After being chased by a helicopter, the bear followed that creek back up and over Sonoma Mountain to return to Napa County from whence he or she had probably started. It is likely that this adventurous ursine was using the Sonoma Valley Wildlife Corridor to travel from Napa County through the Sonoma Valley and up and over Sonoma Mountain.

This bear didn’t just drop into Petaluma — he or she had been able to travel a long distance, safely and mostly unseen, through existing land and creek corridors. Such corridors are essential for wildlife passage — not just for large carnivores, like bear and mountain lion, but for the many smaller critters as well, like raccoon, fox and bobcat.

In 2012, Sonoma Land Trust embarked on a multi-year project to keep open the narrowest section — the “pinchpoint” — in the high-priority Sonoma Valley Wildlife Corridor that is at serious risk of closing up. Since that time, Sonoma Land Trust purchased three key properties in the corridor, including two along the aquatic corridor of Stuart Creek; assessed permeability (freedom of animal movement) within several strategic properties; and completed a corridor Management and Monitoring Strategy (available at www.sonomalandtrust.org/Wildlife-Strategy.pdf). With that progress as a guide, we have widened our focus to include the entire land-based wildlife corridor within Sonoma County. This is a critically important project with ambitious goals.

ONE NIGHT IN 2009, A BLACK BEAR WAS SPOTTED NEAR A CREEK IN PETALUMA.
A critical linkage between Marin and Lake Counties

The Sonoma Valley Regional Center stands at the western foothills of Sonoma Mountain, across Sonoma Creek and the valley floor just past Glen Ellen, to the east of the Mayacamas range in Sonoma County, California. It is a vital portion of the ‘Marin Coast to Blue Ridge Critical Linkage’ identified in the Bay Area Critical Linkages Project and in the Conservation Land Network, both projects of the Bay Open Space Project.

Because of its work and that of others in the area over the years, more than 8,000 acres of the corridor is now protected as natural land. For much of the corridor’s 20-mile length, however, we are managing of lands under the corridors collectively ensure the continued availability of this important landscape for wildlife.

Using new tools to keep the corridor open

Ensuring that wild animals can move safely through the landscape is that their populations are at-risk on the face of development and urban changes happening in the corridor. This is one of our large-scale project. Acquiring properties is one way of accomplishing our goals.

“We want to create a wildlife corridor where we see wildlife because collaborating with great landowners is a very effective conservation strategy,” says Wendy Eliot, Sonoma Land Trust’s conservation director. “So we are using a variety of land protection tools to protect and enhance the corridor’s permeability — such as deeds-in-lieu agreements and agreements — along with purchasing up to 40 parcels.”

Together with assessing the three at-risk properties, our acquisition staff has started multi-county conservation conversations focused on “wildlife movement” that we will use in the corridor and share with other conservation groups also working to save wildlife corridors.

In addition to our work on the corridor, we are Sonoma Land Trust, the Napa and Sonoma landowners, and Protect the corridor along the corridor that manages activities that could impede wildlife passage, such as farms and vegetation clearing. In 2014, with the help of First District Sonoma County Supervisor Betsey Moses donated an easement over their property along the creek that restricts activities that could impede wildlife passage, such as fencing and vegetation clearing.

With this initiative, Sonoma Land Trust is working landowner by landowner and clients’ needs are served while providing urgent environmental protections — including for recreation and public access — and the future of the wildlife corridor and to track animal use over time, we placed remote wildlife cameras on the corridor open. The funding also supports our camera monitoring and integration of these parcels into a broader implementation strategy. Supplemental funding has been provided by the Rockefeller (Sonoma) Land Fund and additional funding is being sought to continue the project and efforts made to Sonoma and Napa County residents.

“With this initiative, Sonoma and Napa landowners are working hand-in-hand through the corridors to save and conserve wildlife,” says Eliot. “This is what it means to be working on a landscape scale when we’re not focused on a single property, but an entire corridor.”

Funding the corridor work

The Gordon and Betty Moore Foundation provided a $1.8 million grant that has allowed us to purchase properties and easements that are critical to keeping the corridor open. We are funding efforts to ensure that the wildlife corridor is protected by the corridor, and it is a key part of the “Marin Coast to Blue Ridge Critical Linkage” identified in the Bay Area Critical Linkages Project and in the Conservation Land Network, both projects of the Bay Open Space Project.

