

# Fall 2014



... to protect the land forever

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CALIFORNIA WATER BOND



The concrete culvert at Stuart Creek Run that was blocking steelhead from their native spawning grounds further upstream has been removed. Here, contractor Hanford ARC is using an excavator to place boulders in the creekbed to form pools and chutes that will facilitate fish passage. Photo by Lance Kuehne Photography.

## Swimming upstream is getting easier for steelhead

Restoring this steelhead run marks a major accomplishment of our overall plan to enhance the viability of the Sonoma Valley Wildlife Corridor.

BY SHERI CARDO

Ten years ago, an adult steelhead trout was seen in the upper reaches of Stuart Creek on the Bouverie Preserve in the Sonoma Valley. That determined fish had negotiated three major barriers on the stream that have stopped lesser specimens of his or her kind for decades. Unfortunately, after that arduous journey to get to the top-notch spawning grounds to reproduce, this fish ended up all alone.

That is what drives our project to restore the historic steelhead run on Stuart Creek. We are clearing the way so that this federally threatened and locally beloved species can once again swim far upstream to spawn in its native habitat.

*(Continued on page 3)*



A NOTE FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

## Tending our garden

So often, conservation efforts are framed so as to vilify the bulldozers — save this land from those big yellow engines of destruction! But as our cover photo illustrates, bulldozers also enable us to restore creeks and landscapes on a scale that matters. A three-quarter mile run of Stuart Creek along Arnold Drive in Glen Ellen has been a dammed, eroded, weed-choked, fish-blocking mess for decades. With the help of our members, grants from the State of California through the Department of Fish and Wildlife and State Coastal Conservancy, and local contractor Doug Hanford, it is being reconfigured and sculpted with stonework into a healthy passageway for spawning steelhead. Restoration work on an even grander scale is underway at Sears Point where dozens of earthmovers are building the new levees that will enable us to bring back nearly 1,000 acres of tidal marsh in advance of the rising bay waters.

What I have come to realize through working in conservation over the years is that even our most seemingly pristine, natural landscapes are like gardens — they need to be tended. They need our intervention not only to keep out unwanted development, but also to keep out unwanted natural features. It's one thing not to harvest trees in a truly old-growth redwood forest; quite another to realize that the beautiful forest through which you are walking has been entered and harvested two or three times over the past century and will grow into a thicket unless selectively logged for years into the future. Our stewardship is an active business.

On a personal note, as many of you know, I am on a glide path toward retirement. Our search is on for my successor as executive director and I expect that we will have an excellent candidate to whom I can pass the baton by the end of the year. I and our board are committed to a seamless leadership transition, mindful always of our commitment at Sonoma Land Trust ... *to protect the land forever!*

Ralph Benson

### OUR MISSION

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

- Developing long-term land protection strategies;
- Promoting private and public funding for land and 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.

