

WINTER 2018



Inside this issue

- 6 Managing land for wildlife and recreation
- 7 Reducing future fire impacts in Sonoma Valley
- 8 Bidding farewell to SDC clients and staff

... to protect the land forever



Ray Krauss and his dog, Darla, look out over the property that Ray and his wife, Barbara Shumsky, are protecting with a donated conservation easement.

PROTECTING 10 PROPERTIES AND 10,000 ACRES IN FOUR YEARS

BY HEATHER AH SAN

With more than a dozen projects in our land protection pipeline, we are excited to report that two properties are very close to being permanently protected within the next several weeks. Ranging from the Sonoma Coast to Sonoma Valley, these strategic acquisitions will safeguard vast, open spaces from future development and prepare our community to be more resilient in the face of a changing climate.

With your support, we are working to complete the Starcross Conservation Easement near the Sonoma Coast and the Krauss Conservation Easement in the Mark West Creek watershed. Both are part of our goal to protect at least 10 priority properties and 10,000 acres over the next four years. As we face increasing threats from climate change, overdevelopment and wildfires, we must accelerate our efforts.

(Continued on page 3)

Our End-of-Year Challenge is under way until December 31. Your donation will help us meet the challenge of raising \$1 million for critical conservation projects. Read more about the impact of your donation inside!



A NOTE FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

TENDING TO THE HEART

One of the things I've enjoyed most about a career in conservation is meeting people and listening to their stories and connection to the land. Land trusts often measure progress by tracking the number of acres protected and, while this is a key metric for us, I believe the true measurement of conservation success is how individuals value these special places in their hearts.

Over the past two summers, we've had the privilege of hosting a bilingual Bay Camp for kids to explore the lands we've protected and are restoring along San Pablo Bay. On their first day, Bay Campers often see the tidal marsh as an unknown and strange place to be;

however, by the end of a week of discovery, they're bobbing along in their kayaks, running through the mud and calling out the wildlife they see by name. This is just as it should be, connecting hearts to the land in the first degree.

The future is not promised to us; the special places we hold dear—the Sonoma Coast, Russian River, San Pablo Bay, Sonoma Mountain and Mayacamas Range—rely upon our acts of stewardship today. As mounting concern grows from the impacts of climate change and expansive growth in the North Bay, your support is so greatly needed to conserve the places we love and near which we live.

With your continued help, we'll protect the special land of Sonoma County forever. Measuring our success not only by the number of acres protected, but also by the number of hearts that see land as a vital part of the community to which we belong.

We'll see you out there!

DAVE KOEHLER
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

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A LEGACY OF LAND PROTECTION

Ray Krauss sits on a lawn chair overlooking rolling grasslands and a forest of oaks and Douglas fir in the distance. This is his land and he's been looking at it for over 40 years—as long as Sonoma Land Trust has been around. Before land trusts came into existence, before the environmental movement even took off, Ray saw what was happening to the natural world around him and had the foresight to take action. From the beginning, he has been in the vanguard of the local conservation movement, having been one of Sonoma County's first environmental planners. So it was fitting that, 40 years later, Ray sought out the Land Trust to generously donate a conservation easement over his 60-acre property in the upper Mark West Creek watershed. Biodiverse and water-rich, the property has been methodically and lovingly stewarded by Ray to restore its native oak woodlands. The property's mosaic of habitats are suitable for numerous species, including mountain lion and black bear, and its clear, clean springs provide an important year-round source of water that flows to Mark West Creek, a priority stream for recovery of endangered coho salmon.

"As you look around, what's happening to the land overall is fairly discouraging," says Ray. "Even if it's just one piece of the puzzle, protecting this property will provide a refuge in the face of an uncertain future."

A COMMUNITY OF CARE

On a beautiful property just inland from the Sonoma Coast, the ecumenical Starcross Monastic Community lives peacefully among shimmering olive groves, open fields and quiet forest. But don't be mistaken—their community isn't sheltered from the world's many problems; in fact, for over 40 years, they've worked hard to tackle them. With projects as far reaching as helping children impacted by AIDS in the U.S. and abroad, to feeding the region's underserved, the Starcross community is nothing short of passionately altruistic.



