

No Mountain Too High

SONOMA LAND TRUST
2013–2014 Report to the Community

Dear Friends,

As the many pages of this report make clear, the Sonoma Land Trust community is big and growing. We believe it is important to acknowledge everyone who sustains the ongoing conservation work we do. Membership gifts at every level provide the foundation for our efforts, and larger gifts enable us to work at a scale commensurate with the conservation needs of our scenic county.

Sonoma County's landscapes are changing — always have been, always will. The bay is filled — wetlands are restored. A creek is dammed and fish are blocked — the creek is restored and fish again pass upstream. Another creek erodes — willows are planted and the land is healed. The landscape is fragmented by subdivisions — but, sometimes, conservation efforts keep it intact. Forests are over-logged — forests are restored. This is the arena in which Sonoma Land Trust works: on the positive side and taking the long view. The beauty of this county is a legacy that all of us hope to pass on — but even healthier and more beautiful than we enjoy it today.

This report speaks to the progress your land trust has made over the past year. The small structure in the distance in the photo on the cover is the volunteer fire lookout at the top of Pole Mountain. It's one of the last of its kind. Pole Mountain was just added to the inventory of protected land that we and our many partners manage throughout Sonoma County. Soon,



Collecting cow bones on a hike at Tolay Creek Ranch. Photo by Scott Hess Photography.

we will be organizing hikes for the intrepid to see the lookout up close.

Thank you for supporting Sonoma Land Trust.

For the land,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Denny Van Ness".

Denny Van Ness
Board Chair

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Ralph Benson".

Ralph Benson
Executive Director



Ralph Benson and Denny Van Ness



Sonoma Land Trust acquired Tolay Creek Ranch in 2007 to complete the link of protected lands from San Pablo Bay up to Sonoma Mountain. Later this year, our ranch will become part of Tolay Lake Regional Park and more people will be able to hike all the way to the top of the ridge to see the wildflowers blooming in the serpentine area, as these springtime hikers recently did. Photo by Corby Hines.

“Land really is the best art.”

— ANDY WARHOL



We are pleased to report to you, our friends and supporters, that Sonoma Land Trust has had a banner year. Major transactions have closed, complex restoration projects are underway, people are out enjoying the land and we are charting new territory with new partners envisioning a beautiful, compassionate, ecologically sensitive and economically viable future for the Sonoma Developmental Center. This publication is both a report on our recent work and a thank you letter to the many people whose names are listed on the following pages and who make our land conservation work possible.

At 38 years old, Sonoma Land Trust has hit its stride. Over the past year, thanks to your support, we acquired the strategically placed Haire Ranch on Skaggs Island, protected the highest peak along the Sonoma Coast, broke ground on the Sears Point Wetlands Restoration Project, continued our efforts to keep the Sonoma Valley Wildlife Corridor open, and introduced more than 2,000 school-children to the various forms of life along Tolay Creek.

We also engaged with a state issue affecting us locally. Just as we took the lead in creating a Sonoma County solution to the State Parks crisis, we are now deep in the details of saving the Sonoma Developmental Center’s irreplaceable services and wild land. In a situation like this, there is risk and opportunity. Your land trust is focusing on the latter and working to craft a positive outcome for everyone involved.



There is only one Pole Mountain, the highest peak along the Sonoma Coast. With its dazzling panoramic views and direct connections to the Jenner Headlands and Little Black Mountain, Pole Mountain promises to be an enduring gem among Sonoma Land Trust's preserves. Photo by Stephen Joseph Photography.

From one end of the county to the other

At one million acres, ours is a big county, twice the size of Marin and highly diverse. From the North Coast down to the Baylands, and from the Estero Americano over to the Mayacamas, we are always on alert for the chance to protect a distinctive property. Last year, two long-awaited prospects became available that warranted all-out efforts by our staff.