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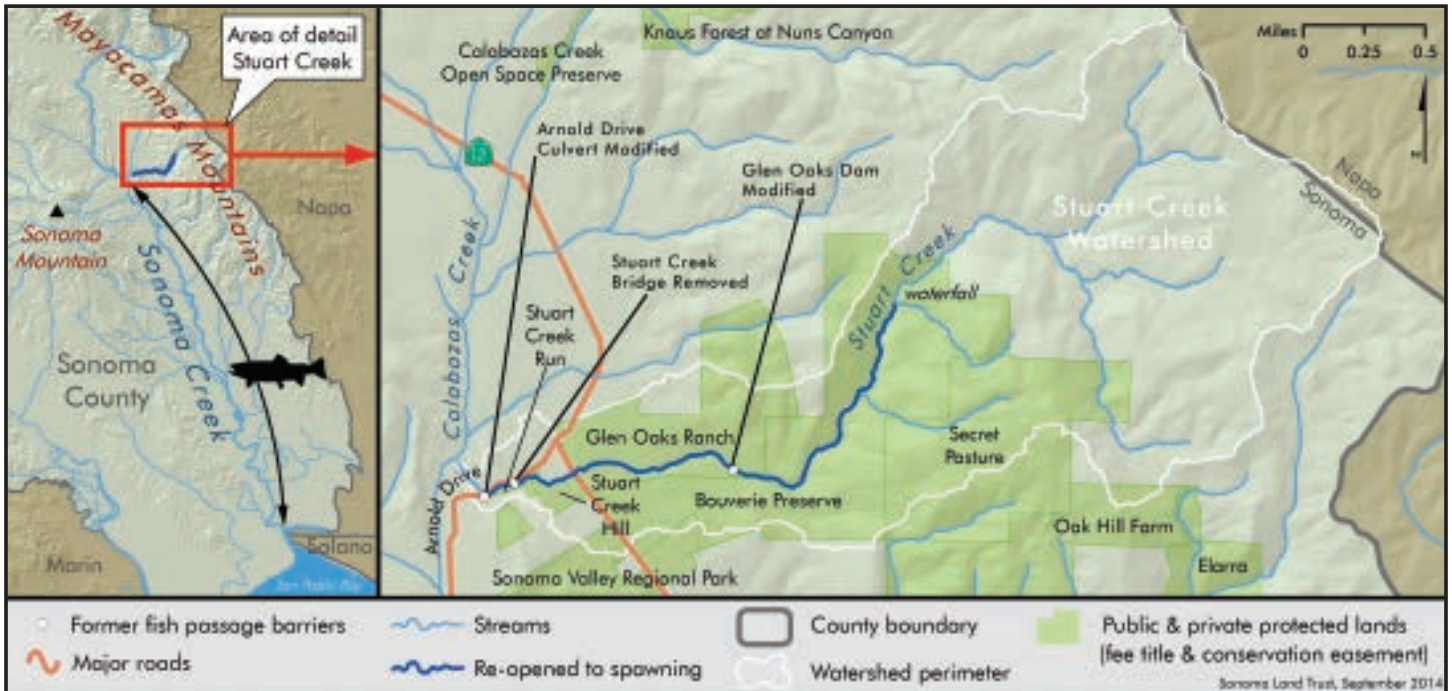
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# Who we are



## Fish barriers and protected lands along Stuart Creek



To accomplish this, we need to remove the fish barriers. Happily, after three years of planning and fundraising, in conjunction with biologists and engineers from the California Department of Fish and Wildlife, National Marine Fisheries Service and Prunuske Chatham, Inc., work to demolish the barriers and reconfigure parts of the creek began in late August. By the end of October, the work will be completed, just in time for the winter steelhead spawning season.

Longtime Sonoma Land Trust members may remember that we purchased 3.5-acre Stuart Creek Run along the creek in Glen Ellen in 2011 specifically to remove the barrier on that property. Subsequently, we identified two additional barriers, one on our Glen Oaks Ranch and one within the County culvert below Arnold Drive. By eliminating these barriers, the steelhead returning from the ocean through the bay along Sonoma Creek will gain access to 2.5 miles of high-quality spawning and nursery habitat on upper Stuart Creek.

"We anticipate that steelhead will soon recognize that the creek is open and then quickly begin to repopulate it,"

says Tony Nelson, Sonoma Land Trust project manager.

At Stuart Creek Run, our contractor, Hanford ARC, removed the old bridge blocking the fishes' way and is now constructing a series of five 40-foot-long chutes and 20-foot-long pools within the streambed to provide the fish with easy passage and places to rest. Unexpectedly, the recent Napa earthquake complicated construction a bit by causing water to flow in the normally dry summer streambed!

Like the barrier at Stuart Creek Run, the dam on Glen Oaks Ranch has also been a problem for the fish. Since the dam is an historic structure and because it has, itself, helped to create fish habitat by scouring a deep pool, we are not removing the dam. Instead, we are modifying it to maintain its benefits while improving conditions for fish to pass it.

The Arnold Drive culvert fortuitously called for the simpler and less expensive solution of installing concrete curbs to create water flow conditions under the bridge that are more favorable to fish passage.

Funding for this project was provided by the California Department of Fish and

Wildlife's Fisheries Restoration Grant Program, the California State Coastal Conservancy and member contributions to Sonoma Land Trust. Additionally, a significant portion of the cost is being generously donated as in-kind services by our contractor, Hanford ARC, whose owner, Doug Hanford, lives in Glen Ellen.

