

# WINTER 2019



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... to protect the land forever



McCormick Ranch is “a great place to see the whole world,” said owner Jim Perry in a recent San Francisco Chronicle article. Photo by Pocho Sanchez Strawbridge.

## \$1 MILLION CHALLENGE WILL HELP US CREATE A MORE RESILIENT SONOMA COUNTY

BY HEATHER AH SAN

From the top of Big Hill on McCormick Ranch, you can see everything that’s at stake: the rolling hills of wine country, the rugged bluffs along the coast, the San Francisco Bay and even the snowcapped peaks of the Sierras. This is the land that sustains us, the land that is essential to our future.

As the earth’s atmosphere continues to heat up, Sonoma Land Trust recognizes that we must harness the power of nature to protect the land and build our community’s resilience to a changing climate. Protecting land is critical for mitigating the effects of climate change and, as we look to 2020, your land trust

will, with your help and support, accelerate our work to protect, restore and strengthen our natural — and human — communities.

Recognizing the urgent need to protect Sonoma County’s natural resources, supporter Mary Love recently made a generous gift to Sonoma Land Trust in honor of her late husband, David Love.

“Some people are never going to have the opportunity to see the beautiful places that David and I traveled to because they are disappearing. I feel very good about this donation because I know it’s going to help protect land forever,” says Mary.

(Continued on page 3)

## A NOTE FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

# COMBATting CLIMATE CHANGE WITH LAND CONSERVATION



As I write this, rain is finally falling and, like you, I am profoundly relieved to see the official end of fire season. Yet, my relief is also tinged with regret that one of the most beautiful times of the year in Sonoma County, a time of color and harvest celebration, is now suffused with unease and dread.

At the Land Trust, we believe that we don't have to accept what some folks are calling the "new normal." It's true that we

have to learn to live with fire, but it doesn't have to regularly upend our lives and communities. Nor do we have to feel helpless in the face of fire's malign sibling — flooding. Land protection is a powerful weapon in the battle against climate change, and our work with the Sonoma Valley Wildlands Collaborative and in the Baylands are just some of many ways in which we are helping our communities adapt to a changing world.

It's also crucial to remember that we are part of a national and international movement. The conservation work we do on the ground here in Sonoma County, when taken together with that of our

sister organizations, adds up to truly global, systemic protection.

I hope you'll find the time over the holidays to be in nature, perhaps on lands we've preserved, to recharge your physical and spiritual reserves. Thank you for being there, arm in arm with us, as we tackle the challenges of protecting this special county we call home.

**EAMON O'BYRNE**  
**EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR**

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## WE WON A NATIONAL AWARD!

Sonoma Land Trust is proud to be the recipient of the Land Trust Alliance's 2019 National Land Trust Excellence Award for excelling in one or more of the following areas: broadening support for land conservation, outstanding collaboration, and outstanding communications, education and outreach. We share this high honor with you, our members, our supporters, our champions!





Mary has joined our board of directors in issuing a \$1 million challenge to the community to support Sonoma Land Trust's most pressing needs. When you donate to the Land Trust before December 31, your gift will be counted in the End-of-Year Challenge and will be leveraged to protect nature — for wildlife, fresh air and clean water — today and for the future.

"Science-based land management remains one of the best ways to reduce the risks of wildfires and other consequences of climate change," says Eamon O'Byrne, Sonoma Land Trust executive director. "Join Sonoma Land Trust in helping us create a climate-resilient community."

## PATH TO RESILIENCE AND ADAPTATION

Preserving large, intact landscapes is one of the best strategies for defending against climate change. Take McCormick Ranch for example: Located in the southern Mayacamas Mountains and spanning the ridge between Napa and Sonoma Counties, protecting this historic, 654-acre family ranch means not only preserving land for wild animals and healthy watersheds — it also means adding to an existing 7,800-acre network of already preserved open space lands,

thus increasing our community's defenses against climate change.

"Acquiring such a large and wild landscape along the top of a mountain range is particularly important because of the many benefits it will bring to people and wildlife," says John McCaull, Sonoma Land Trust's acquisition manager for the Sonoma Valley. "McCormick Ranch really has it all."