BREAKING NEWS

On June 30th of this year, we closed escrow on Pole Mountain along the North Coast! Almost one year to the day of entering into a purchase contract with the conservation-minded landowners, this exceptional 238-acre property was protected forever. We wish to thank the many of you who responded to our campaign to raise the funding for this project. You came through with more than \$400,000, which we were then able to leverage to raise the additional funds for the acquisition. Our success with our funding partners means we will be able to use your generous donations

toward ongoing stewardship and trail expenses. Many thanks to the David and Lucile Packard Foundation, the Sonoma County Agricultural Preservation and Open Space District, the State Coastal Conservancy and the State Wildlife Conservation Board for making this \$2.35 million acquisition possible.

Equally as significant was the coveted acquisition late last year of 1,092-acre Haire Ranch in the southern part of the county. For a decade, Haire Ranch had stood in the way of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's plan to restore all of 4,300-acre Skaggs Island from diked baylands to historic

tidal marsh. Now that Haire Ranch has been secured and transferred to the San Pablo Bay National Wildlife Refuge, the reestablishment of the wetlands can begin, bringing numerous biological benefits to the region. The \$8.3 million purchase price for Haire Ranch was provided by the Natural Resources Conservation Service, the State Coastal Conservancy and the Gordon and Betty Moore Foundation.

With gratitude to the Federated Indians of Graton Rancheria and Station Casinos, our land conservation in the Baylands expanded last year when they donated 321 acres along Lakeville Highway to us. And later this year, we plan to acquire a lovely 27-acre property in the Sonoma Valley that is a vital part of the Sonoma Valley Wildlife Corridor. Currently owned by the Curreri family, we will transfer it upon closing escrow to Regional Parks to expand Sonoma Valley Regional Park and create new recreational opportunities for park visitors.



San Francisco Bay lost 85 percent of its historic wetlands to development and farming, but the tide is turning. Here, Baylands program manager Julian Meisler explains how, through the Sears Point Wetland Restoration Project and acquisitions like Haire Ranch, Sonoma Land Trust is working to bring back as much of the original marshlands as possible to help protect against sea level rise from climate change.



Fortunately, Sonoma County's bay frontage was farmed rather than developed over the last 120 years. Thanks to the landowners in the Baylands who kept their land in agriculture all this time, like Jim Haire of Haire Ranch (pictured above) and Fred Dickson of Dickson Ranch, now part of Sears Point Ranch, the critical wetland restoration projects are possible. Photo by Corby Hines.

FINDING THE RIGHT STEWARD

While Sonoma Land Trust owns and maintains a number of preserves, we also acquire properties for specific purposes and then transfer them to other organizations or agencies to carry out the objectives, such as we did with Haire Ranch and will do with the Curreri's property in the Sonoma Valley. Over this past year, we also transferred title on the Jenner Headlands and some of our properties in the Baylands, and are now preparing to transfer out Tolay Creek Ranch.

As planned from the beginning, we transferred title to the Jenner Headlands to The Wildlands Conservancy (TWC) last fall. We have enjoyed a close working relationship with TWC since the end of 2009 when they provided a substantial loan to purchase the property after the promised State bond funds were frozen, jeopardizing the

\$36 million deal. Thanks to TWC, the acquisition closed on schedule. Since then, both of our organizations have worked together to manage and steward this large, diverse landscape, and we both expect that our partnership on the Headlands will continue. Because TWC specializes in providing public access and educational opportunities on their large landholdings in other parts of the state, Sonoma County residents and visitors to the area can look forward to a future of increased access at the Jenner Headlands as well. In time, sturdy hikers will also be able to hike from the Jenner Headlands to Pole Mountain!

Another long-anticipated transfer occurred earlier this year when part of Sears Point Ranch and our North Parcel seasonal wetland property across Highway 37 were deeded to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to expand its

When we acquire the Curreri's picturesque property, it will immediately become part of Sonoma Valley Regional Park. Photo by Wendy Eliot.





