

WINTER
2015



... to protect the land forever

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Estero Ranch offers three-quarters of a mile of Pacific coastline and a mile of Estero Americano frontage from which one can enjoy views of Point Reyes, Bodega Head and Doran Beach. Photo by Stephen Joseph Photography.

Your support has
helped us reach the
point where Estero
Ranch will soon be
protected forever,
remain in productive
agriculture and also
be available for public
recreational use.

We're on the verge of protecting Estero Ranch!

We are in the final phase of the 547-acre Estero Ranch acquisition and, if all goes as expected, we will close before the end of the year! This stunning property hugs the Sonoma Coast where the Estero Americano meets the Pacific Ocean and has been on our list of key properties to protect for more than 20 years. Now, on the eve of Sonoma Land Trust's 40th anniversary, your support has helped us reach the point where Estero Ranch will soon be protected forever, remain in productive agriculture and also be available for public recreational use. *Thank you!*

(Continued on page 3)

Completing 40 years and two big projects

A NOTE FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR



It's been a great year for Sonoma Land Trust and it's thanks to you, and thousands of individuals like you, who share a common bond for conserving the treasured landscapes of Sonoma County. In the coming year, we will celebrate our 40th Anniversary as we continue to focus our work on gathering additional friends and protecting special places. In celebration of this milestone, our board of directors, past board and leadership members have launched a \$1 million challenge to celebrate what we have achieved so far and to equip us for the future. (See page 4.)

We are on-the-land people with our roots firmly planted in a 1970s conservation movement in Sonoma Valley led by the late Otto Teller, a noted conservationist and organic farmer. He saw our county as a mosaic of special landscapes needing protection and became inspired to gather other like-minded individuals to form Sonoma Land Trust in 1976.

Every year since our formation, Sonoma Land Trust has celebrated big conservation wins. This year, we reached an important milestone in our work in the Baylands as we breached a levee to restore 1,000 acres of tidal marsh at Sears Point. Years in the making, the breach was a hallmark event celebrating your support and our partners' participation that enabled the

very best science to be applied to the restoration of San Francisco Bay.

Following on the heels of the Baylands celebration, we are now completing the acquisition of Estero Ranch, a 547-acre working cattle ranch on the rugged Sonoma Coast at the mouth of the Estero Americano. One of my favorite walks is the two-mile loop trail onto Bodega Head that provides a panoramic vista of Bodega Bay, the Estero and the mouth of Tomales Bay. In that breathtaking view, you can see and feel the importance of Sonoma Land Trust's urgent work to protect these incredible places.

As we look to our next 40 years, we are keenly aware that it is because of our most committed supporters like you that we've been able to grow into one of California's most effective land trusts. Thanks to you, we will continue to advance and be innovative in our work to conserve the extraordinary landscapes that make Sonoma County a special place to live.

See you out there,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, reading "Dave Koehler". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "D" and "K".

Dave Koehler

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 by:

- 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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THIS SPECIAL PROPERTY DESERVES TO BE
**THOUGHTFULLY
MANAGED**



The Estero Americano forms the Sonoma-Marín border, traveling from just east of Valley Ford to the Pacific Ocean. Photo by Stephen Joseph Photography.

One property at a time, we are protecting Sonoma County's incomparable coast. Estero Ranch will now connect with SLT's adjacent 127-acre Estero Americano Preserve and other neighboring protected lands and marine areas, including Gulf of the Farallones National Marine Sanctuary, Doran Beach Regional Park and Bodega Head, part of Sonoma Coast State Park. Your land trust has now saved more than 7,000 acres along the coast.

In the heart of the Pacific Flyway, the Estero is bordered by sloping grassy hillsides, providing important habitat for migratory waterfowl, shorebirds and even an otter or two. The upland portion of the property consists primarily of rare coastal prairie and is home to numerous mammals.

In addition to its status as a biodiverse haven, Estero Ranch possesses a long

agricultural history. From 1919–1954, the property was owned and used as a dairy by the Albini Family. Then, the Bottarinis acquired the ranch in 1954 and cared for it as a cattle ranch until the family decided to sell it last year. Presently, the majority of the land is grazed and the southwestern tip is used as an aquaculture farm.

"This special property deserves to be thoughtfully managed to protect the natural resources, while continuing its historic productive agricultural use as part of our food system," says Sonoma Land Trust acquisitions director Amy Chesnut. "It was loved and cared for by the Bottarinis for more than 60 years and we intend to carry on in much the same way."

It took nearly two years for Sonoma Land Trust to acquire this property. Your support provided the critical seed funding necessary to secure additional funds from our partners in this project — the

Gordon and Betty Moore Foundation, California Coastal Conservancy, and Sonoma County Agricultural Preservation and Open Space District. We are excited to also continue our close partnership with our colleagues at The Wildlands Conservancy, who will own and manage the property, and plan for future public recreation along an expansion of the existing California Coastal Trail.

