

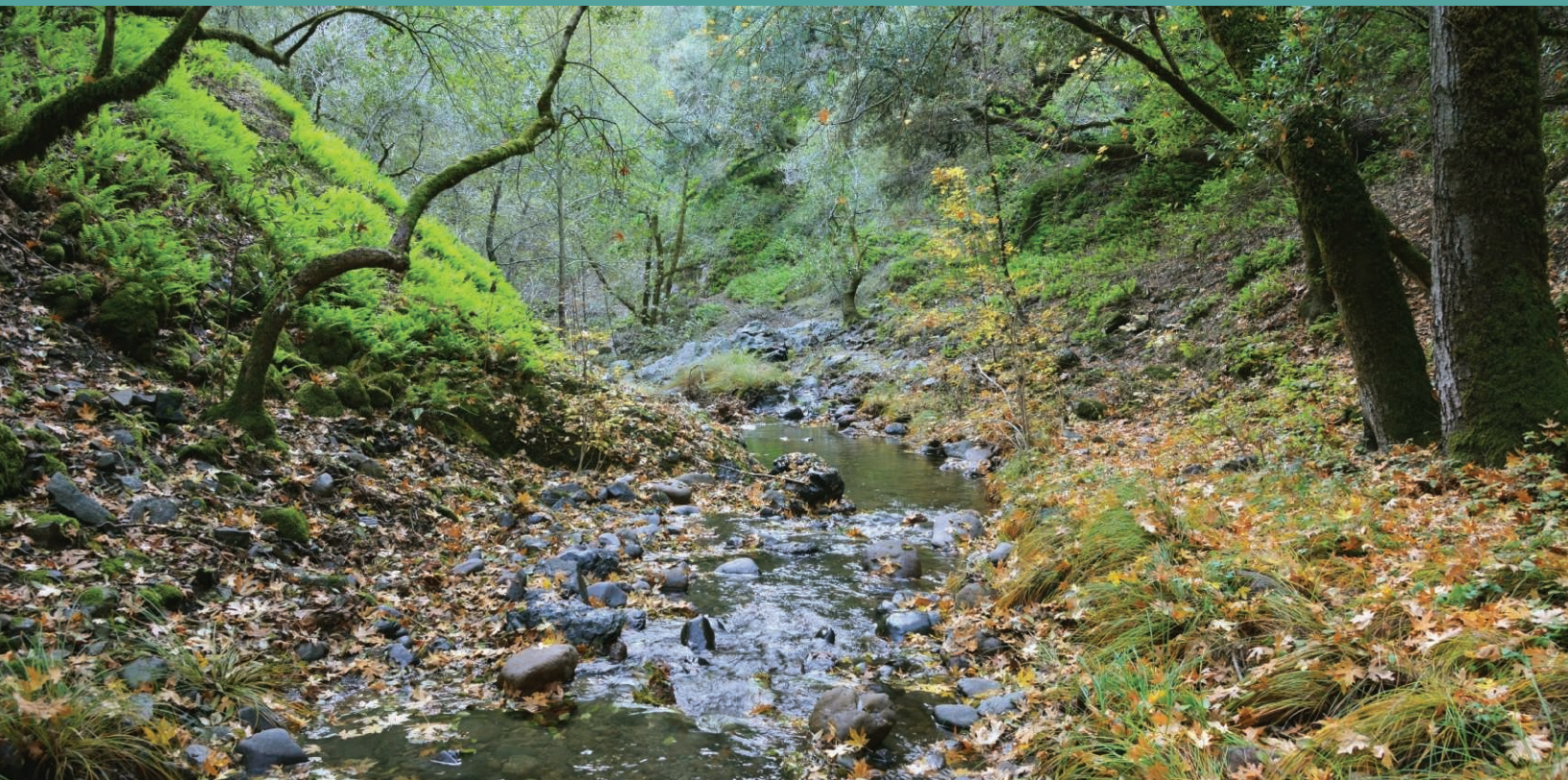
# SPRING 2018

## Inside this issue

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- 7 Prop. 68 promises new state funding



... to protect the land forever



*The stretch of Santa Rosa Creek on our new acquisition in the Mayacamas provides ideal conditions for spawning steelhead. Photo by Scott Hess Photography.*

## SMALL ACQUISITION MAKES BIG, WILD IMPACT

BY SHERI CARDO

Sonoma Land Trust has just purchased a 40-acre gem next to Hood Mountain Regional Park and Open Space Preserve that contains the last stand of redwoods in the Santa Rosa Creek watershed and is also part of a major wildlife linkage. An inholding accessible only through the

eastern boundary of the park, the newly named "Santa Rosa Creek Redwoods" property is completely undeveloped and contains the steep and wild Santa Rosa Creek canyon high up in the Mayacamas Mountains. Though there was interest from neighbors whose development

plans would have endangered the wild nature of this parcel, the landowners, whose family has farmed and run cattle on the western slopes of Hood Mountain since the late 1800s, were determined that the property be protected forever. And now it is.