Keeping the corridor open and to have such high hopes for it. Some landowners are already making improvements on their properties. “It is a critical linkage across the corridor,” says Supervisor Gorin. “It also became part of Sonoma Valley Regional Park.

Wendy Eliot, Sonoma Land Trust’s conservation director. “So we are using a variety of land protection tools to protect and enhance the corridor’s permeability — such as deeds-in-lieu agreements and agreements — along with purchasing up to 40 parcels.”

Together with assessing the three at-risk properties, our acquisition staff has started multi-county conservation conversations focused on “wildlife movement” that we will use in the corridor and share with other conservation groups also working to save wildlife corridors.

In addition to our work on the corridor, we are Sonoma Land Trust, the Napa and Sonoma landowners, and Protect the corridor along the corridor that manages activities that could impede wildlife passage, such as farms and vegetation clearing. In 2014, with the help of First District Sonoma County Supervisor Betsey Moses donated an easement over their property along the creek that restricts activities that could impede wildlife passage, such as fencing and vegetation clearing.

With this initiative, Sonoma Land Trust is working landowner by landowner and clients’ needs are served while providing urgent environmental protections — including for recreation and public access — and the future of the wildlife corridor and to track animal use over time, we placed remote wildlife cameras on the corridor open. The funding also supports our camera monitoring and integration of these parcels into a broader implementation strategy. Supplemental funding has been provided by the Rockefeller (Sonoma) Land Fund and additional funding is being sought to continue the project and efforts made to Sonoma and Napa County residents.

“With this initiative, Sonoma and Napa landowners are working hand-in-hand through the corridors to save and conserve wildlife,” says Eliot. “This is what it means to be working on a landscape scale when we’re not focused on a single property, but an entire corridor.”

Funding the corridor work

The Gordon and Betty Moore Foundation provided a $1.8 million grant that has allowed us to purchase properties and easements that are critical to keeping the corridor open. We are funding efforts to ensure that the wildlife corridor is protected by the corridor, and it is a key part of the “Marin Coast to Blue Ridge Critical Linkage” identified in the Bay Area Critical Linkages Project and in the Conservation Land Network, both projects of the Bay Open Space Project.

Keeping the corridor open and to have such high hopes for it. Some landowners are already making improvements on their properties. “It is a critical linkage across the corridor,” says Supervisor Gorin. “It also became part of Sonoma Valley Regional Park.

Wendy Eliot, Sonoma Land Trust’s conservation director. “So we are using a variety of land protection tools to protect and enhance the corridor’s permeability — such as deeds-in-lieu agreements and agreements — along with purchasing up to 40 parcels.”

Together with assessing the three at-risk properties, our acquisition staff has started multi-county conservation conversations focused on “wildlife movement” that we will use in the corridor and share with other conservation groups also working to save wildlife corridors.

In addition to our work on the corridor, we are Sonoma Land Trust, the Napa and Sonoma landowners, and Protect the corridor along the corridor that manages activities that could impede wildlife passage, such as farms and vegetation clearing. In 2014, with the help of First District Sonoma County Supervisor Betsey Moses donated an easement over their property along the creek that restricts activities that could impede wildlife passage, such as fencing and vegetation clearing.

With this initiative, Sonoma Land Trust is working landowner by landowner and clients’ needs are served while providing urgent environmental protections — including for recreation and public access — and the future of the wildlife corridor and to track animal use over time, we placed remote wildlife cameras on the corridor open. The funding also supports our camera monitoring and integration of these parcels into a broader implementation strategy. Supplemental funding has been provided by the Rockefeller (Sonoma) Land Fund and additional funding is being sought to continue the project and efforts made to Sonoma and Napa County residents.

“With this initiative, Sonoma and Napa landowners are working hand-in-hand through the corridors to save and conserve wildlife,” says Eliot. “This is what it means to be working on a landscape scale when we’re not focused on a single property, but an entire corridor.”

Funding the corridor work

The Gordon and Betty Moore Foundation provided a $1.8 million grant that has allowed us to purchase properties and easements that are critical to keeping the corridor open. We are funding efforts to ensure that the wildlife corridor is protected by the corridor, and it is a key part of the “Marin Coast to Blue Ridge Critical Linkage” identified in the Bay Area Critical Linkages Project and in the Conservation Land Network, both projects of the Bay Open Space Project.

Keeping the corridor open and to have such high hopes for it. Some landowners are already making improvements on their properties. “It is a critical linkage across the corridor,” says Supervisor Gorin. “It also became part of Sonoma Valley Regional Park.