State Park.
- Acquire easements or fee of four to five key properties in the corridor.

## Conservation Opportunities

SLT is currently working with several landowners within this Area to preserve approximately 575 acres for a wildlife corridor and approximately two miles of trail, including an important segment of the Ridge Trail between Sonoma Mountain Road and Annadel State Park. The properties include Dinner (325 acres), Friend (47 acres), Farina (160 acres), and Gilliland (40 acres) for a total of 572 acres (*Figure 9: Annadel to London Corridor and Figure 10: Annadel to London Conservation Corridor*). Collectively, these properties have retained their remarkable and valuable natural resource features, including:

- Approximately 335 acres of significant, undisturbed oak woodlands habitat; designated as Priority Oak Woodlands in SCAPOSD's 2006 Long-range Acquisition Plan..
- Portions of Yulupa Creek, a steelhead stream and tributary to Sonoma Creek; designated as Priority Riparian Corridor in SCAPOSD's 2006 Long-range Acquisition Plan; and portions of two unnamed tributaries to Sonoma Creek.
- Three large, intact, undisturbed vernal pools.
- Located within Sonoma Creek watershed, identified in the Habitat Goals Report as providing significant habitats.

## Potential Project Partners

- Sonoma County Agricultural Preservation and Open Space District
- Sonoma County Regional Parks
- California Department of Parks and Recreation
- California State Coastal Conservancy
- California State Department of Fish & Game
- California State Wildlife Conservation Board
- Bay Area Ridge Trail Council
- Sonoma Mountain Preservation
- California Native Plant Society