*Continued on page 3*



## A NOTE FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

# PUTTING RESILIENCY INTO ACTION

Resiliency means more than just bouncing back — it also means being prepared for our future. We are humbled every day to hear the stories of heroism, strength of character, compassion and generosity of the people of Sonoma County taking place in the wake of the 2017 wildfires. We see firsthand the strength of our Sonoma County community and we are confident that, together, we will foster lasting recovery and stewardship of our cherished landscapes.

We are not powerless in the face of wildfire and we can, and should, prepare ourselves for the next one. History informs us that the Sonoma County we know and love has been and will continue to be shaped by fire. So we must find a path forward that allows it to serve a

beneficial purpose on our landscapes while managing the risks of wildfire to our homes and families.

As our collective recovery continues, Sonoma Land Trust will work alongside our partner organizations and agencies to protect and manage lands that buffer our towns and cities from catastrophic fire. Today, we are working to secure funding for vegetation management programs to safely reduce the decades-long buildup of fuel loads in our forests and chaparral. And we are undertaking land protection projects to provide landscape-scale buffers to the urban interface.

As Sonoma Land Trust puts resiliency into action, we will continue to be strong stewards of the land to help preserve our

community and help our friends and neighbors do the same. Protected land is the heart of our community — it is the anchor of where we want to live, work and play.

Especially in times like these, let's remember to get outside and enjoy the beautiful places of Sonoma County. We'll see you out there.

**DAVE KOEHLER**  
**EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR**

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Looking from a trail in Hood Mountain Regional Park toward the last stand of redwoods in the Santa Rosa Creek watershed, now protected forever. Photo by Scott Hess Photography.

At the end of March, Sonoma Land Trust closed escrow on Santa Rosa Creek Redwoods and plans to donate the property to Sonoma County Regional Parks. As part of Hood Mountain, it will provide a much-needed wildlands buffer between the park and the growing estate-home development along Los Alamos Road.

“Santa Rosa Creek Redwoods offers a beautiful oasis of natural land right in between a number of backyards and the trails of Hood Mountain,” says John McCaull, SLT’s land acquisitions program manager for Sonoma Valley. “You don’t usually see old-growth and second-growth

alder trees and redwoods together like you do in this mature forest along the creek. It’s spectacular.”

The quarter-mile stretch of Santa Rosa Creek on this rugged property also provides ideal conditions for the spawning of threatened steelhead trout and for the rearing of juvenile steelhead. Because of the importance of this parcel for fish and wildlife, Regional Parks does not intend to develop it with trails. “It’s really for the animals and the fish,” says John. “To have some land without trails and other human use is actually good for wildlife and people alike.”

Although a majority of Hood Mountain burned severely in the fires last fall, Santa Rosa Creek Redwoods escaped the flames and remains intact. Nonetheless, because the property had no legal road access, it was a relatively inexpensive acquisition at \$90,000, with funding provided by Wine Country Weekend, the San Francisco Foundation and major donors of the Land Trust.

Sonoma Land Trust added another 162 acres and a half mile of Santa Rosa Creek to the Hood Mountain/Sugarloaf Ridge park complex in 2016.

“Putting together an integrated park system can take decades of work,” says John, “and we are always looking for opportunities to protect more of Santa Rosa Creek and to connect Hood Mountain Regional Park to Sugarloaf Ridge State Park. It’s one of those long-term land protection puzzles that keep acquisitions staff up at night!”

And it’s why your land trust is in the business of “forever.”

*Sheri Cardo is SLT’s communications director.*

## WELCOMING OUR FIRST DIRECTOR OF COMMUNITY PROGRAMS



Photo by Lance Kuehne.

Engaging an array of fresh voices for land conservation in Sonoma County is one of our key priorities and, on March 1, Neal Ramus joined Sonoma Land Trust to do just that as our new director of community programs.

