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## MANAGING LAND FOR WILDLIFE AND RECREATION

We ask a lot of our protected lands. We want them to keep our air and water clean, to provide us with scenic beauty, to provide food, to serve as safe homes for wildlife—and, more and more, to provide places for us to be out in nature. We all appreciate getting away from urban centers to less frenetic spaces where we can breathe in the scents of the forests and listen to the cries of the hawks. Places where we can be alone. But are we?

How many of us consider that when we're out on the trails, we are actually sharing space with wild animals—even if we don't see them? And how many of us stop to wonder how we may be affecting the wildlife who live there or are passing through?

Because of the fragile status of the Sonoma Valley Wildlife Corridor, your land trust has had to wonder about this a lot. When a designated corridor narrows down to a pinch point less than half a mile wide, we believe we need to do everything reasonable to facilitate animals' passage from one side to the other. So we commissioned a study to help guide management of public recreation in the Sonoma Valley to help, rather than hinder, wildlife.

Scientists from the Wildlife Conservation Society and the Department of Fish, Wildlife and Conservation Biology at Colorado State University took the following steps:

1. Reviewed the scientific literature on the subject of wildlife and recreation;
2. Used camera traps on nine protected properties in the Sonoma Valley to assess human and wildlife usage; and
3. Recommended recreation guidelines to maintain wildlife habitat connectivity.

They learned that some of our protected

lands receive a lot of human traffic. This isn't a surprise. In the U.S., outdoor recreation on public lands has increased by 40 percent over the last decade. This poses challenges for some wild animals. Research shows that even quiet activities, like hiking, bicycling and wildlife viewing, can impact the behavior, reproduction and survival of individual animals, as well as their willingness to use some areas.

So how do we minimize the negative effects of recreation on wildlife while allowing us, for our own mental and physical health, to get outdoors and move around?

The scientists suggest that precautions be taken where wildlife are most at risk, such as the corridor pinch point and the

undeveloped lands leading to it. "For example," says Tony Nelson, Sonoma Valley program manager, "on properties with heavy human use, it might be appropriate to reduce the number of trails, close trails at certain times and enforce leash laws; whereas, at our Glen Oaks Ranch, which is not open to the public, a modest increase of hikers may be sustainable, if only on existing trails."

The Land Trust has shared the scientists' full report with other land organizations and agencies in Sonoma Valley. Naturally, any workable solution will require support from the local community. Ask yourself, are you willing to modify your routines to make room for the mountain lion, the fox, the deer, ...?



A bobcat follows a trail in the Sonoma Valley Wildlife Corridor. Camera trap photo.