Figure 9: Annadel to London Corridor

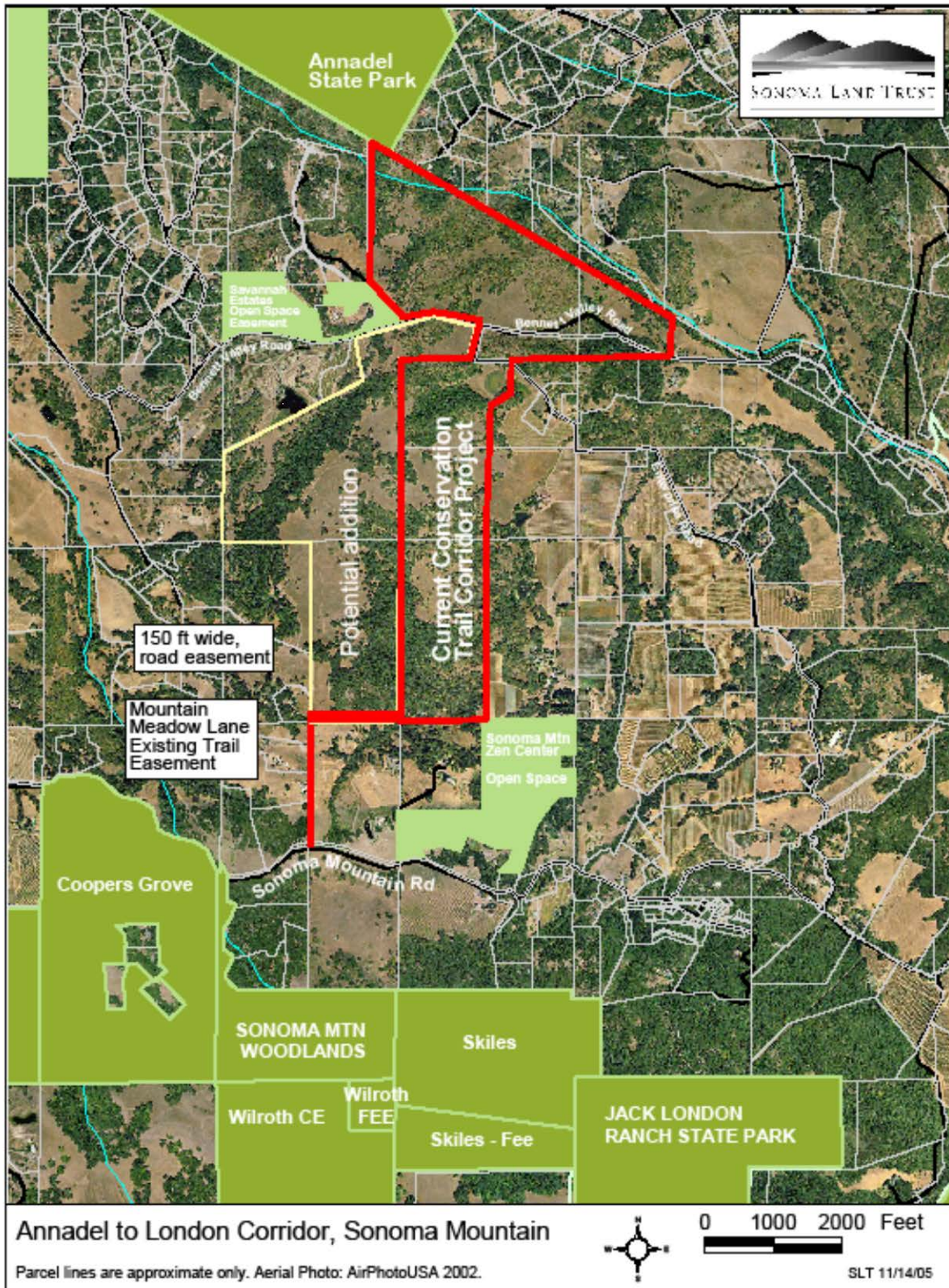
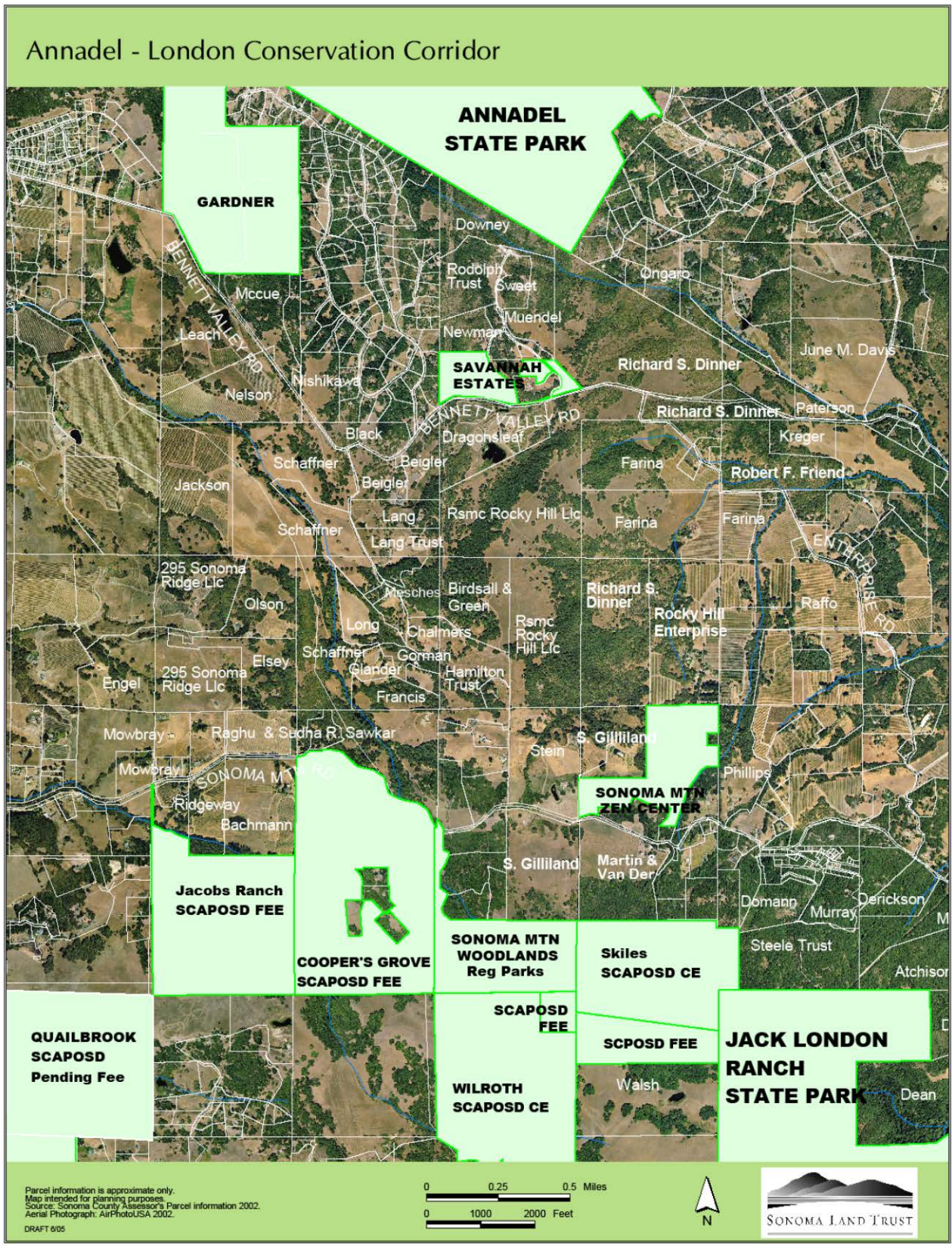