Neal brings more than 10 years of experience and leadership in developing community programs for a wide array of audiences and, since 2012, has developed programs and activities for Bay Area youth and their families at the California Academy of Sciences.

Born and raised in Sonoma County, Neal graduated from Sonoma State University

with both a bachelor’s degree in biology and an MBA. He now directs our On the Land and Volunteer programs and will develop new programs that celebrate our core belief that the land is the heart of the community.

“Neal has tremendous experience and passion for growing the tent of audiences and voices for conservation,” says SLT executive director Dave Koehler. “We’re confident that he is the right person to lead our community programs into the future.” Neal can be reached at [neal@sonomalandtrust.org](mailto:neal@sonomalandtrust.org).

# PROTECTING THE RUSSIAN RIVER WATERSHED

BY HEATHER AH SAN



A view from the Jenner Headlands of the Russian River completing its 110-mile journey at the Pacific. Photo by Stephen Joseph Photography.

The perfect day – so often defined here in Sonoma County as spending a day on the Russian River. There's nothing more satisfying than dipping your toes in the cool, calm waters – and, if you're lucky, spotting river otters paddling under the willows, salmon spawning upstream, and blue or green herons flying gracefully overhead. It is a place where people, and wildlife, flourish.

The Russian River watershed isn't special just to those who call Sonoma County home. Only a handful of locations around the world are as rich in biodiversity as the landscape through which the Russian River flows. The numbers are impressive: 94 named peaks, 57 tributaries, a 110-mile-long main stem and an elevation range from zero to 4,343 feet above sea level. Draining an area of approximately 1,485 square miles, this watershed is a huge economic and ecological engine that supports our health and drives our quality of life.

With your help, Sonoma Land Trust has worked in the watershed for decades and built an impressive track record. Among our most notable projects is the 5,630-acre Jenner Headlands, which, at

the time, was the largest conservation acquisition in Sonoma County. This coastal landmark, located near the town of Jenner where the Russian River meets the Pacific Ocean, hosts rich habitat for fish and wildlife, and offers spectacular views and, soon, public access.

Yet the health of the watershed is threatened. A changing climate, with greater chances of drought and catastrophic fires, demands that we create the most resilient lands we can as quickly as possible. Habitat loss and land use conversion are the major drivers of river system decline. *Strategic land conservation is the most widely recommended tactic to prepare for resiliency in a changing climate.*

The good news is that your land trust has deep relationships in the watershed and landowners are asking for our help. We've also hired a dedicated, full-time Russian River program manager, Ann Johnston, to advance our goals. Ann is excited to join a long-time collaboration dedicated to the Russian River watershed ... and to define the unique role that Sonoma Land Trust can play.

Together, we plan to meet four core objectives for protecting and caring for the Russian River:

- Build climate resilience, enhance watershed processes and protect wildlife corridors;
- Create new recreational opportunities compatible with natural resource protection;
- Support economic diversity and sustainable working lands that complement conservation efforts; and
- Increase outreach to grow visibility and cultivate new funding for land protection.

"We are fortunate to have landowners in the watershed who want to preserve their land," says conservation director Wendy Eliot. "We must now match their conservation initiative with funding so that we can create a stronger and more resilient Sonoma County for all. Rest assured that our commitment to protecting large, intact landscapes remains strong."

*Heather Ah San is SLT's communications coordinator.*



# LIVING WITH FIRE

BY BOB NEALE

Living with fire isn't easy. Six months ago, our county was awakened to smoke, flames and heart-wrenching tragedy, and many things are still far from normal. And yet, together, we move forward, step by step. The community continues to support and inspire us by coming together to care for one another during this very difficult time.

On our preserves, as the immediate safety concerns have been addressed around buildings, roads and trails, our stewardship staff have turned their eyes to the natural lands to understand what the firestorm's actual impact will be. We continue to ask ourselves how can we manage our lands to create a place where native plants and animals thrive while helping our communities to reduce the impact of future wildfires.

## RECOVERY AND RESILIENCE

One definition of resilience is the ability to rebound and adapt well to adversity or difficulty. This can apply to landscapes as well as people. Over the coming year, we will share with you what we are seeing on the land, how nature is responding to the fire, and how the Land Trust is recovering, planning and managing our lands for the future.