Creating a path to climate resiliency is increasingly important, particularly in the aftermath of another major wildfire in our community (see story on page 4). In 2017, McCormick Ranch proved critical to CAL FIRE's efforts to contain the Nuns Fire. Its 2,500-foot-high summit was used to create a fire break and staging area that prevented the blaze from crossing into Napa County and threatening St. Helena.

McCormick Ranch will also provide the public with more opportunities to get out on the land. As a relatively wild and undisturbed landscape accessible only by existing trails from Hood Mountain and Sugarloaf Ridge parks, McCormick Ranch will provide a long-anticipated connection for two- to three-day backpacking trips along a 20-mile multi-use loop trail. And with views of Mount St. Helena, the Napa and Sonoma Valleys, Sonoma Mountain,

the Sonoma Coast and San Francisco Bay, McCormick Ranch will add an awe-inspiring three-mile stretch to the Bay Area Ridge Trail.

## NATURE IN THE CITY

In the middle of Santa Rosa, surrounded by homes, businesses, schools, roads and cars, nature may seem out of reach — but it doesn't have to be. Early next year, we'll be acquiring "Cooper Creek," a small but crucial 54-acre property in Santa Rosa, located adjacent to the northwest corner of Taylor Mountain Regional Park and Open Space Preserve.

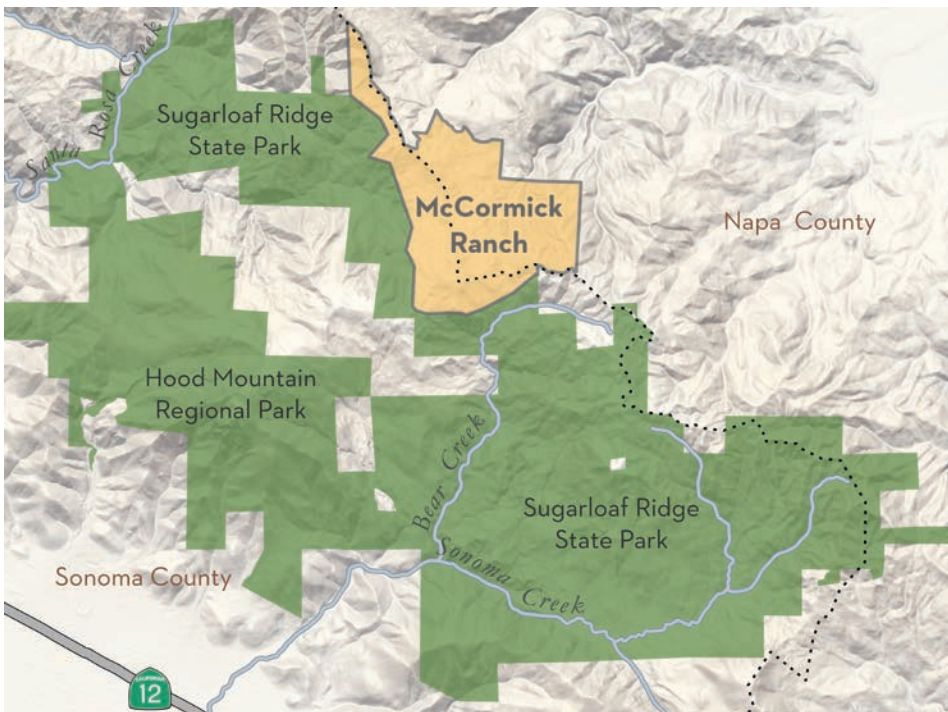
Along with safeguarding natural resources and habitat, protecting Cooper Creek will allow for new, closer access to the park, particularly for communities that are currently lacking in parks and greenspace, and will one day provide future trail connectivity to Spring Lake Regional Park via the 47-acre, two-mile Southeast Greenway. This new park access will provide more people with easy access to the outdoors, with all of the many health and community benefits that parks provide — *because nature needs us and we need nature.*

## GIVE TO THE LAND YOU LOVE

We invite you to join our community of people who care about the land by donating today. All gifts received by December 31 will help us meet the \$1 million challenge issued by Mary Love and our board of directors. These funds will help us protect and restore the most important landscapes in Sonoma County — and create a more climate-resilient community — while making nature accessible for all.

Land is essential to our future, but the future of the land is not promised to us. We must each continue to do our part. Thank you for your support.