Figure 10: Annadel to London Conservation Corridor





## ***Sonoma Mountain***



*View southeast over Sonoma Mountain with Mount Tamalpais in the background*

### **Objective**

One of the county's most prominent natural features, particularly visible from the south, this stately landmark encompasses spectacular streams, ancient redwoods, vast oak woodlands, and vigorous habitats for many plants and animals. Because existing protected areas are highly fragmented, more conservation measures need to be taken if the mountain's character and crucial role in watershed protection are to be preserved. The mountain's easy accessibility makes it an important recreation resource for the county's growing population.

### **Significant Resources**

- Over 1,500 acres of protected lands, including the 27-acre Petaluma Adobe State Historic Park, and several private conservation easements held by SCAPOSD.
- Priority riparian corridors, oak woodlands, open meadows.
- Priority greenbelt and important scenic resource due to its high visibility from the Highway 101 corridor from Novato to Santa Rosa, the Cities of Petaluma, Rohnert Park, Cotati and Santa Rosa, and many other western areas of the county.
- Priority agricultural resource.
- Multiple recreational opportunities available on protected lands; potential trail extensions.



## **Strategies**

- Acquire easements or fee to increase size of protected lands in this region, focusing on larger parcels and lands adjacent to protected lands.
- Pursue opportunities to acquire priority projects, including: Elliott Ranch, Bowes and Walsh properties.
- Assist to complete and open trail along eastern slope of Sonoma Mountain; extend trail on acquired properties.

## **Potential Project Partners**

- Sonoma County Agricultural Preservation and Open Space District
- Sonoma County Regional Parks
- California Department of Parks and Recreation
- California State Coastal Conservancy
- Bay Area Ridge Trail Council
- Sonoma Mountain Preservation

## ***Sonoma Valley Habitat Corridor***



*Large mammals like this Bobcat require large areas of connected habitat*

### **Objective**

To continue the efforts of numerous public and private organizations in creating a major regional east-west corridor of protected lands, from the east side of Sonoma Mountain to Mount Veeder near the Napa/Sonoma County Line, and connecting the 7,829 acres of already protected lands, including Jack London State Park, Fairfield Osborn Preserve, Sonoma Mountain Woodlands, Sonoma Valley Regional Park, Crane Creek Regional Park, Sonoma Development Center, Glen Oaks Ranch, and Bouverie Preserve.