As Sonoma Valley program manager Tony Nelson says, "Let's learn from this experience and make strides in managing our landscape for fire so the natural lands can benefit and our local communities can be better protected." This spring, we are offering a series of fire-ecology hikes on our impacted preserves so that participants can learn firsthand how trees and plants are recovering, which animals are moving across the burned landscapes and how our stewardship staff are considering fire in our preserve planning and operations.

## OUR FIRE-ADAPTED LANDSCAPES

In our winter newsletter, we shared that our stewardship team was approaching post-fire land management by, "First, do no harm." Here are some brief updates on our fire-affected preserves.

Along Stuart Creek at Glen Oaks Ranch and Secret Pasture, our wildlife cameras are revealing deer, opossums and foxes returning to their normal routines. Though the chaparral habitat up top burned the hottest and lost most of its vegetation, a green sheen of young plants now covers the blackened ground, Fremont's star lily has exploded across the hillsides, and small oaks, toyon and manzanita are sending forth new shoots from their hardy roots.

It's a similar story at Live Oaks Ranch in the Mayacamas. Fortunately, the winter rain did not cause any significant erosion and the ground is stable. We did, however, lose a number of large oaks in the Bidwell Creek valley, most because of preexisting weaknesses, such as cavities in the base of trees that allowed fires to smolder and burn inside the trees, causing them to fall down.

At Sears Point Ranch, about 80 percent of the grassland burned in October. While the grass is recovering nicely, more than 15 miles of fencing was destroyed and needs to be replaced. On a more colorful note, we're hoping for a wealth of wildflowers on Cougar Mountain this spring!

Fire is and has been part of the California landscape for thousands of years. Our forests, grasslands and hillsides evolved with fire and have become "fire adapted." Working together, we can manage our natural lands and human landscapes in ways that will benefit our native habitats and make our communities safer and more resilient.

Bob Neale is SLT's stewardship director.



Students from Lawrence Jones Middle School's Expeditionary Learning program in Rohnert Park – and also part of the STRAW program (Students and Teachers Restoring A Watershed) – recently re-planted some of the vegetation along Bidwell Creek at Live Oaks that was lost to the fire. Photo courtesy of Point Blue Conservation Science.



Fully charred by the Nuns Fire last fall, the meadow at Glen Oaks Ranch is now green again under the oaks. Photo by Tony Nelson.

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Together, we move forward,  
step by step.

# BETH BERKSON AND ROB DAS INSPIRE GENEROSITY



Photo by Ed Aiona.

In our last newsletter, you met Fran Conley, one of three generous supporters who put forth the challenge to raise \$2 million in two months for Sonoma Land Trust's work. Now, we are pleased to introduce Beth Berkson and Rob Das, the other charitable souls behind the end-of-year challenge, which Sonoma Land Trust supporters not only met, but exceeded!

Beth and Rob have lived in Sonoma County since 2011 and love everything about it. "The physical diversity of this county is simply stunning," says Beth. "As far as we're concerned, there's nowhere like it on earth. Being able to take a quick trip to the ocean through beautiful

vineyards, across amazing rivers, via groves of redwood trees and through emerald valleys and hills is something that dreams are made of. We are so blessed to see this every day from our home and love sharing the view with visitors."

"Preserving what we enjoy every day for others to enjoy, forever, is important to us and, as a result, we decided to make a gift to Sonoma Land Trust," says Rob. "After quite a bit of due diligence, including interviewing board members, we discovered the organization was more than worthy of our contribution – well managed with passionate people and just the right size."

Beth and Rob are transplants from Silicon Valley. Rob worked as a software engineer, executive and serial entrepreneur for more than 30 years. He was the co-founder of a fast-growing, publicly held, big-data analytics company. Beth worked in retail management for more than 30 years. In 2012, they retired to Healdsburg where they enjoy the bounty of the region, including local food and wine, and spending time with family and friends.

Beth and Rob liked the idea of using their gift to double the impact of others' donations to Sonoma Land Trust during

the challenge. From November 1 through December 31, 2017, supporters generously donated \$2,367,222 – far exceeding Beth, Rob and Fran's challenge.

"We are grateful to all who donated, and to Beth, Rob and Fran for helping us mount the most ambitious end-of-year challenge to date," says Shannon Nichols, director of philanthropy. "The outpouring

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**Thank you to the 1,505 donors who exceeded the \$2 million goal at the end of year by contributing more than \$2,367,000!**

**Want to help issue the challenge next year?  
Contact Shannon Nichols at (707) 526-6930  
ext. 140 or [shannon@sonomalandtrust.org](mailto:shannon@sonomalandtrust.org).**



of support provides critical resources for our work and shows just how important it is to conserve the land and all that we hold so dear about Sonoma County. We are grateful to all who took part."