The Jenner Headlands HawkWatch has become our leading citizen science project, with more than 20 volunteers visiting the property each week during the fall migration to record the number of raptors soaring along the Pacific Flyway. Participating in this project is a wild experience and an important responsibility. Groundbreaking scientist Rachel Carson based her theory of DDT's toxic impact on decades of data she accessed about raptors passing by Pennsylvania's Hawk Mountain. Who knows what may result from the Jenner HawkWatch team's data? Photo courtesy of Tom Reynolds.

San Pablo Bay National Wildlife Refuge. We will transfer another 1,000 acres to the Refuge upon completion of our Sears Point tidal marsh restoration project, but we are retaining the wildflower-rich upland section on the north side of the highway, along with the beautiful building we built to house meetings and educational presentations.

Lastly, later this year, we plan to transfer title for 1,665-acre Tolley Creek Ranch to Regional Parks, which will double the size of Tolley Lake Regional Park. Transferring land to partners whose visions align with ours, and who can often provide greater recreational access opportunities, frees up Sonoma Land Trust to tackle additional new and exciting projects ... *for future generations.*



A white-tailed kite lands on a pine tree at the Jenner Headlands. Photo courtesy of Tom Reynolds.

KEEPING AN EYE ON WILDLIFE

Our staff who have been working on the Sonoma Valley Wildlife Corridor Project have made significant progress in understanding wildlife movement patterns and reducing threats to passage across this critical Bay Area habitat link. With funding from the Gordon and Betty Moore Foundation and donations from our members, we have deployed more than 40 “critter cams” that are taking thousands of photos to determine the current state of wild animal movement across the Valley. We are continuing to acquire key parcels along Stuart Creek and in the narrowest part of the corridor through which animals may be experiencing difficulty moving, while also maintaining our focus on the imperiled Sonoma Developmental Center (SDC).

The character of Sonoma Valley for decades to come will be determined by the fate of SDC. Change is coming from the State and the mode of caring for patients residing at the Center is also changing. With the hiring of land acquisition project manager John McCaull in 2013, we strengthened our staffing capacity and expertise to manage a campaign to permanently protect SDC’s wild lands on the eastern slope of Sonoma Mountain. Our conservation work is also done in partnership with the community. We are talking with and educating landowners about things they can do to aid wildlife, such as promoting native vegetation and



The Sonoma Developmental Center’s 800 acres of open space that constitute the core of a natural wildlife corridor from the Mayacamas to Sonoma Mountain are at serious risk. Sonoma Land Trust is working collaboratively on a comprehensive, locally developed vision for the future that would retain the Center’s services and keep the undeveloped land forever wild. Photo courtesy of Sonoma Ecology Center.



The camera traps we’ve placed in the Sonoma Valley Wildlife Corridor are helping us to determine wild animal and habitat usage. This science is instrumental to our acquisition, landowner outreach and stewardship work in the Corridor.

minimizing fencing. Saving SDC and the wildlife corridor are multi-faceted, multi-year endeavors that your gifts to Sonoma Land Trust help support.

BRINGING LAND BACK TO HEALTH

Sonoma Land Trust’s practice is to leave a place in better shape than we find it. At the Jenner Headlands, this means restoring the redwood forest to an earlier time when trees grew bigger and healthier. Last year, among myriad stewardship projects, the Jenner team piloted a 20-acre shaded fuel break program to reduce fuel loads on the property and provide access for firefighters in the event of a wildfire.

At Tolay Creek Ranch, our goal has been to help restore the creek by repairing stream banks, planting native trees and plants, and changing when and where livestock are set out to graze. This is yet another huge project that got a big boost last year with the help of our partners at STRAW (Students and Teachers Restoring A Watershed), a program of Point Blue Conservation Science, which brought out more than 2,000 children over the last two years to plant, irrigate and weed willow and other native trees and shrubs along the creek.



At Glen Oaks Ranch last year we turned back the clock on an historic stone barn that subsequently earned us an award from the Sonoma League for Historic Preservation. Photo by John Hanses Photography.

And then there's the Sears Point Wetland Restoration Project — all 1,000 acres of it. The magnitude of this effort is huge: In the last nine years, we have raised nearly \$18 million for the project and orchestrated an intensive planning, environmental impact reporting, designing and partnering process — before we could lift a shovel. This June, we broke ground and are now beginning to build tidal marsh!

