



... to protect the land forever



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SAVING LAND — THE MEANING
OF FOREVER



Passing Measure AA is critical for restoring more needed tidal marsh around the bay and providing outdoor recreation, as our project at Sears Point is doing. Photo by Scott Hess Photography.

Vote for Measure AA for San Francisco Bay on June 7 BY JOHN MCCAULL

Since the 1980s, Sonoma Land Trust has made restoration of bay wetlands one of our top organizational priorities.

San Francisco Bay is central to our lives, our communities and our economy — but decades of pollution and shoreline development have put the health of the bay at serious risk. Fish are contaminated with harmful chemicals, bay communities are vulnerable to the impacts of climate change and, in the event of a severe storm, flooding would cause millions of dollars in damage.

On June 7, voters across the nine Bay Area counties will consider **Measure AA: The San Francisco Bay Clean Water, Pollution Prevention and Habitat Restoration Measure**. Through a \$12 per year parcel tax, this first-of-its-kind regional effort is anticipated to raise \$500 million over the next 20 years, improving the bay for people

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A NOTE FROM
THE EXECUTIVE
DIRECTOR



A healthy bay for the generations

For the past dozen years, Sonoma Land Trust has been leading the way to restore tidal marsh and wetlands along San Pablo Bay. Our supporters are heroes of their generation, putting their hearts and treasure into improving the Baylands for people and wildlife. Now, as funding sources for additional restoration of the bay are becoming scarce, we have a terrific opportunity coming up on the June 7 ballot to give our work a vital boost — by passing “Yes on AA: People for a Clean and Healthy Bay.”

With two-thirds of California’s salmon population passing through San Francisco Bay and more than half of the state’s Pacific Flyway migratory birds relying on its wetlands, we have a lot at stake.

Together, from traditionalists to millennials, the generations of our supporters are putting their shoulder to the wheel and beginning to recover the largest estuary on the West Coast. But there’s much more to do.

Since the Gold Rush, urbanization and land conversion depleted the bay’s wetlands down to only five percent of their historic scale. In 1999, the scientific community set a goal to restore 100,000 acres. Since then, 40,000 acres of tidal marsh and wetlands have been restored in San Francisco Bay with 60,000 remaining to be restored. The encouraging news is that 30,000 acres of land have been acquired and are now restoration-ready. It’s land that is just waiting for us to pass

“Yes on AA” so that its transition back into wetlands can be completed.

It’s up to us. Please take a moment to read John McCaull’s article in this newsletter highlighting the benefits that “Yes on AA” will bring to Sonoma County. It’s terrific to be working with all of you on this. Our generation holds a special place in history to restore and honor the natural heritage we have in San Francisco Bay — and to leave it healthy for the generations that will follow.

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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and wildlife while strengthening our economy and preparing for climate change.

Measure AA would restore thousands of acres of tidal marsh in order to:

- Reduce trash, pollution and harmful toxins in the bay;
- Improve water quality;
- Restore habitat for fish, birds and wildlife;
- Protect communities from floods; and
- Increase shoreline public access.

The modest investment of \$12 per parcel (equaling \$1 per month) will leverage \$500 million for our bay. The funds will be allocated through a competitive grant-making process by the San Francisco Bay Restoration Authority, which is a regional agency created by the Legislature in 2008 with a governing board made up of local elected officials. The Legislature gave the Restoration Authority the unique capacity to raise funds from local sources throughout the Bay Area, along with the oversight capacity to ensure transparency and prevent waste. Its purpose is restoration, not regulation. The Restoration Authority does not duplicate the missions of other public agencies and private organizations working on bay restoration; it is designed to deliver essential local funding to restoration projects developed by others.

Since the 1980s, Sonoma Land Trust has made restoration of bay wetlands one of our top organizational priorities. San Francisco Bay once had 200,000 acres of tidal marsh, but only 40,000 acres are left. Scientists have determined that the bay needs 100,000 acres of marshlands to regain its full health. To reach this goal, we need many more projects like the Land Trust's successful restoration at Sears Point, which is cultivating 1,000 acres of tidal marsh. The

What does Measure AA offer for Sonoma County?