### **Significant Resources**

- One of the few remaining east-west wildlife corridors in Sonoma Valley.
- Numerous priority oak woodlands, conifer forests, priority riparian corridors, open meadows, and wetlands.
- Scenic Sonoma Mountain, Sonoma Valley and the Mayacamas Mountains.
- Potential recreational trail linkages between numerous state and regional parks in the Region.

## Strategies

- Acquire easements or fee to increase size of protected lands in this region, focusing on a few large ‘infill’ parcels adjacent to and between protected lands on Sonoma Mountain, in Sonoma Valley and the Mayacamas.
- Assist in securing recreational trail connections where appropriate or identified on a regional plan.
- Support current efforts by Sonoma Mountain Preservation (SMP) and Sonoma County Agricultural Preservation and Open Space District (SCAPOSD) to ensure that the State Surplus Area and Sonoma Developmental Center are protected over time.

## Conservation Opportunities

- **Stuart Creek.** The upper portion of Stuart Creek is located in the easterly portion of this Conservation Area, adjacent to lands owned and protected by SLT and Audubon Canyon Ranch (ACR). There are several adjacent properties to these holdings for which we will pursue conservation options. SLT and ACR have had discussions about how to partner together to preserve the properties located in the Stuart Creek watershed.
- **Hooker Creek.** In 2006, SLT acquired a conservation easement over the Elarra property which encompassed a portion of the upper reaches of Hooker Creek, and further expanded the Sonoma Valley Wildlife Corridor. Outreach efforts will be made to adjacent landowners to continue to expand the east-west Wildlife Corridor, as well as the protection of additional reaches of Hooker Creek.

## Partners

- Sonoma County Agricultural Preservation and Open Space District
- Sonoma County Regional Parks
- California Department of Parks and Recreation
- Sonoma Mountain Preservation
- Sonoma Ecology Center
- Audubon Canyon Ranch

## ***Mayacamas Mountains (Sugarloaf Ridge/Hood Mountain Expansion)***



***View up Adobe Canyon toward Sugarloaf State Park and Hood Mountain Regional Park***

### **Objective**

Expand the already protected lands in this region including Sugarloaf Ridge State Park, Beltane Ranch, Saddle Mountain and Hood Mountain Regional Park so that the region's biological, scenic, recreational, and watershed functions remain intact. These mountains present an attractive ridgeline along the eastern rim of Sonoma Valley, below which are privately held woodlands and grasslands that have been susceptible to vineyard conversion. At present, protected areas in the Mayacamas are a patchwork preserved by the Trust, state parks, regional parks, and other jurisdictions.

### **Significant Resources**

- 7,262 acres of existing publicly and privately protected lands.
- Priority oak woodlands, priority riparian corridors, conifer forests, open meadows, and seasonal wetlands.
- Scenic ridgeline of the Mayacamas Mountains to the east of the Highway 12 corridor.
- Potential recreational trail linkages between the various public parks and preserves within the region and to the east toward Napa Valley.

## **Strategies**

- Acquire easements or fee to increase size of protected lands in this region, focusing on larger parcels adjacent to and between the publicly protected lands.
- Assist in securing recreational trail connections where appropriate or identified on a regional plan.

## **Current Conservation Opportunities**

- Adobe Canyon Road. In 2005, SLT acquired a conservation easement over the Mason Property, an 18-acre parcel with Sonoma Creek frontage located on Adobe Canyon Road, the entrance way to Sugarloaf Ridge State Park. In late 2005 through 2006, SLT researched the ownership data of the lands located adjacent to and between the Mason Property and Sugarloaf Ridge State Park. The information was mapped and SLT met with Sonoma County Regional Parks to coordinate outreach efforts. Letters of outreach and other informal efforts were made to seven landowners, which resulted in a meeting with three of the landowners in the summer of 2006. SLT remains interested in pursuing these conservation opportunities if and when the landowners elect to do so. The seven property owners are:
  - Philbin
  - Foster
  - Chapman
  - Harrison
  - Dempster
  - Carpeneti
  - Wiltshire

A map, parcel data and copies of the outreach letters are included in **Appendix C**.