(Top) Ninety-acre Starcross Farm near Annapolis. (Bottom) Sister Julie and Brother Toby of Starcross. Photos by Beiron Andersson.

And now, they're also affirming their longtime passion for saving the land.

"We believe the land is sacred," says Brother Toby McCarroll, co-founder. "We'll do everything we can to protect it."

Starcross's gorgeous 90-acre property among the coastal hills is central to the community's mission of living a good and simple life at "a spiritual sanctuary for people and nature." The community has



an orchard and gardens where they grow and process organic olive oil, as well as a variety of fruits and vegetables for their food pantry and farmstand open to the community. Young volunteers interested in combining spirituality and sustainable living lend a hand with the farm operation. Beyond the farm and monastery lies more than 70 acres of wild land that the community maintains as a sanctuary for both people and wildlife. In addition to redwood and Douglas fir forest and open grassland, the property boasts locally uncommon stands of sugar pines and hybrid manzanita, and a stretch of Grasshopper Creek, a tributary of Buckeye Creek in the Gualala River watershed.

"It's been a pleasure working with the Land Trust," says Sister Julie DeRossi, co-founder. "They've got this great reputation in the community; we feel so lucky."

We are thrilled to work with the Starcross Monastic Community, as well, to protect this natural oasis and working farm forever.

(Continued on page 4)



Locations of current projects featured in this article. Map by Joseph Kinyon.

PROTECTING ICONIC LANDSCAPES

Earlier this summer, we assisted Sonoma Ag + Open Space with the purchase of a conservation easement over a 978-acre southern Sonoma County ranch adjacent to Highway 121 and the newly expanded Tolay Lake Regional Park (which includes our former Tolay Creek Ranch and is now open to the public). Named the Gravelly Lake Conservation Easement, this scenic property is quintessential

Sonoma County, with vast grasslands, rolling hillsides and oak woodlands, all covering a large swath of Sonoma Mountain. Its stunning vistas will now be protected in perpetuity. Of course, it isn't just the views we were keen to protect—the property hosts headwater streams draining to San Pablo Bay and significant natural habitat that allows wildlife movement between Sonoma Mountain and the Baylands. Next time you're out at Tolay Lake Regional Park, take in the

view knowing that it has been protected for you, for wildlife and for the land.

ACCESS FOR ALL

At Sonoma Land Trust, we believe that protecting natural open spaces benefits us all. Many of our preserves are in remote areas that are difficult to get to for recreation. Yet, providing the larger community with opportunities to enjoy nature's splendor is also one of our core values. That's why we're excited to have the opportunity to add acreage to one of our community's most-used urban open spaces: Taylor Mountain Regional Park. Sonoma Land Trust is working with Sonoma County Regional Parks to acquire a 53-acre parcel named Cooper Creek that will add another access point to the park from neighborhoods in southeast Santa Rosa. It will also enable future connections between the park and planned urban trails—including the Santa Rosa Southeast Greenway—while protecting the creek habitat on this scenic hillside property. We look forward to telling you more about this project in 2019!

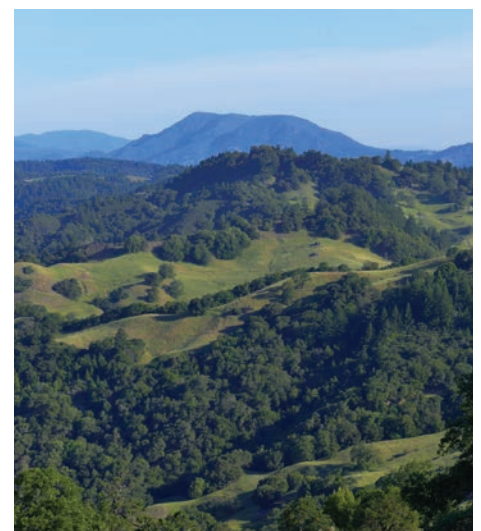
A MAJOR ACQUISITION COMING UP

We're also working hard to conserve some key landscapes that will allow more connectivity for wildlife along what is known as the Marin Coast-Blue Ridge Critical Linkage, a massive area that stretches from the Marin Headlands to Napa and Lake Counties.