*Heather Ah San is communications project manager at Sonoma Land Trust.*



# FIRE ON OUR LANDS PAST AND PRESENT —AND WHAT WE'RE DOING ABOUT IT

BY SHERI CARDO

Wildfire, the primordial process that burns and cleanses, injures and heals, frightens and restores — is challenging us to take notice.

We are paying attention.

## THE KINCADE FIRE ON OUR LANDS

Two of our preserves burned in October. Bear Canyon Wildlands on Pine Flat Road and White Rock on Geysers Road are among our wildest preserves and, according to stewardship director Bob Neale, the former saw high winds and heavy fire activity.

He says, “By 2:30AM on that windy Saturday night, our wildlife cameras on Bear Canyon stopped working. We had been alerted to two photos of wild animals taken around 10PM — and then the next and last image taken, at 2:21AM, showed simply bright shades of orange. We believe the fire was burning intensely

on our preserve at that time.” Almost all of the underbrush on the 250-acre property is gone and the flames extended high into many of the tree canopies.

Our White Rock Preserve also burned extensively, but less intensely than Bear Canyon. While all the grassland burned, the trees look like they took less heat and fire doesn't seem to have gotten into many canopies. Since the fire, we've been documenting the conditions on both properties and planning to do erosion control where warranted.

Our experience from the 2017 firestorms gives us every reason to believe that these impacts will be short-lived. Black oaks and grey pines will send forward new leaves in the spring, the late fall rains will cause the manzanita to sprout from their charred bases, and grasses and wildflowers will green up the blackened land. Already, wildlife has returned, evidenced by scampering lizards and fresh deer tracks

along the road. It's hard to remember past the human catastrophe to the fact that fire has a natural and important role to play in nature's regular cycles.

## COLLABORATING FOR CHANGE

Despite these recent fires, it's clear that we have learned a lot as a community over the past two years. This time around, we were all better prepared — especially our public agencies and first responders that worked so effectively to stop the fire from spreading further. We are grateful that firefighters were able to stop the fire just a half mile away from our historic Laufenburg Ranch in Knights Valley — for the second time.

Here at Sonoma Land Trust, we've also learned a lot about managing land for fire — and we have solutions to offer. We know that when we prepare and do the right things, we can reduce wildfire's negative impacts.

We are working with our neighbors, our communities and local fire officials to develop practical approaches for healthy lands, people and nature. As one example, the Sonoma Valley Wildlands Collaborative that we convened with five partner organizations after the 2017 fires is working together on the ground to reduce the risks and impacts of wildfire across 18,000 acres. Through controlled burns, tree thinning and shaded fuel breaks, we're hoping to change how fire moves across the landscape.

“A healthy natural landscape is more resilient to fire,” says Bob. “While we may not be able to prevent wildfires in this era of climate change, we want to keep fire burning at a lower intensity so that it's easier to control and keeps communities safer.”



A view of the burned oak woodland and conifer forest at the face of “White Rock,” a unique geologic feature for which White Rock Preserve was named.



## FIRE IS THE FUTURE

Sonoma Valley program manager Tony Nelson is a fire ecologist. He says, "Fire doesn't have to be a disaster if we can allow it to serve its natural role again while also taking steps to keep it in wild lands and out of cities."

Fire as a natural process provides many benefits, including reducing excessive fuel loads, helping to reduce invasive species, and creating diverse habitats for both wildlife and plants. But vegetation needs to be better managed in order to reduce fire intensity near people and property. Good vegetation management and clean gutters can increase the odds that a fire doesn't take hold when embers hit, for example.

"People's safety starts at their houses," says Tony. "We all have to be part of the solution."

## 15 YEARS OF MANAGING FOR FIRE

August 12, 1978 was a hot, dry summer day when the 12,000-acre Creighton Ridge Fire sparked northwest of our Little Black Mountain Preserve near Cazadero, burning it in its entirety.

"It was a terribly traumatic event that changed the community forever," says stewardship senior project manager Shanti Edwards. "It was also a turning point in the community's relationship with fire."

Owned by Bob Thierot, of the family that

***We know that when we prepare and do the right things, we can reduce wildfire's negative impacts.***

owned the *San Francisco Chronicle*, the property was heavily wooded. Thierot loved the trees on his land and had named many of them while practicing what he called "gentle forestry." He was heartbroken by the fire and the loss of his trees, and barely made it down the mountain alive; the following year, he donated his property to Sonoma Land Trust and moved away.