## **Potential Project Partners**

- Sonoma County Regional Parks
- California Department of Parks & Recreation
- Sonoma County Agricultural Preservation and Open Space District



# City of Sonoma Backdrop



## Objective

Currently connected to the significant natural resources of the Mayacamas, these oak-covered hills provide an admirable defining viewshed for the city of Sonoma. Rather than being converted for expensive housing or lodging, the land would be protected to ensure a healthy watershed while providing scenic beauty and outdoor recreation within walking distance of the valley’s largest urban center.

## Significant Resources

- Over 50 acres of protected lands including Sonoma State Historic Park, several private conservation easements, and the recent acquisition of the 151 acre SCAPOSD’s Montini project.
- Priority oak woodland, priority riparian corridors.
- Priority agricultural greenbelt and greenways.
- Important scenic resource as the backdrop to the City of Sonoma.

## **Strategies**

- Acquire easements or fee to expand the area of protected lands..

## **Conservation Opportunities**

SLT will pursue conservation projects to expand the area of protected lands, including the Haywood property.

## **Potential Project Partners**

- Sonoma County Agricultural Preservation and Open Space District
- Sonoma Ecology Center
- California Department of Parks & Recreation

## ***Sonoma Valley Floor***



*Wine grapes make up over 60% of Sonoma County's agricultural monetary value*

### **Objective**

To protect the mosaic of scenic, natural and agricultural resources which all create the rural heritage of Sonoma Valley. A strategic goal is keeping the character of the valley as close as possible to what it is today, while also restoring blocked tributaries and fragmented wildlife habitat. Maintaining pleasing views and a mix of small farms, rural homes, and native vegetation along this corridor of primarily private land is a key objective. Special emphasis is placed on the riparian areas along Sonoma Creek, which are home to many native plants and animals. Conservation measures along the creek are an essential to flood control, pollution abatement, and watershed vitality. Restoring a steelhead run to this impaired waterway is a long-held vision feasible through land conservation and wise development.

### **Significant Resources**

- Priority oak woodlands, priority riparian corridor of Sonoma Creek, open meadows, and wetlands.
- Scenic rural character derived via a combination of historic land uses, including parks and open space, vineyards, grazing, residential and commercial.
- Significant agricultural heritage of Sonoma Valley.



- Potential recreational trail linkages along the valley floor.

### **Strategies**

- Protect the rural character of the Valley.
- Support agriculture, especially small farms.
- Work with Sonoma Ecology Center to assist in protecting Sonoma Creek riparian corridor.
- Assist in securing recreational trail connections where appropriate or identified on a regional plan.

### **Conservation Opportunities**

SLT is currently supporting SEC's efforts to protect the Dunbar Wetlands off of Dunbar Road in the Valley.

### **Potential Project Partners**

- Sonoma Ecology Center
- Sonoma Valley Vintners and Growers Association
- Sonoma County Agricultural Preservation and Open Space District
- Sonoma County Regional Parks

## WHAT'S NEXT? IMPLEMENTING THE PLAN



The following strategies will be used to further our conservation efforts throughout the region. These strategies include on-the-ground project work of fee acquisition and conservation easements, education and outreach to individual landowners and groups, further development and maintenance of partnerships, and identifying and securing funding for projects. The multiple concurrent strategies complement each other and forward the regional conservation program as a whole.

### ***Protect lands via fee acquisition or conservation easements.***

We will work with willing landowners to acquire conservation easements and fee interests in their lands pursuant to the criteria in this plan and our acquisition criteria. Our work will include bringing funding and other interested partners together to develop acquisition plans for each project. We recognize the recreational goals of our partners and will strive to incorporate those goals in our protection efforts throughout the region.

### ***Direct outreach to landowners in each of the priority areas.***

As part of our project development, we will conduct outreach to landowners in the Priority Conservation Areas, recognizing that when opportunities arise throughout the region, we will retain our ability to respond.