Measure AA has a funding formula that ensures at least \$45 million for Marin, Napa, Solano and Sonoma Counties; we can also compete for millions of dollars in additional funding that will be allocated without regard to county. With these funds, we can leverage state and federal dollars to:

- restore wetlands and riparian habitat in lower Sonoma Creek, the lower Petaluma River, Tolay Creek and Lagoon, and Petaluma Marsh;
- restore 4,400-acre Skaggs Island, build recreational trails and increase public access; and
- fund wetlands restoration work associated with the necessary renovation of Highway 37, which is threatened by flooding and sea level rise.

longer we wait, the more marsh we will lose as sea levels rise. Recent climate change studies sound the alarm: We only have 20 years to accomplish restoration work that we had thought was on a 50-year timetable.

Sonoma County is in an exceptionally good position for successful grant proposals to the Authority because hundreds of acres fringing the bay are already in public or nonprofit ownership and ready for restoration. Nonprofit organizations like Sonoma Land Trust also have cultivated excellent working relationships with state and federal agencies, like the State Coastal Conservancy, that will help us leverage Measure AA funds to bring additional restoration and clean water funding to our county.

In order to pass, Measure AA requires a "supermajority" of 66 percent of Bay Area voters. Years of polling and research show that now is the right time to move forward. The economy is the strongest it has been in the eight years since the Restoration Authority was created, with

low unemployment and strong consumer confidence. Despite the high cost of living in the region, voters have shown that they are willing to pay this modest tax in order to keep our bay clean and healthy, and to protect communities and critical infrastructure from flooding. With a strong, well-run campaign, we are confident that this measure will pass. Sonoma Land Trust has endorsed Measure AA and we urge you to vote "Yes" on June 7!

John McCaull is SLT's land acquisition project manager.





NEXT STEPS

for the

SONOMA VALLEY WILDLIFE CORRIDOR

BY NICOLE NA

There's a special place in the heart of downtown Santa Rosa where mountain lions prowl, gray foxes scurry, jackrabbits lope along the ground and deer munch contentedly on tufts of foliage. This little menagerie isn't a zoo — rather, it can be found on Sonoma Land Trust's computer server, where thousands upon thousands of photos captured by our wildlife camera traps in the Sonoma Valley Wildlife Corridor are stored and analyzed.

The Sonoma Valley Wildlife Corridor is a vital strip of habitat that links to larger blocks of habitat, allowing wildlife to safely move between them. This critical linkage allows animals to adapt to changing factors in their habitats and escape predators, find mates, and obtain better access to food and water. The corridor is an invaluable, irreplaceable part of our ecosystem here in Sonoma County. In recognition of this, our stewardship team established a network of wildlife camera "traps" to monitor wildlife. Left to their own devices for six weeks at a time, the motion-activated cameras snapped photos when triggered



by passing animals. Early last December, we took the cameras down, wrapping up a continuous data set spanning two years and encompassing over 200,000 photos. Each individual photo is now being painstakingly analyzed by our stewardship crew and a cadre of student interns from Sonoma State University.

But why bother? Why pour so much time and energy into looking over images of animals that we'll probably never see? The reason is that, from these data sets, a well-versed wildlife expert can glean which parts of the corridor animals are more likely to pass through and which parts act as barriers to animal movement. The photos provide a wealth of precious data about animal behavior and also tell us which species live in the corridor and their relative abundance. This valuable information, in turn, was

critical for designing and implementing the management and monitoring strategy for the corridor.

Conceived and directed by SLT's Sonoma Valley program manager Tony Nelson, the *Sonoma Valley Wildlife Corridor Project: Management and Monitoring Strategy* lists factors impacting wildlife passage in the corridor and recommends actions that corridor partners and landowners can take to better facilitate animal movement. Funded in part by the Gordon and Betty Moore Foundation and a grant made through the Bay Area Conservation Initiative of the Resources Legacy Fund, the Strategy can be found at www.sonomalandtrust.org.