"Beth and I are ecstatic about our contribution to the acquisition and ongoing care of beautiful open space in Sonoma County – the most incredible place we've ever lived," says Rob. "We're happy to do our part to protect this beautiful place we call home."

# PROP. 68 PROMISES NEW STATE FUNDING FOR WATER, WILDLIFE HABITAT AND PARKS

BY JOHN MCCAULL

## *The best investment on Earth is earth. — Louis Glickman*

Over the last 50 years, California has invested billions in protecting our beautiful state, but we are facing more frequent and severe droughts, wildfires, impacts from climate change, and a lack of support from the federal government to protect our water and natural areas. In June, voters will have an opportunity to take responsibility for protecting our own unique natural resources. Proposition 68 — a \$4 billion general obligation bond measure — will fund programs to make California's water supplies more secure, increase drought preparedness, protect wildlife habitat and watersheds, and ensure that every California community has access to safe, quality parks.

California has a big list of water, park access and climate change issues that impact the daily lives of millions of people

— and it's no different in Sonoma County. Sonoma Land Trust has determined that we need approximately \$40-50 million to complete our 2018-2020 high-priority land acquisition projects. As conservation director Wendy Eliot says, "Our acquisitions team has put together an incredible portfolio of land protection projects and we need an infusion of state matching funds to get these across the finish line. We're in a unique position to act quickly on protecting thousands of acres of land if new funding sources become available."

When your land trust protects land forever, we inevitably need to raise money from a variety of funders. Over the last 18 years, California voters have approved more than \$20 billion in bonds to protect and restore our "natural capital" of land and water resources. Through agencies such as the Coastal Conservancy, Wildlife Conservation Board and Department of Fish and Wildlife, the State has been a

consistent and reliable source of matching funds for land protection projects in Sonoma County. Unfortunately, over the past few years, state funding has dwindled and good projects are stacking up in our pipeline as a result.

Prop. 68 programs will bring an infusion of funding that will benefit the Bay Area and Sonoma County, including:

- A share of \$290 million in population-based allocation for Bay Area park districts for local and regional parks;
- Over \$40 million for the San Francisco Bay Conservancy Program and for wetlands and tidal marsh restoration grants to match Measure AA (the regional Bay Area funding measure passed in 2016);
- A chance to compete for over \$440 million in funding for wildlife corridors and open space, fishery and riparian restoration projects, agricultural land conservation and stewardship, and ecological restoration of forests; and
- \$3 million for the Russian River.

Sonoma Land Trust is proud to endorse Prop. 68 and we will be working over the next few months with our many partners to educate and mobilize SLT supporters to vote **"Yes on 68!"** in June. To learn more about the campaign, please visit [www.yes68ca.com](http://www.yes68ca.com).

*John McCaull is SLT's land acquisitions program manager for the Sonoma Valley.*







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## POLE MOUNTAIN AND JENNER HEADLANDS TO OPEN THIS SUMMER

Get ready! Starting mid-summer, both the Jenner Headlands and Pole Mountain Preserves will be opening to the public for hiking, thanks to our partnership with The Wildlands Conservancy (TWC) and the Ag + Open Space District. While SLT acquired the 5,630-acre Jenner Head-

lands in 2009, we transferred title to TWC a few years back. We have, however, maintained ownership of Pole Mountain Preserve, which we purchased in 2014 and is immediately north of the Jenner Headlands. The District helped fund and holds conservation easements over both properties that stipulate public access to these remarkable properties.

This spring, TWC is putting the finishing touches on their beautiful “Gateway to the Headlands,” which includes a parking lot off of Highway 1, the trailhead and a restroom. Once completed, hikers and picnickers will be able to park at the Gateway and meander along the ADA-accessible trail to a site with a stunning coastal view or enjoy the five-mile coastal loop trail. More intrepid hikers can consider taking the “Sea to Sky” Trail, all the way from the Jenner Headlands to the top of Pole Mountain, a 15-mile roundtrip climb with 3,600 feet of elevation gain – strenuous, yes, but well worth the 360-degree views. Just be sure to get an early start!

We’re very excited to bring you this news. Stay tuned for updates.



On top of Pole Mountain. Photo by Corby Hines.

### 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.