***Maintain strong partnerships with our conservation partners, and outreach to groups and associations that are connected to the land.***

We will maintain our existing relationships and develop new partnership opportunities with conservation partners. The other way to reach landowners is through organizations that include landowners as their members. This outreach will be directed to groups and associations, including, but not limited to: Sonoma County Grape Growers Association, Sonoma Valley Vintners and Growers Association, Sonoma County Farm Bureau, Southern Sonoma County Resource Conservation District, real estate brokers, estate planners, financial planners, land use consultants. Working with these groups may provide effective ways to (a) educate others about the work we do, (b) educate others about land conservation options, (c) learn about potential conservation opportunities, and (d) develop a network of conservation buyers

***Identify and secure appropriate funding sources through our existing and potential partners for land acquisition.***

We will continue to identify and secure funding for projects in which it is necessary to do so, and work with our funding partners to further the collective goals identified in this plan.

***Best Management Practices and Education.***

As part of our overall conservation efforts, we will promote and work with private landowners to implement best management practices that protect and enhance the natural resources in the region. We will continue to manage our preserves and lands using the best management practices available.

## **APPENDIX A: PROTECTED LANDS**

### ***The Saddle Mountain Open Space Preserve***

The Saddle Mountain Open Space Preserve is an 1,100 acre acquisition of fee and conservation easement by SCAPOSD. The intended use will be as an open space preserve with low-intensive public recreational uses. Protected habitat includes oak woodlands, redwood and Douglas fir forest, open meadows, wetlands and riparian habitat along Weeks, Alpine and Van Buren creeks, tributaries to Mark West creek, a fish bearing tributary to the Russian River.

### ***The Sugarloaf Ridge-Hood Mountain Area***

The Sugarloaf Ridge-Hood Mountain area is a combination of lands owned or preserved by State Parks, Regional Parks, SCAPOSD and the Sonoma Land Trust. The total area protected is approximately 8,485 acres. Much of the area is designated as park lands and provides recreational activities such as hiking, horseback riding and camping. Protected habitat includes redwood and Douglas fir forests, oak woodlands, chaparral, open meadows, wetlands, and riparian habitat along the headwater areas of Santa Rosa Creek and Sonoma Creek.

### ***Beltane Ranch***

Beltane Ranch is a 1,290-acre property recently purchased by the SCAPOSD, and which will ultimately be owned and managed by State Parks as a unit of the Sugarloaf Ridge State Park. The Sonoma Land Trust holds an easement over an additional 38 acres immediately adjacent to Beltane Ranch. Protected habitat includes redwood and Douglas fir forests, oak woodlands, and riparian habitat along the headwaters and main stem of Calabazas Creek.

### ***Mayacamas to West side of Sonoma Mountain***

This highly scenic segment of privately conserved and publicly held lands runs in a westerly direction from the middle western ridges of the Mayacamas down and across Sonoma Valley, up and over the east, north and west sides of Sonoma Mountain and down to the western foothills of Sonoma Mountain. It encompasses 7,287 acres of contiguous land and preserves forestland, oak woodlands, open meadows, wetlands, and the riparian habitat along Stuart Creek, Sonoma Creek, Graham Creek, Asbury Creek, the south and north forks of Matanzas Creek, and Crane Creek. Portions of the lands are currently used for park purposes, and portions are intended to be used for park purposes in the future.

## ***Annadel State Park Area***

Annadel State Park is located on the north end of Sonoma Valley adjacent to the City of Santa Rosa. This 4,920-acre park primarily covers the ridgeline between Sonoma Valley and Bennett Valley. The park contains forestlands, oak woodlands, open meadows, marshland, creeks and a lake. An additional 429 acres immediately adjacent thereto comprise Spring Lake Regional Park and Howarth Memorial Park. While Spring Lake and Howarth parks are more developed than other lands in the area, they still provide connectivity and some habitat protection.