Upon its completion, Tony will coordinate with Bouverie Preserve staff and agency fisheries biologists to monitor the creek for steelhead spawning activity for at least three years. We also plan to create a roadside picnic area on the site for the public with a trail, interpretive signage and 3–4 parking spaces. We expect this project will expand the environmental education programming that is presently happening at both Glen Oaks Ranch and Bouverie Preserve as well.

Restoring this steelhead run marks a major accomplishment of our overall plan to enhance the viability of the Sonoma Valley Wildlife Corridor. No more shall there be a lone steelhead at the top of the creek.

Sheri Cardo is SLT's communications director.

# Protecting the land and the people of the Sonoma Developmental Center

BY SHERI CARDO



Located in the “pinchpoint” of the Sonoma Valley Wildlife Corridor, nearly 800 of SDC’s 1,000 acres are undeveloped and wild, making it critical habitat for wider-ranging mammals, like mountain lion, deer, bobcat, bear and coyote. This is why Sonoma Land Trust is a leading partner of the effort to develop a community-centered plan for SDC. Photo by Scott Hess Photography.

Your land trust has become centrally involved in charting the future of the Sonoma Developmental Center (SDC) and some may wonder why. For such a complex matter, the answer is simple. SDC sits on 1,000 acres right in the middle of the Sonoma Valley Wildlife Corridor, and approximately 800 of those acres are undeveloped — many would say wild. It is critical habitat for wider-ranging mammals, like mountain lion, deer, bobcat, bear and coyote, who require expansive open spaces to roam. SDC is also located at the “pinchpoint” of the wildlife corridor, the section that is in

grave danger of closing up and isolating animals on one side from those on the other: a genetic setback in the making.

We cannot let that happen.

So in 2012 — in the face of a diminishing commitment from the State towards operating SDC — Sonoma Land Trust helped convene a local coalition that includes Supervisor Susan Gorin and numerous community groups and county agencies to *Transform SDC*. This project, unlike any other with which we’ve been involved, seeks to engage

the local community to create a “redevelopment” plan that we anticipate will guide the future use of SDC’s land, health care services and infrastructure.

“While this endeavor is complicated by the fact that both the facility and the land are owned by the State of California, we have strong reason to believe that Governor Brown would not disregard a comprehensive community planning effort,” says John McCaull, an attorney and former environmental lobbyist hired by Sonoma Land Trust last year to serve as land acquisition project manager on Sonoma Valley initiatives. “We need to

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By 2016, the goal of *Transform SDC* is to develop financially sustainable options for providing crucial health care services for those with developmental and intellectual disabilities, along with provisions for preserving the land for wildlife and recreational use.

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show the Governor that we can develop a locally supported vision for SDC that will significantly reduce the State's financial pressures for operating the facility and forever protect the valuable open space lands on the property."

To fund the 18-month-long community planning process that will kick off in 2015, Sonoma Land Trust is raising \$400,000 from the Gordon and Betty Moore Foundation, the Resources Legacy Fund, Impact100 Sonoma, the Sonoma County Agricultural Preservation and Open Space District, and our members. By 2016, the goal of *Transform SDC* is to develop financially sustainable options for providing crucial health care services for those with developmental and intellectual disabilities, along with provisions for preserving the land for wildlife and recreational use.

"We hope to engage a wide diversity of interests in the community, including

people who don't even yet know that they should care," says John. "The natural resource values at SDC are so significant that we risk losing something critical to our mission if we don't act now."

What the plan will ultimately look like is unknown; the coalition is open to any and all ideas. Interested parties are welcome to contact John McCaull at [johnm@sonomalandtrust.org](mailto:johnm@sonomalandtrust.org).



*Preserving the land for wildlife and recreational use is a key goal of the Transform SDC planning process. Photo by Scott Hess Photography.*



*Kathleen Miller and her son, Dan. Photo courtesy of Press Democrat/Kent Porter.*

## Family and community ties

Since 1891, the Sonoma Developmental Center has served as a residential facility for individuals with intellectual and/or developmental disabilities, including Dan.