Starting in 2002, Sonoma Land Trust secured CAL FIRE funding and worked with forester Harold Appleton to develop the first forest plan for the property. Since then, the focus has been on promoting forest health: thinning the forest, allowing the snags and downed logs to remain for wildlife, leaving native shrubs alone and favoring native trees like true oaks, redwoods and madrone.

Fire planning has also been a priority given the area's history. In 2008, we developed a fire response plan and have treated over 30 acres in high-priority hazard areas. In addition to the ongoing fuel treatment on the property, the Cazadero Volunteer Fire Department

helped determine placement of a 5,000-gallon water tank with fire hydrants on the property to be available to firefighters in future fires.

More recently, concerned about the one-way-in, one-way-out nature of Pole Mountain Road, we convened a neighbor meeting to identify safe evacuation routes and create a phone tree. We're also working with the group that is designing a new, modern fire lookout for our neighboring Pole Mountain Preserve that will operate during red-flag warnings.

"Our role is not just about managing the natural resources," says Shanti. "The human safety element of our work is paramount."

## MOVING FORWARD

What we know for sure is that fire is part of our life and landscapes, in the past, present and future — and science-based land management remains one of the best ways of reducing the risks of wildfire and other consequences of climate change.

"We are upping our game to create healthy landscapes that are more resilient to climate change," says executive director Eamon O'Byrne. "We plan to adapt and mitigate — so that living with fire no longer means tragedy."

*Sheri Cardo is the Land Trust's director of communications.*



Star Meadow at our Bear Creek Wildlands Preserve after the fire.



Little Black Mountain before fuel treatment.

## Q & A WITH EAMON

Eamon O'Byrne joined Sonoma Land Trust in September as our new executive director after several years of working for The Nature Conservancy. We thought you might enjoy getting to know him a little bit more.



*Now that you've been with the Land Trust for a few months, what are you most excited about accomplishing over the next couple years?*

This is such a well-respected and effective organization, and I'm thrilled to be leading the team that's combatting the impacts of climate change in Sonoma County. I know it's easy to slip into despair and helplessness as we look into the not-too-distant future, but we are helping to combat wildfire and flood risk, and sea-level rise, as well as protecting clean water sources and safeguarding the biological diversity of our county. Being part of that work is deeply inspiring, especially in such a conservation-minded community.

*And the long-term?*

The Land Trust thinks in generational terms and has been nationally recognized for its work in engaging all Sonoma County residents in the effort to safeguard our future. I'm especially excited by our efforts to help advance the Santa Rosa Southeast Greenway and protect the natural lands of the Sonoma Developmental Center.

*Why is land protection so vital to Sonoma County's future?*

More and more, people are realizing that parks, preserves, open spaces and working lands aren't just nice to haves, but essential natural infrastructure that our community depends on. Whether it's providing clean water, reduced fire risk, flood management, tourism, recreation or health benefits, Sonoma Land Trust has been a leader in securing and protecting lands for the benefit of the community in so many ways.

*What gives you hope that we'll survive climate change?*

Nature is extraordinarily dynamic and I've personally seen severely damaged habitats on the verge of ecological collapse make near-miraculous recoveries when science-backed conservation was applied. If we can do this both locally and on a global scale, I know we can weather the changes ahead.

*What would you like our supporters to know about you?*

Conservation isn't just a career for me. It's very personal. Growing up in a dense urban environment without easy access to nature, I saw firsthand the impacts on my family and community. Individuals and communities really suffer when there's a lack of places to walk or run, to see trees and greenery, or simply to come together as neighbors. I'm also one half of a conservation couple — my wife is the executive director of the San Francisco Botanical Garden, and she's really opened my eyes to the wonderful complexity and variety of plants. I'm a late-blooming botanist (pun intended) thanks to her!

*What do you most enjoy about living in Sonoma County?*

The sheer variety of the landscape! I can go from sun-drenched Mediterranean valleys to dense forests, rugged coastlines, steep mountains, winding rivers and rolling pastures all in the space of an afternoon. And the fact that it's filled with life — from apex predators like mountain lions to tiny rare plant species.