## ***Southeastern Flank of Sonoma Mountain***

In this area, several properties have been protected in conjunction with development projects. The 160-acre Van Hoosier easement protects oak savannah and open meadows with significant native plants. In addition to the scenic protections, habitat protected by these easements include forestlands, oak woodlands, open meadows, and riparian areas.

In addition, isolated, individually-protected parcels are located throughout the Region, along the valley floor, in the foothills and the ridgeline of the Mayacamas, north and east of the City of Sonoma, on the southwest flanks of Sonoma Mountain, along Petaluma Hill Road, and on Taylor Mountain. These lands are a combination of agricultural, scenic, and forever wild easements, as well as lands held in fee for current and future park uses.

## ***Taylor Mountain Ranch***

Dramatically visible from most of central Sonoma County, the 823-acre Taylor Mountain Ranch forms the backdrop to Santa Rosa, located directly adjacent to the City's southeast boundary. This property was purchased by the Sonoma County Agricultural & Open Space District in 2006 and the District will open this spectacular site to the public as an open space preserve so everyone can enjoy the amazing vistas from this site. Guided tours are currently being offered to the public. This will be followed by full access when the District and its partners, the City of Santa Rosa and County Regional Parks, complete their cooperative planning effort that will incorporate recreational use in a manner that is compatible with protection of its scenic and natural resources.

## ***Montini Property***

The 157-acre Montini property forms the City of Sonoma's "backdrop" and was designated as a priority greenbelt area for preservation by the SCAPOSD. The property was acquired in 2005 through acquisition of 100 acres, which was added to the Sonoma State Historic Park, and 57 acres of highly visible hillside protected through a conservation easement.

## **APPENDIX B: PARTNER MAPS**

**Sonoma Mountain, Sonoma County California.** prepared for Sonoma Mountain Preservation by Sonoma Ecology Center. August 2005.

**Bay Area Ridge Trail Map,** prepared by GreenInfo Network .

**Sonoma Mountain Preservation Area of Interest,** prepared by Sonoma Ecology Center. September 2005.

**Preservation and Restoration Priorities for Sonoma Valley,** Sonoma Ecology Center. August 2005.

**Mountain Lions in Sonoma Valley: A discussion of potential impacts of land use and land cover,** prepared by Sonoma County Agricultural Preservation and Open Space District. August 2002.

## **APPENDIX C: ADOBE CANYON SUB-REGION STUDY**

### ***Priority Conservation Projects: Assessor Parcel Numbers***

Harrison: 051-050-016; 051-050-015

Dempster: 051-050-004; 051-050-005; 051-050-011; 051-060-007; 051-060-012

Foster: 051-050-008; 051-050-009

Philbin: 051-050-010

Wagner: 051-050-006

Wiltshire: 051-060-026

Carpeneti: 051-060-004; 014

Chapman: 051-060-003; 051-060-009; 051-050-017; 051-050-018

## ***Outreach Letters to Priority Property Owners***



## ***Adobe Canyon Neighbor Map***

## APPENDIX D: INTERVIEWS, REPORTS, STUDIES AND OTHER MATERIALS

Anderson, Craig - *LandPaths*. Personal Interview. 17, February and 23 March 2005.

Atwood, Julie - *Sonoma Valley Vintners & Growers Association*. Personal Interview. 21 February 2005.

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Best, Howell, Knight and Wells. *A Flora of Sonoma County*. California Native Plant Society, 1996.

Brown, Kelly - *Greenbelt Alliance*. Personal Interview. 1 February 2005.

Buckman, Allan and Gene Cooley - *California Department of Fish & Game*. Personal Interview. Spring 2005.

Burridge, Betty. *Sonoma County Breeding Bird Atlas*. Madrone Audubon Society, Inc., Santa Rosa, CA; 1995.

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Ellman, George and Phyllis. Personal Interview. 29 March 2005.

Frey, Nick - *Sonoma County Grape Growers Association*. Personal Interview. 14 March 2005.

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Hoffnagle, John and Vanessa Johnson - *Napa Land Trust*. Personal Interview. 8 February 2005.