We are steadily making progress in ticking off the actions to enhance viability of the wildlife corridor. One such endeavor was our Stuart Creek project,





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which involved removing three creek barriers to reopen access for threatened steelhead to 2.5 miles of spawning and nursery habitat. This project was completed in October 2014 and we are monitoring for steelhead spawning activity for at least three years. We are also working with local groups to plant native trees and shrubs that will improve the habitat along the creek, benefiting wild animals as well as steelhead.

Another focus of our work in the corridor is looking at how animals use underpasses and culverts to move safely beneath roads like Highway 12. We recently completed a Wildlife Corridor Underpass Use Report (also available on our website), which summarizes a year's worth of wildlife camera data collected from culverts and underpasses in the corridor. This information helps us determine how these passages affect animal movement. Preliminary analyses indicate that large numbers of common animals, such as deer and gray fox, frequently use underpasses, especially around busy roads. This underlines the importance of these culverts and passages in increasing "permeability" of the wildlife corridor (the ability of wildlife to move through it). Since so many animals are crossing under the roads, this indicates that these structures improve safety for humans as



well. Our cameras also picked up uncommonly seen species — a few beaver sightings and one lone porcupine — telling us that the corridor is more biodiverse than we previously thought.

Culverts and underpasses are helping wildlife move throughout the corridor, but their avenues are still limited by residential and agricultural use by humans. Landowners along the corridor, however, can expand these avenues by making their properties more wildlife-friendly. Sonoma Land Trust has developed a brochure giving advice on how landowners can better coexist with our wildlife and help protect the Sonoma Valley Wildlife Corridor. The advice includes ideas about how to design fencing, minimize outdoor night lighting and avoid the use of pesticides, among many others. Additionally, we are hosting meetings for landowners on Sonoma Mountain and in the Mayacamas to discuss how we can all work together to strike a balance between human activity and wildlife movement.