Now 46 years old, Dan has lived at SDC for 13 years and was in a similar facility in Southern California before it was closed. His mother, Kathleen Miller, knows what it's like to lose your safety net and has become a fierce advocate for the residents and employees of SDC. She also serves as the president of the Parent Hospital Association, a leading member of the *Transform SDC* coalition.

While the State's newer care model of integrating those with developmental challenges into smaller community homes should work for some of SDC's remaining clients, Kathleen doesn't believe it will work for those with severe behavioral challenges and those who are

medically fragile. "My son would be difficult to place in a group home because of his multiple diagnoses," she says. "He and others could end up in jail or be subject to multiple acute psych hospitalizations. We need to come up with a solution that works for all residents."

The Center also employs more than 1,000 people, making it the largest employer in the Sonoma Valley by far. Closing it without replacing those jobs would be devastating. "Clearly, protecting the land cannot happen without marrying conservation interests to economic and social concerns," concludes John McCaull.

# Mary Mueller: A legacy of giving for the land

BY RETA LOCKERT

She had seen farms turn into 6,000-person neighborhoods in what seemed like the twinkling of an eye.



When Mary Mueller moved to Sonoma County in 1974, she was seized by its beauty and the contrast between its open spaces and the reality of present-day San Jose and Santa Clara, which she had left. She had seen farms turn into 6,000-person neighborhoods in what seemed like the twinkling of an eye. She came to Sonoma County because she knew Fred and Robin Beeman, who lived in Camp Meeker. Mary set herself up in Camp Meeker and found a job as an offset lithographer at Santa Rosa Junior College.

Before long, the Beemans told her about a relatively new nonprofit organization called Sonoma Land Trust that was set up to protect those beautiful places she loved. Mary's first gift in 1981 reflected her desire to preserve Sonoma County's open lands. Her inclusion of Sonoma Land Trust in her estate plan bespeaks her commitment to this land-saving work beyond her own lifetime.

Born and raised in Wewoka, Oklahoma, Mary had lived in Indian Country. The county seat of Seminole County, Wewoka was at the end of the Trail of Tears. She went away to school and bounced around a bit, "accidentally" majoring in art with a watercolor emphasis. Ultimately, she graduated with a BFA from San Jose State.

Mary loved her work at the JC where her fine arts background combined with an innate mechanical ability to make her perfect for running their offset press. She

delighted in working with international students from Eritrea, Vietnam, China, Central America and Iran who were taking advantage of the JC's excellent ESL program in a community near their extended families.



Now retired after more than three decades at the SRJC, Mary lives in a co-housing unit, attends as many concerts as she can, enjoys her book club and looks forward to visits with her daughter in France.

Warm thanks to Mary Mueller for her support of our mission since 1981 and far into the future.

*Reta Lockert is SLT's donor relations director.*

## Planning your own legacy

When you make a planned gift to Sonoma Land Trust, you help ensure that the natural beauty of Sonoma County will be here for future generations to enjoy.

To find out more about how to include Sonoma Land Trust in your estate plans, please visit [www.sonomalandtrust.org/leavealeagacy](http://www.sonomalandtrust.org/leavealeagacy) or contact our planned giving specialist Phil Murphy at (415) 457-7482 or [pgphil@comcast.net](mailto:pgphil@comcast.net). If you have already included Sonoma Land Trust in your estate plans, please let us know by contacting donor relations director Reta Lockert at (415) 526-6930, ext. 105 or [reta@sonomalandtrust.org](mailto:reta@sonomalandtrust.org).

# Progress protecting our redwood forest

BY SHERI CARDO

“Focus on something and it will grow” is apt in more ways than one when applied to Sonoma County’s North Coast forest. Our 2009 purchase of 3,100 acres of redwood/Douglas fir forest on the Jenner Headlands solidified our commitment to protecting the coastal forest, which offers habitat to wildlife, sequesters carbon, provides for livelihoods and lifts our spirits.