Houser, Lynn and John Herrick - *California Native Plant Society*. Personal Interview. 10 April 2005.

Hunter, Rich - *Sonoma State University Sudden Oak Death Study*. Personal Interview. 23 March 2005.

Kiser, Rich - *North Bay Agricultural Alliance*. Presentation at Monthly Meeting. 27 April 2005.

Mackenzie, Andrea and Kathleen Brennan-Hunter - *Sonoma County Agricultural Preservation and Open Space District*. Personal Interview. 19 January 2005.

McCorvey, Lex - *Sonoma County Farm Bureau*. Presentation to Land Use Committee. 27 April 2005.

Millet, Wendy and George Yandell - *The Nature Conservancy*. Personal Interview. 13 January 2005.

Peters, Denise - *Sonoma County Permit & Resource Management Department*. Personal Interview.

Peterson, John, Dan Gluesenkamp, Skip Schwartz, and Dan Murphy - *Audubon Canyon Ranch, Bouverie Preserve*. Personal Interview. 8 February 2005.

Potter, Sandra - *California Regional Water Quality Control Board, Region II*. Personal Interview. 17 February 2005.

Sales, Philip and Steve Ehret - *Sonoma County Regional Parks Department*. Personal Interview. 15, February 2005.

San Francisco Bay Water Quality Control Board and Sonoma Ecology Center. *Draft of the Executive Summary of the Sonoma Creek Watershed Limiting Factors Analysis*. January 2005.

San Francisco Bay Area Wetlands Ecosystem Goals Project. *Baylands Ecosystem Habitat Goals, A Report of Habitat Recommendations*. June 2000.

Sheffer, Paul - *Southern Sonoma County Resource Conservation District*. Personal Interview. 25 January 2005.

Snedaker, Gerry - *Real Estate Broker*. Personal Interview. 14 February and 29 March 2005.

*Sonoma County Agricultural Crop Report*. 2003.

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Theis, Rick. Personal Interview. 28 March 2005.

Van Houten, Holly and Dee Swanhuysen -*Bay Area Ridge Trail Council*. Personal Interview. 12 December 2004.

## ***References***

Bay Area Ridge Trail Council. 1007 General Kennedy Avenue, Suite 3 San Francisco, CA 94129-1405. (415) 561-2595 Internet Site: [www.ridgetrail.org](http://www.ridgetrail.org)

California Coastal Conservancy. 1330 Broadway, 11th floor, Oakland, CA 94612. (510) 286-1015 Internet Site: [www.coastalconservancy.ca.gov](http://www.coastalconservancy.ca.gov)

California Department of Fish & Game. 1416 Ninth Street, Sacramento, California 95814. (916) 445-0411 Internet Site: [www.dfg.ca.gov](http://www.dfg.ca.gov)

California Department of Parks and Recreation. 1416 9th Street, Sacramento, CA 95814. (916) 653-6995 Internet Site: [www.parks.ca.gov](http://www.parks.ca.gov)

Land Paths. P.O. Box 4648, Santa Rosa, 95402. (707) 544-7284 Internet Site: [www.landpaths.org](http://www.landpaths.org)

Sonoma County Agricultural Preservation and Open Space District. 747 Mendocino Avenue, Ste 100, Santa Rosa, CA 95401. (707) 565-7360 Internet Site: [www.sonomaopenspace.org](http://www.sonomaopenspace.org)

Sonoma Ecology Center. P.O. Box 1486, Eldridge, CA 95431. (707) 996-0712 Internet Site: [www.sonomaecologycenter.org](http://www.sonomaecologycenter.org)

Sonoma County Grape Growers Association. P.O. Box 1959 Sebastopol, CA 95473. (707)829-3963 Internet Site: [www.sonomagrapevine.org](http://www.sonomagrapevine.org)

Wildlife Conservation Board. 1807 13th Street, Suite 103, Sacramento, CA 95814. (916) 445-8448 Internet Site: [www.wcb.ca.gov](http://www.wcb.ca.gov)