*What do you miss about your most recent job?*

Riding a ferry to work and encountering whales and dolphins on the way! But hiking Sonoma Mountain in this crisp fall weather goes a long way to make up for it.

*What do you do when you aren't working to protect land?*

I'm an avid sailor! San Francisco Bay and the "iron-bound" coast of California make for exhilarating sailing, especially when ocean racing. Surfing down off a 20-foot swell under the Golden Gate Bridge under full sail can be quite an adrenaline rush!

“

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## Help us meet our \$1 million End-of-Year Challenge for nature by donating today.

Donations made by December 31 will have immense impact and help leverage additional funds made possible by our challengers Mary and David Love, and the Sonoma Land Trust Board of Directors.

[sonomalandtrust.org/give](https://sonomalandtrust.org/give)

## THE GIFT OF FRIENDSHIP (Continued from page 8)

Anne, Mary and Janet all met during their first year at Smith College in 1949 and they remained close throughout their entire lives.

It was Janet who introduced Anne to Ted and Pat Eliot — the latter was a cousin of Janet's husband, Sam Ketcham. Anne's daughter Arden Bucklin-Sporer said that her mom was so grateful to Janet for introducing her to the Eliots. "Mom had profound admiration for both Pat and Ted. She called Pat 'the real deal,'" says Arden.

The four women friends shared a common passion for philanthropy, and Anne, Mary and Pat were all passionate advocates for the environment.

Anne, who was married to Otto Teller, one of the founders of Sonoma Land Trust, was a true steward of the land at their Sonoma Valley home, Oak Hill Farm, and she and Otto donated to the Land Trust its first preserve, Secret Pasture.

Mary was a steadfast Land Trust supporter and board member of 16 years, and her family has carried on that legacy of philanthropy — her son Scott now serves on our board and all three generations support our mission individually and through the family business, Hafner Vineyard.

Pat — who had spent teenage summers working at the London Ranch before traveling the world with her diplomat husband — was, along with Ted, integral in protecting the top of Sonoma Mountain. They also protected their Sonoma Mountain property with a conservation easement and were passionate advocates for saving Sonoma



*Ted and Pat Eliot.*

Developmental Center's open space land for future public use.

"This group of friends loved the land and felt very fortunate to be here in Sonoma County. Their work to protect the land was deeply meaningful to them," says Scott Hafner. "And to be able to do that work with your dear friends? It doesn't

get much better than that!"

Janet continues to carry on this legacy of giving back through her work in the arts and women's empowerment and education, helping to build girls schools in Afghanistan where Ted Eliot served as ambassador. In fact, she and Ted traveled together to Afghanistan in 2010 where, after seeing the schools she'd helped finance, she became inspired to partner with an architect and contractor to build a new school, which was completed in 2015.

Today, though Anne, Mary, Pat and Ted have all passed on, we're heartened to know that their love for giving back — and their love for each other — still carries on through their friend, Janet Ketcham.

And Arden thinks that her mom, Anne, would have this advice for future generations of land lovers: "Eat organic food, get outside and enjoy nature, exercise and marvel at this world."



*(L-R) Janet Ketcham, Anne Teller, their friend Ruthie and Mary Hafner recreate the photo from page 8 in more recent years.*



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*Season's  
Greetings!*

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## THE GIFT OF FRIENDSHIP

How a lifelong relationship inspired support for the land

BY HEATHER AH SAN



*(L-R) Smith College graduates Janet Ketcham, Anne Teller, their friend Ruthie and Mary Hafner visiting together in Sonoma County.*

Our county lost two iconic conservation leaders this year: Anne Teller, a longtime Land Trust supporter and the owner of Oak Hill Farm, and Ted Eliot, a champion of the land and father of Sonoma Land Trust's conservation director, Wendy Eliot. Both Anne and Ted were formidable leaders in Sonoma County's environmental movement and their loss leaves a great hole in the community and in our hearts.

In the weeks following Anne's passing, we received a sizable gift with an incredible backstory. The donation was made by Janet Ketcham in honor of her friend, Anne Teller. Soon, we learned that her connection to us wasn't only through Anne, but through a group of lifelong friends that include longtime Land Trust supporters Mary and Dick Hafner and Ted and Pat Eliot, all of whom shared a passion for giving back to their community along with the deep connection to one another.

*(Continued on page 7)*

## 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.