Last year, we built a new road into the property to provide safe access and removed the buildings south of the rail line where the grand 2-1/2-mile levee and marsh are being constructed. Currently, our contractors are digging channels in the future marshland area to provide material for building the levee and soon they will be constructing hundreds of “marsh mounds” to collect sediment and provide habitat for plants and animals. Next fall, we will breach the levee and make San Francisco Bay 1,000 acres larger.



Young people from STRAW, Conservation Corps North Bay, Boy Scouts, Analy and Casa Grande High Schools and additional youth organizations planted nearly every one of the more than 3,000 native trees, shrubs and sedges installed at Tolay Creek Ranch over the last few years. Photo by Scott Hess Photography.



PUT ON YOUR HIKING BOOTS

If you haven't hit the trails recently with your land trust, you are missing out on a lot. Our On the Land program has grown by leaps and bounds over the last two years, involving more than 1,000 individuals on more than 40 outings in both 2012 and 2013, amounts we may even surpass this year. From spring wildflower hikes all over the county to migratory raptor viewings along the coast to opportunities to delve deep into a topic, like geology or nature journaling or plants, we offer a wide array of experiences for both Land Trust members and the public. Your land trust possesses some of the most beautiful land in all the world thanks to your support — we hope you will take advantage of these enjoyable and restorative outings.



Despite the drought, our popular wildflower hikes in the Baylands did not disappoint this past spring. Photos by Lance Kuehne Photography.

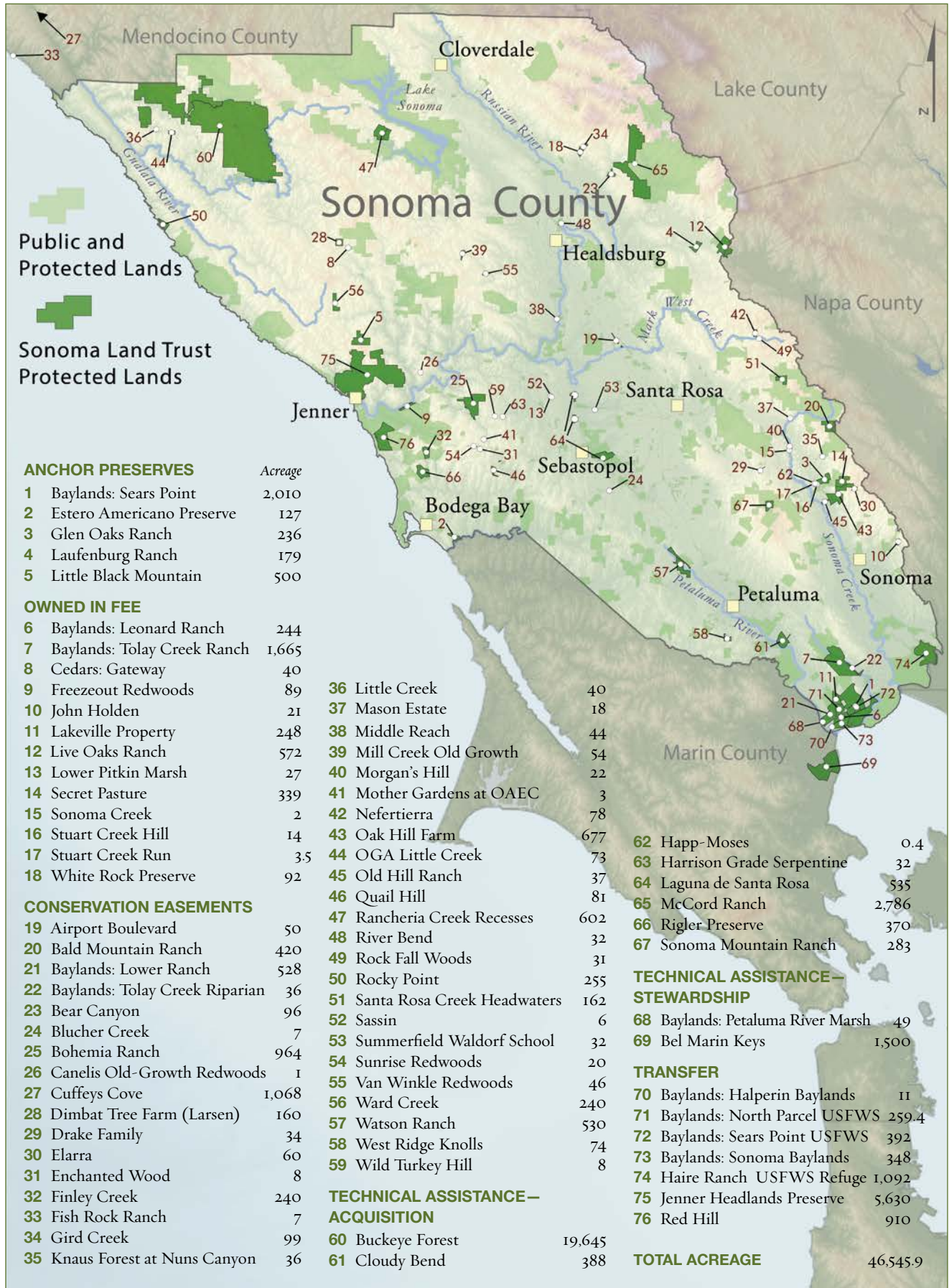
We couldn't accomplish all that we do without the help and enthusiasm of our many volunteers. Last year, more than 350 volunteers contributed more than 3,500 hours of their time, intellect and energy to our mission. Whether helping out on the land or in the office, our volunteers are indispensable to us. They count birds, whack weeds, clear trails, monitor easement properties, organize our files, and so much more. A million thanks to each of them.