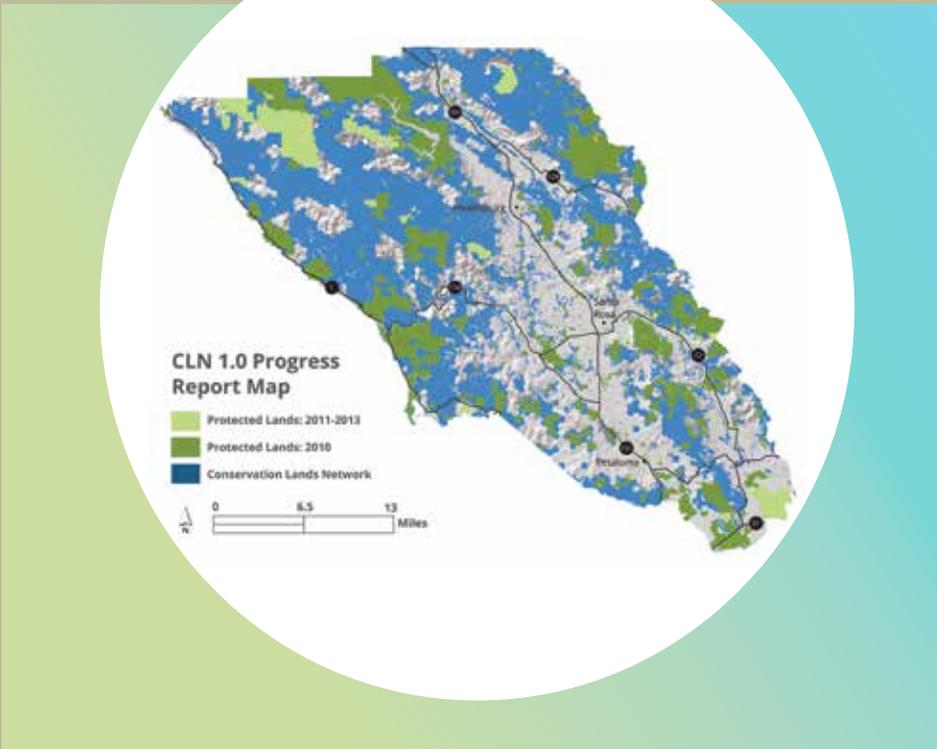
So what's next? The Sonoma Valley

Wildlife Corridor is actually one section of a longer corridor that spans Sonoma County from Napa to Marin. The successes that we have achieved have prompted us to begin planning an expansion of our efforts to include the entire corridor. "There's still a lot of data to analyze to further clarify animal use of the corridor," says Tony. "We're working now to secure additional funding to allow us to assess permeability through additional properties, to conduct meetings with additional neighborhoods and communities, and to help willing landowners implement recommendations from the Strategy across a much wider region."

The work we have spearheaded will be valuable to all landowners in the area far into the future, helping keep the wildlife corridor the wild place that it is. And it is also changing how the Land Trust and our neighbors manage our lands. Recently, Caltrans called us to request some project data — yes, our work is now influencing Caltrans to design bridges in the region with minimal risk to wildlife!

Nicole Na is SLT's communications coordinator.

(Continued from back cover)



Marc Schwager and Allison Ash witnessed all this for the first time in 1998, on a search for a small weekend getaway. The couple hadn't previously considered purchasing undeveloped land, especially a parcel spanning 80 acres — but they fell in love with the property, captivated by the magic of Elarra's natural beauty. As they became more familiar with their new stomping grounds, they also began to appreciate the land's ecological values. Deer, mountain lions and gray foxes roamed freely through Elarra's chaparral and old-growth Douglas fir forest. Alison and Marc realized that the Hooker Creek watershed, a pristine riparian jewel, needed preserving for all the lives dependent on it.

Then, in 2001, they learned about conservation easements from a landowner in Montana and knew that an easement was the right step to take to protect their Elarra forever. "We felt that, as stewards of the property, it was something positive we could do to preserve the area in perpetuity," says Marc. They contacted Sonoma Land Trust and began the conversation about how to protect the canyon.

What IS a conservation easement?

A conservation easement is a legal agreement between a landowner and a qualified conservation organization that restricts future activities on the land to protect its conservation values. A conservation easement is a tool that landowners may use to create their legacy of protecting their land in perpetuity.

Why are conservation easements so vital to land conservation? Conservation easements are a flexible tool used to conserve land that is to remain in private ownership, like family farms, natural lands, forests and ranches. Conservation easements also represent the values held close to the heart by the landowner and land conservation organizations.

There's a lot of land to protect in Sonoma County

To date, Sonoma Land Trust has secured more than \$100 million to protect over 50,000 acres of land in Sonoma County, about 7,000 acres of which are protected by conservation easements. Thanks to the help of various other land conservation organizations working here, 21 percent

of Sonoma County — roughly 218,000 acres — had been protected as of 2013, according to the Bay Area Open Space Council, although Sonoma County, one of the largest counties in the Bay Area, remains one of the least protected. In the map at left, protected lands as of 2013 are represented in green. What's all that blue on the map, though? The blue represents lands that, according to the Conservation Lands Network, are habitats and linkages critical for meeting biodiversity conservation goals.

That's a lot of land to protect, more than can be accomplished by nonprofits and public agencies alone, so private landowners are key to reaching the shared land conservation goals in Sonoma County. Stewardship director Bob Neale explains, "There's a lot of important land to care for in Sonoma County. We need to work together, in partnership, with neighbors, farmers, ranchers and the whole range of private landowners in order to reach our collective goals for keeping our landscapes healthy and whole. We owe it to future generations to do this now." This is where conservation easements come in, as private landowners may use a conservation easement to protect their lands and their vision in perpetuity, and manage the lands accordingly.

It's not just land trusts — and, by extension, the community and wildlife — that benefit from conservation easements. Easements provide a host of benefits to landowners, too. Perhaps the greatest benefit resulting from a conservation easement is the ability for landowners to participate in a broader conservation ethos and leave their legacy on a place that is special to them. By placing an easement over property, landowners can shape their vision and intent for their land forever. Landowners, by donating conservation easements, are making a charitable contribution for the benefit of the public — by protecting clean water, clean air, wildlife habitat or a

WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO SAVE LAND FOREVER?

working farm, forest or ranch. In recognition of this generous gift, conservation easement donors may also realize financial benefits, like federal income or estate tax benefits or reductions in real property taxes.