Since then, thanks to acquisitions director Amy Chesnut’s passion for maintaining our county’s sustainable working forests, and preserving what remains of the ancient redwoods, Sonoma Land Trust has continued our focus in this region. This has resulted in a forest conservation conference for land conservation supporters and industrial timber landowners; the extinguishing of development rights on a scenic, forested ranch along the coast; and funding

assistance for The Conservation Fund’s purchase of Preservation Ranch (now Buckeye Forest). Currently, we are working on two exciting new prospects.

## **A once-in-a-generation opportunity**

The 29,500-acre Gualala Redwoods property is for sale — and we’re aiming for a conservation outcome that will keep the property intact and working, while continuing habitat enhancement and increasing public recreation along the Gualala River. As a result of our existing relationship with the owners, GRI, from having negotiated the Jenner Headlands transaction, they recently called us to share their intent to sell the property.

Our work is cut out for us as it is being heavily marketed and GRI is interested in a fast sale. Any conservation deal will be complex, expensive and challenging as we continue to climb out of the recession. Your land trust is ready for the task and, between now and December, when the project goes up for bid, we are moving quickly and collaborating with our partners in the conservation community to determine the best and most efficient way to protect this extensive landholding.

## **Saving sacred trees**

While Sonoma’s North Coast was historically covered in redwood forest, most of the land has been harvested once, twice, thrice. But a few pockets of the big, ancient trees still exist and deserve to be protected forever. To that end, we are assisting landowners in the region who have owned 1,400 acres since the 1940s and have logged selected trees only when absolutely necessary. By providing them with a loan thanks to the Gordon and Betty Moore Foundation, they will be able to keep their forest intact while they complete their sale of a conservation easement to our partner, the Sonoma County Agricultural Preservation and Open Space District.

Again, an unusual and complex transaction that benefits from Sonoma Land Trust’s nonprofit nimbleness.

When you donate to Sonoma Land Trust, part of what you are contributing to is the deep expertise and commitment of our staff, who are focused on protecting as much of Sonoma County’s resource-rich landscape as possible. For future generations.

*As a result of the owners’ light-touch management, this 1,400-acre property on the North Coast is filled with old-growth redwoods and pristine creeks. “We don’t see forests in this condition very often,” says Amy Chesnut. “These family members have been exceptional stewards of their land.”*

*The 29,500-acre Gualala Redwoods property is for sale — and we’re aiming for a conservation outcome that will keep the property intact and working, while continuing habitat enhancement and increasing public recreation along the Gualala River.*



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There is an urgent need for a new state funding measure  
for water and natural resource programs.

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## SLT recommends voting YES on **Proposition 1**, the California Water Bond

BY JOHN MCCAULL

“The Water Quality, Supply and Infrastructure Improvement Act of 2014,” also known as the “Water Bond,” is on this November’s ballot as Proposition 1. It will authorize up to \$7.5 billion in bond sales to fund projects to protect lakes, rivers and streams, clean up polluted groundwater and drinking water supplies, and augment the state’s stressed water supply system.

There is an urgent need for a new state funding measure for water and natural resource programs. You may not realize that state agencies, such as the Coastal Conservancy, the Wildlife Conservation Board and the California

Department of Fish and Wildlife, are key partners in many of Sonoma Land Trust’s high-priority projects, contributing millions of dollars of bond funding to help protect and restore iconic properties that include the Jenner Headlands, Pole Mountain, Sears Point, and more.

The Legislature and the voters have not approved any new funding measures for environmental programs since Proposition 84 in 2006. Existing fund balances are reaching levels low enough that our partner agencies cannot continue to guarantee funding for Sonoma Land Trust projects. Proposition 1 will provide an infusion of funding for projects that will directly benefit our watersheds, help restore historic salmon and steelhead populations, improve our groundwater monitoring and management, and fund integrated efforts to improve our water quality in the North Bay and along the North Coast.

The Sonoma Land Trust Board of Directors approved a resolution endorsing **Proposition 1** because the measure promises new sources of funding for

our work to protect the landscapes of Sonoma County. We urge you to support Prop. 1 at the ballot box on November 4. Please contact John McCaull at [johnm@sonomalandtrust.org](mailto:johnm@sonomalandtrust.org) if you would like further information.

*John McCaull is SLT’s land acquisition project manager.*