WHEN IT COMES TIME TO GIVE ...

... Our donors always respond. We were fortunate to have had two large matching grants contributed last year that surpassed expectations. In the summer, a neighbor of Pole Mountain provided a \$100,000 match to help us acquire and manage this stunning summit, and at the end of the year, Sonoma resident Bill Jasper offered a \$250,000 match out of his deep love of the land. Thanks to the success of these endeavors and our donors' generosity, we entered 2014 with a strong balance sheet and the ability to carry out the work you expect of us — and more.

With fewer tax funds available for land acquisition, donations from our supporters are vital to sustaining the work of Sonoma Land Trust. It is you who makes it possible to realize the vision for our county that we all share. Thank you for helping to preserve what we all love most about this magnificent place we call home.

OUR DIVERSIFIED PORTFOLIO OF CONSERVATION PROJECTS



Financial Statements

The amounts presented here are derived from Sonoma Land Trust's financial statements for years ending December 31, 2013 and December 31, 2012. Copies of the audited reports of financial statements are available upon request.

STATEMENT OF FINANCIAL POSITION AT DECEMBER 31

ASSETS	2013 (pre-audit)	2012 (audited)
Cash and cash equivalents	\$ 5,445,645	\$ 3,405,378
Investments	2,758,637	3,736,406
Contracts and other receivables	2,212,286	373,558
Pledges receivable	2,680,240	1,348,523
Deposits and other assets	170,026	91,435
Conservation lands and easements	34,031,612	68,656,882
Property and equipment, net	2,308,413	931,340
<i>Total Assets</i>	<i>\$ 49,606,859</i>	<i>\$ 78,543,522</i>
LIABILITIES AND NET ASSETS		
<u>Liabilities</u>		
Accounts payable and accrued expenses	\$ 2,568,092	\$ 381,703
Deferred income	566,589	137,654
Short-term note payable	0	350,000
Long-term debt	80,000	—
<i>Total Liabilities</i>	<i>\$ 3,214,681</i>	<i>\$ 869,357</i>
<u>Net Assets</u>		
Unrestricted		
Available for operations	\$ 3,337,130	\$ 2,622,521
Board designated — conservation projects	762,231	739,721
Investment in conservation lands*	34,590,796	68,656,882
Total unrestricted net assets	\$ 38,690,157	\$ 72,019,124
Temporarily restricted net assets	7,702,021	5,655,041
<i>Total Net Assets</i>	<i>\$ 46,392,178</i>	<i>\$ 77,674,165</i>
<i>Total Liabilities and Net Assets</i>	<i>\$ 49,606,859</i>	<i>\$ 78,543,522</i>