This is a very exciting property to be able to protect," says our executive director Dave Koehler. "The estuary is where life begins for hundreds of fish and wildlife species, and the working ranch is a cornerstone in the scenic landscape of the Sonoma Coast."

We have more work to do! Please join us in our 40th Anniversary Challenge (see page 4) to ensure that we can continue to protect Sonoma County's treasured places.

It's our 40th anniversary!

We're celebrating our
achievements and planning
our next moves

BY DEIRDRE HOLBROOK

In 1976, a group of concerned Sonoma County residents gathered around a kitchen table to figure out the best way to save what was left of the county's wild beauty and agricultural heritage. Their solution was to form Sonoma Land Trust and they did so at a critical time — in the 1970s, the county's population increased by 50 percent.

Since our founding, and with the support of thousands of individuals and partners, Sonoma Land Trust has protected nearly 50,000 acres of our most cherished landscapes. And, yet, there is still so much more to save in our diverse million-acre county.

To celebrate all we have accomplished together and to launch the Land Trust into its 40th year to help meet the challenges ahead, our board of directors, along with several past board and Land Trust members, are stepping forward to

lead the charge by launching a "40th Anniversary Challenge." **Collectively, they have contributed \$500,000 and are challenging the rest of us to raise another \$500,000 or more by the end of the year.** Raising a total of \$1 million

is a big goal, but meeting that target is essential to meeting the greater challenges ahead.

Here are some of our most recent accomplishments:

>>By the end of this year, we expect to acquire the spectacular 547-acre Estero Ranch along the coast and Estero Americano, which is surrounded by other protected lands and marine areas. In time, you will have new opportunities to access this stretch of wild, coastal California with views of Point Reyes, Bodega Head, Mount Diablo and Mount Tamalpais, along with wildflower, whale and

other wildlife viewing opportunities.

>>We have protected the Jenner Headlands, Pole Mountain and Little Black Mountain along the coast to create a connected sweep across 6,300 acres of rangeland, working forest and places for





"During our 27 years in Sonoma County, we have seen population growth and increased pressures on the land. The work of SLT protecting properties for wildlife and keeping lands natural is a personal priority and is beneficial and important to all of us."

—Bryant and Diane Hichwa

wildlife to thrive and people to enjoy. Starting next year, hardy hikers will be able to hike all the way to Pole Mountain from the Jenner Headlands!

>>We are reversing the Bay Area's tidal marsh losses and improving the health of the bay and its fisheries. Ninety percent of the marshes have been lost to human development, which is, indeed, a tremendous loss. These marshlands are a source of biological wealth and store more carbon from the atmosphere than almost any other habitat on earth. Marshes are the best and least expensive way to protect our shoreline and buffer us from the rising seas and intense storms projected on the horizon. We've protected 6,000 acres of the Baylands and welcomed bay tides back to 1,000 acres at Sears Point this fall. Over time, this place will develop into a thriving marshland. Also, we have extended the Bay Trail by more than two miles so you can visit and watch the marsh renew itself in years to come.

>>We've threaded together a series of conservation lands in the Sonoma Valley to protect a vital stretch of the Northern California Wildlife Corridor, which extends from Lake County to the Marin Coast. Our work here will help ensure the survival of many of our region's iconic animals, such as mountain lions, bobcats, coyotes, foxes, porcupines and black bears.

>>We have restored Stuart Creek in the Sonoma Valley to bring back steelhead trout and support the recovery of a fishery that is part of our quality of life here. The greatest threat to the survival of steelhead is the loss and degradation of their freshwater spawning habitats. Statewide, steelhead runs have declined by 80–90 percent in the past 50 years. With your support, we removed barriers and redesigned parts of the creekbed to make it more habitable for the fish. Now, we are eagerly awaiting their return.

>>Last, but not least, next year we plan to transfer to Regional Parks our 1,665-acre Tolay Creek Ranch to double the

size of Tolay Lake Regional Park, adding the ranch's diverse resources to what will become the largest regional park in the county.

Forward thinking

As we head into our 40th year, we are sitting around the table again and looking ahead to the decades to come. There are now 500,000 of us fortunate enough to call Sonoma County home, and our population is continuing to grow. Over the next 40 years, it is projected to increase by another 30 percent. We can see it happening already: Companies are migrating north and real estate prices are climbing, yet less than 20 percent of our natural and working lands has been preserved.

So what do we do to make sure Sonoma County retains the character we so dearly love, so close to the urban Bay Area but still a world away with its rugged coastal beauty, rolling oak-studded hills, and fields filled with grazing cows,

(Continued on page 6)

produce and vineyards yielding the fresh, local food and wine for which our region is famous? Well, for one thing, Sonoma Land Trust is taking a wide-angle, big picture view of the county and looking for the best strategic investments we can make to protect our way of life, watersheds and wildlife.