McCormick Ranch is a stunning 654-acre



Hikers on SLT's Tolay Creek Ranch, now part of Tolay Lake Regional Park. Photo by Lance Kuehne.



McCormick Ranch. Photo by Shawn Paul Luchin.

historic ranch nestled high in the hills along the Napa and Sonoma County borders that we are working to protect. If we are successful, the ranch will become part of a larger, intact region of parks and protected lands totaling over 10,000 acres. With high ecological integrity and little fragmentation, it provides crucial wildlife habitat because it sits within both the Sonoma Valley and Blue Ridge Wildlife Corridors. The headwaters of three streams start on the property and feed clean, cold water into Santa Rosa and Sonoma Creeks in Sonoma County, and Sulphur Creek in Napa County. The ranch is situated between Sugarloaf and Hood Mountain parks, which would allow the Bay Area Ridge Trail to extend north,

connecting the two popular parks and offering outdoor enthusiasts the opportunity for multi-day treks. Stay tuned for details next year—we'll need your help to complete the protection of this significant landscape.

HELP PROTECT THE PICTURE

Your continued support of our mission is what allows us to protect such vital lands. Regardless of size, each property is part of a larger vision of protecting and caring for our treasured landscapes and building a community resilient to climate change.

Stewarding our landscapes is as important as acquiring them; in order for land to be restored to its natural state—like we're

doing in the Baylands—we need to be on the ground, managing and monitoring. And we're actively engaging, educating and advocating for land conservation among our community members, too, which is a third and critical component of protecting the land.

Our work is multi-faceted and, with so much at stake, your support is needed now more than ever. Thank you for helping us protect the beautiful land of Sonoma County forever.

Heather Ah San is Sonoma Land Trust's communications coordinator.



WHY THEY PROTECT THE LAND FOREVER



"I've watched Sonoma Land Trust grow from the beginning and admired their conservation work. It's an institution in which we can have confidence because of their commitment."

— Ray Krauss, conservation easement landowner

"I meet extraordinary people when volunteering for Sonoma Land Trust. If I were stranded on an island, there are some friends and family I'd like with me, as well as virtually everyone I've met volunteering. Thanks for the opportunity to meet such great people while helping the environment."

— Carolyn Boyles, volunteer

"Raising funds for land conservation is easy for me because it means keeping what I love about this place. I feel so lucky to live in Sonoma County."

— Ellie Rilla, board member

The Gordon and Betty Moore Foundation generously supports our land protection and stewardship efforts and encourages others to make a donation by December 31 in support of Sonoma Land Trust's mission.

MANAGING LAND FOR WILDLIFE AND RECREATION

BY SHERI CARDO

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, ...?

Sheri Cardo is Sonoma Land Trust's director of communications.



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

REDUCING FUTURE FIRE IMPACTS IN SONOMA VALLEY

BY TONY NELSON

The impacts of the 2017 Nuns Fire in Sonoma and Napa Counties remain ever-present in our minds. The Sonoma Valley region that burned has experienced large-scale fires in the past and, in the future, fires are likely to become more frequent and occur over a prolonged annual season. In light of this and considering that fire is a phenomenon that doesn't respect human property boundaries, Sonoma Land Trust, Audubon Canyon Ranch, Sonoma Ag + Open Space, Sonoma County Regional Parks, Sonoma Mountain Ranch Preservation Foundation and California State Parks are collaborating to develop landscape-scale management of fire and vegetation in Sonoma Valley and the surrounding hills.

The towns and homes within Sonoma Valley are surrounded by thousands of acres of protected wild lands and parks that are managed for ecological benefit and our enjoyment, intermixed with farms, vineyards and ranches scattered along steep mountain roads. While building with fire-resistant materials and maintaining defensible space around structures must be the first line of defense for homeowners and communities, the manner in which wild lands are managed can significantly influence wildfire events by affecting fuel loads and fire intensity, and facilitating access and defense by firefighters.