STATEMENT OF ACTIVITIES FOR THE YEARS ENDED DECEMBER 31

REVENUE AND SUPPORT		
Contributions and grants	\$ 7,754,149	\$ 2,917,863
In-kind contributions	62,906	47,014
In-kind contributions: Conservation land & improvements	—	335,320
Project income	368,199	1,121,364
Investment income	470,968	334,417
Other gains (losses)	—	(1,290)
<i>Total Revenue and Support</i>	<i>\$ 8,656,222</i>	<i>\$ 4,754,688</i>
EXPENDITURES		
Projects and stewardship	5,032,756	4,406,609
Governance and administrative	746,091	652,170
Fundraising	422,447	380,531
<i>Total Expenditures</i>	<i>\$ 6,201,294</i>	<i>\$ 5,439,310</i>
Net income before land acquisitions & donations	\$2,454,928	\$ (684,622)
Land acquisition expenses	(1,711,323)	(2,742)
Land acquisition contributions (net)	5,474,197	1,198,000
Property grants to other organizations*	(37,499,781)	0
<i>Net income after land acquisitions & donations</i>	<i>\$ 31,281,979</i>	<i>\$ 510,636</i>

*In 2013, Sonoma Land Trust granted the Jenner Headlands property to The Wildlands Conservancy, resulting in a decrease in assets and a grant expense of \$37,499,781.



NONPROFIT
U.S. POSTAGE PAID
PETALUMA, CA
PERMIT NO. 201

... to protect the land forever

822 Fifth Street
Santa Rosa, CA 95404
www.sonomalandtrust.org



Board of Directors

Denny Van Ness, Chair
Robert Brent
Neal Fishman
Kenneth Freeman
Scott Hintz

Mark Jacobsen
Peter Mattson
Bill Osterland
Fred Reid
Harry Richardson

Maggie Salenger
Allison Sanford
Wendy Smit
Margaret Spaulding
Peter Van Alyea

Staff

Ralph Benson,
Executive Director

Karen Arrington, Development Manager
Sheri Cardo, Director of Communications
Dale Carroll, Accounting Assistant
Kara Caselas, Stewardship Assistant Project Manager
Amy Chesnut, Acquisitions Director
Paul DeMarco, Director of Finance & Administration
Lauren Dixon, Parks Alliance Project Manager
Shanti Edwards, Stewardship Project Manager
Wendy Eliot, Conservation Director
Trevor George, Stewardship Assistant Project Manager
Georgiana Hale, Conservation Easement Stewardship Manager
Corby Hines, Outings Assistant

Deirdre Holbrook, Assistant to the Executive Director
for Strategic Initiatives
Joseph Kinyon, GIS Manager
Reta Lockert, Donor Relations Director
John McCaull, Land Acquisition Project Manager
Julian Meisler, Baylands Program Manager
Bob Neale, Stewardship Director
Tony Nelson, Stewardship Project Manager
Corinne Neuman, Senior Accountant
Elizabeth Newton, Office Manager
Beverly Scotland, Development Director
Ingrid Spetz, Outings Manager

Editor/Writer: Sheri Cardo

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 conservation
 - ◆ Acquiring land and conservation easements
- ◆ Practicing stewardship, including the restoration of conservation properties
- ◆ Promoting a sense of place and a land ethic through activities, education and outreach

ABOVE PHOTO: A view of the Cedars from the top of Pole Mountain. Photo by Stephen Joseph Photography.