We are building a large, connected landscape to protect not only land, but also water. As this resource has become more precious than ever in California, we want to make sure that we are meeting our county's most pressing future needs for a safe and reliable water supply by conserving lands that protect our rivers, creeks and groundwater.

We will keep working to protect the critical wildlife corridor that narrows down to a pinchpoint in Sonoma Valley by preserving at-risk land and working with neighboring landowners. The fate of the Sonoma Developmental Center will

continue to be a part of this effort, with 750-acres of undeveloped land and wildlife habitat at stake.

We will bring green spaces into urban ones, such as by helping to protect the Santa Rosa Southeast Greenway, a 2.2-mile vacant right-of-way. Once it is saved, it can be transformed into a vibrant greenway with trails, bike paths, community gardens and pocket parks in the heart of Santa Rosa. Sonoma Land Trust will redouble its focus on protecting our working farms, forests and ranches that are the backbone of our agricultural heritage and economy.

We will expand our land conservation efforts in the North County to protect our water, farmland and wild lands. And we will continue to increase recreational opportunities in nature by working with our partners to open miles of trails to the public at the Jenner Headlands, Sears Point, in Sonoma Valley, and more.

This is a challenging time for land protection — and also an exciting one. We still have time to preserve the county's scenic beauty, watersheds, farmlands, vistas, wildlife and places for people to enjoy. However, more than ever before, we need to be fast-acting and well-equipped to move quickly and strategically in an increasingly competitive market.

Imagine if there had been no Sonoma Land Trust. Thankfully, that is not the case. Please join us in making sure that we all have even more to celebrate in the years to come. Won't you help us meet our challenge? Please use the enclosed remit envelope or visit sonomalandtrust.org/donate. *Land ... it's about forever.*

Deirdre Holbrook is SLT's development director.

"As a military brat, I lived all over America, never having a real hometown. When I moved to Sonoma County in the mid-70s, it felt like home at last! Helping to make our community better as it grows is for me a great privilege. I want to ensure this remains a special place for all by supporting the 40th Anniversary Campaign."

—Dr. Nancy Doyle

"When I decided to retire and leave New York, I looked at a number of places to live around the country. After visiting Sonoma County, I knew I had found it. This is a place like no other, and I support the Land Trust and this campaign to ensure that it remains this way."

—Hal Hinkle



State's SDC closure plan leaves door open to community vision

BY JOHN MCCAULL

We are ending what has been a whirlwind year for the Sonoma Developmental Center (SDC). SDC has served as a residential hospital and care facility for those with developmental disabilities for more than 125 years. The property — covering nearly 1,000 acres on the slopes of Sonoma Mountain — is also an ecological treasure with abundant habitat and water resources.

In May, the Governor announced the State's intent to close SDC by 2018. The highly expedited closure timeline caught many by surprise, and summer and early fall saw a nearly continuous stream of public hearings and meetings. The final closure plan was submitted to the Legislature on October 1 for review and approval as part of the 2016 state budget process.

Hundreds of people and organizations commented on the draft closure plan and the good news is that we secured one of our key objectives: The State recognized "the property's incredible natural resources," and made a commitment to work with the Sonoma Valley community to identify a long-term reuse plan for the property and not to sell or dispose of the land as "surplus."

Of immediate concern is what will happen to SDC's 390-plus residents who are being asked to leave the residential hospital in the next three years, and the

1,200 people who work there. The State seems determined to move everyone off the property *before* engaging in a dialogue on future uses. Along with our allies the Parent Hospital Association and County of Sonoma, we are pushing hard to identify onsite health care services and housing options to serve at least some of the existing population.

Through the Transform SDC Project, Sonoma Land Trust will continue to advocate for the immediate needs of those who live and work at SDC, as well as plan for the long-term future of this significant community and natural asset. To learn more about this project, please visit www.transformsdc.com.

John McCaull is the Sonoma Valley acquisition project manager.



Photo by Paolo Vescia.



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More than 1,000 people came out on October 25 to view the levee breach and subsequent filling of the recently constructed tidal basin. It was a remarkable day to celebrate this 10-year-long restoration project that will enhance the bay ecosystem, provide habitat for endangered species, buffer the shoreline from climate change-induced storm surges and provide extensive opportunities for public access. "We have literally changed the map of the bay with this project," says Baylands program manager Julian

We've had a **sea change** at Sears Point!

Meisler. "That's important because we all depend on a functioning bay — it is vital to our safety and our economy, and for all the wildlife who call it home. This is our legacy and it's wonderful to have one of which we, as a community, can be proud." A new 2.5-mile-long section of the San Francisco Bay Trail on top of the new levee will also provide some of the best access to the bay in Sonoma County. The trail, and a kayak ramp, will open to the public in early 2016.



Photos by Corby Hines (top) and Scott Hess Photography (bottom).