Different types of easements

Conservation easements are very flexible tools and can be designed to match the landowner's goals for the future uses of the property. They range from a "forever wild" easement, which prohibits commercial and residential activities, to a "working lands" easement, which recognizes and permits the production of food and the harvest of timber as conservation values. Easements are an excellent way to ensure that the landscape as the landowner knows it is preserved in perpetuity. In short, this is what forever looks like — it's an opportunity for a landowner to leave their legacy and vision for the land, knowing that Sonoma Land Trust, as the easement holder, will monitor and defend the easement forever.

We also see our role as being a resource to landowners. We provide landowners with information on best management practices and are able to readily provide references to other experts — certified rangeland managers, registered professional foresters, botanists, ecologists, geologists, soil engineers and public agency staff members who manage grant programs for land management projects.

In addition to the community's conservation benefits and the landowners' satisfaction in protecting the land they love so much, conservation easements forge a simultaneous reward for both parties: the gain of a new partnership. The drafting of a new easement creates a platform for a connection between land trust and landowner, one

in which we work together with a common goal to preserve the land under the easement. This partnership even transcends ownership over time — when the property is transferred to a new owner, the conservation easement remains and Sonoma Land Trust connects with the new landowner, develops a new conservation partnership and makes sure that the original owner's intentions are followed.

Does forever really mean forever?

How does Sonoma Land Trust ensure that the conservation vision and the terms of a conservation easement are protected forever? We do so with the help of our knowledgeable and dedicated staff — along with our crack team of volunteer easement monitors. "Monitors are our eyes on the land," says SLT conservation easement program manager Crystal Simons. "Their job each year is to take a snapshot in time, document what they observe on the property and prepare a simple report." On annual monitoring trips, volunteers meet with

the landowner and tour the property with cameras and compasses in hand. They review the conservation easement, discuss any changes on the land with the owners, take photos and make notes about the property so that our staff can track changes over time.

Sonoma Land Trust's job is to uphold the promises made in the conservation easement and we take this job seriously. On the rare occasions when the terms of the conservation easement are violated, we will do what it takes to ensure the easement is upheld. Most often, the solution lies in a brief conversation and clarification of a misunderstanding; sometimes, however, we have no other options but to file suit. We make a promise to landowners who donate easements and it is our role, as the caretaker of the trust that our community has placed in us, to make sure the land remains protected forever. We take seriously our commitment to uphold the terms of the easement that captured the original conservation vision — like the values that Marc and Allison first recognized in Elarra.

Elarra is thriving today, protected by the exemplary stewardship of Marc and Allison and their foresight in donating the conservation easement to Sonoma Land Trust. Marc and Allison, true stewards of the land, give us frequent updates on their property, which sees seasonal changes. Though parched by drought these past few years, the waterfalls are once again running at full volume with the recent rains. One thing that remains constant, though, is Marc and Allison's vision for Elarra. "We want it to remain wild and unchanged forever," says Marc. As holders of Elarra's conservation easement, we'll do our part to keep it that way.

Nicole Na is SLT's communications coordinator.





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Mark your calendar!

Join us for the opening of the

Bay Trail at Sears Point

on **May 15** (details to come)

WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO SAVE LAND FOREVER?

The property known as Elarra crowns the Mayacamas, cradled by the Sonoma and Napa Valleys. On a clear day, visitors bear witness to the fog blankets rolling low in Sonoma Valley, with Mount Tamalpais and Mount Diablo rising green and golden from the valley floors, and sometimes even San Francisco, veiled by a net of faint haze. Two creeks — Hooker and Stuart — flow through Elarra, their waters rushing white in the spring and cascading in waterfalls that provide a faint burbling backdrop to the scenery.

(Continued on page 6)

BY NICOLE NA