As recent wildfires have again demonstrated, fire in residential areas is tragic. Yet scientists know that fire is a fundamental process in maintaining the ecological diversity and resiliency of many of California's landscapes. In fact, as we are seeing, the prolonged lack of fire will have consequences to plants and animals, water quantity and quality, soil condition and, ultimately, the size and behavior of an inevitable large wildfire consuming many years of fuel.

After decades of suppressing fire on the ground, fire management professionals, scientists and land managers concur on



A landscape in the process of recovering from the Nuns Fire on our Secret Pasture Preserve.

the benefits of prescribed fire, and the State of California is supporting significant increases in its use over coming years. Prescribed fire mimics natural processes, restoring fire to its historic role in wild land ecosystems; it can also reduce fire hazard, enhancing public and firefighter safety. Relatively small and more frequent burns under optimal conditions also produce far less smoke than would be released during a major wildfire. While it's impossible to eliminate all risk from fire, adding prescribed burns to the land managers' toolbox allows greater flexibility in promoting ecological health and human safety.

The new collaborative intends to use prescribed fire, fuel reduction and other vegetation management activities to enhance ecosystem values while reducing future risks from wildfire to homes and communities along the Highway 12

corridor. CAL FIRE will be a necessary partner in this bold effort and its local staff is supportive because the collaborative plans to accomplish priority elements of CAL FIRE's *Sonoma-Lake-Napa Unit Fire Management Plan*. It will also further the recommendations of Fire Safe Sonoma and the Sonoma County Office of Recovery and Resiliency.

Landscape-scale fire and vegetation management is a long-term effort. With the support of the community, Sonoma Land Trust and our conservation colleagues hope to make real progress over the next 10 years that will be cost effective and environmentally sustainable.

Tony Nelson is an ecologist and Sonoma Land Trust's Sonoma Valley program manager.



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PROTECTING WHAT WE LOVE

EVENTS BID FAREWELL TO SDC CLIENTS AND STAFF

BY JOHN MCCAULL

Saying goodbye is always difficult, and it's especially challenging when it's a final farewell. After 127 years of operation as a residential hospital for people with developmental disabilities, the Sonoma Developmental Center (SDC) is slated to close its doors forever by December 31. There are only about 25 residents left from the 350 people who lived at SDC when closure was announced in 2015 and, by December, they will be in new homes scattered around the Bay Area. Hundreds of staff who continue to work at the facility also face their last day on the job. Although the focus of Sonoma Land Trust is on protecting the 700 acres of open space and wildlife corridor lands on the property after closure, we are saddened to see friends, colleagues and longtime community leaders leave the Valley.

Under the theme of **Protecting What We Love**, Sonoma Land Trust, the Parent Hospital Association, the Glen Ellen Forum and The Eldridge Portraits Project served as a host committee to sponsor three events in October and November commemorating and honoring the workers, residents and families of SDC.

These included:

- Transforming the Village of Glen Ellen into a portrait gallery with imagery from the Eldridge Portraits Project, a series of images of SDC residents and families taken by photographers Christian Pease and Joe Garappolo with Light11B;
- Hosting a luncheon for SDC staff in conjunction with the facility's annual Halloween Parade to thank them for their many years of service; and
- A thank you and farewell celebration at the Hanna Boys Center attended by over 200 people to honor the history, legacy and story of SDC, while articulating a vision for the future.

As Sonoma Land Trust executive director Dave Koehler said at the farewell celebration, "The journey ahead for the land of SDC is a call for stewardship. Stewardship of the land and the stories of its people. This is public land, owned by the people of California, and we are Californians. Going forward, on whatever path we may take together, we are and will remain stewards of this beautiful land on Sonoma Mountain."

John McCaull is a land acquisition program manager for Sonoma Land Trust.

OUR MISSION

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.