

WINTER 2020

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... to protect the land forever



After acquiring Fitzsimmons Ranch early next year, Sonoma Land Trust will donate this stunning 200-acre property to Regional Parks to become part of Hood Mountain Regional Park and Open Space Preserve. Photo by Corby Hines.

HELP US MEET OUR \$1.2 MILLION CHALLENGE FOR NATURE!

BY MELISSA BENNETT

Despite this being a year unlike any other, Sonoma Land Trust has persevered and has many accomplishments to celebrate along with innovative plans that we hope will inspire you. Thank you for being part of our community of conservationists who make our work possible. We know that together, with your support, we can continue to protect the natural splendor and unique biodiversity of Sonoma County.

According to the latest science, we have only a short period of

time—a decade—to take the necessary actions to secure Sonoma County's future in the face of climate change. Bold and innovative action is needed right now—and **Sonoma Land Trust is at the forefront.**

Over the next year and beyond, we will be working to reduce the impacts of wildfires and floods, and to protect the incredible variety of plants, animals and landscapes for which our county is celebrated.

(Continued on page 3)

A NOTE FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

NEW WAYS OF CONNECTING YOUTH TO THE LAND



Of all the critically important work that the Land Trust does to protect and preserve the natural systems that sustain life in Sonoma County, perhaps none is more

important than fostering the next generation of land stewards. Restoring healthy fire and flood plains, securing room for wildlife and safeguarding watersheds won't mean much without future stewards to sustain and care for the natural world. That's why Sonoma Land Trust is investing in new and innovative programming to nurture the next cohort of scientists,

policymakers and, yes, plain old-fashioned tree huggers!

In the past, love for the land was passed from generation to generation through family camping and fishing trips, but these old traditions seem to be dying out. Maybe that's not a bad thing in the end since those traditions rarely extended to children from all communities.

But we do need new ways of connecting young people to the land. Quite apart from worrisome childhood health and development statistics arising from this decline, there is a fundamental question as to who will be the next E.O. Wilson, the next Wangari Maathai. That's why our

newest program—the Conservation Council—is aimed at giving teens a feel for how applied science works. We are showing them not just theory, but how their work can influence the real world, and also encouraging them to consider STEM fields when they go to college.

Your support doesn't just help us tackle climate change and grow our network of open spaces—it's an investment in our community in every sense.

EAMON O'BYRNE
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

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MISSION

Sonoma Land Trust protects the scenic, natural, agricultural and open landscapes of Sonoma County for the benefit of the community and future generations.

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NATURE CAN HELP PROTECT US FROM CLIMATE CHANGE

The natural, undeveloped lands of Sonoma County are some of the best tools available to sequester carbon, increase biodiversity and fight the effects of climate change. That's why Sonoma Land Trust—with your help—is working hard to protect key properties with rich forest, water and wildlife resources over the next 12 months: Two-Horse Ranch, Fitzsimmons Ranch, McCormick Ranch and Sonoma Mountain Vernal Pools. Conserving these significant natural places forever is only the first step. Together with our partners, we will ensure these lands and waterways are properly restored and managed for the future we are facing.

FIGHTING FIRE WITH FIRE

Indigenous people living in this area before European settlement understood that fire is a natural part of our landscape. Today, we are re-learning that fire is an elemental tool for reducing the risk of catastrophic wildfires and pollution. We are seeing our preserves' habitats rebound and thrive after fire has passed over them, like at Glen Oaks Ranch. [See photos.] We are managing our forests with fire in mind and taking what we are learning to make our preserves throughout the county more resilient to wildfire and more protective to our surrounding communities.

The Sonoma Valley Wildlands Collaborative, comprised of six private and public conservation landowners, including Sonoma Land Trust, is safely implementing prescribed burns within an 18,000-acre



area to keep our forests healthy and reduce the risks of massively destructive fires. We need your support to expand these fire management efforts into more regions of the county.

BUILDING CLIMATE RESILIENCY IN THE BAYLANDS

With 55 miles of coastline and a southern border on San Francisco Bay, Sonoma County will experience severe impacts from sea level rise if we do nothing to adapt to our warming climate. The costs of inaction are steep—the threats are not only to key wetland habitat, but also to public and private property and infrastructure that will likely amount to tens of billions of dollars over the next 20 years.

Sonoma Land Trust is working to mitigate sea level rise by acquiring land in the Sonoma Baylands and restoring thousands of acres to tidal marshland. By reestablishing the mudflats and wetlands with natural sediment and native plants, we are creating buffers that will protect against sea level rise. We are also partnering with state and regional

transportation agencies to ensure that the proposed redesign to Highway 37 supports continuing wetland restoration—to prevent flooding today and far into the future. We are sharing our expert knowledge and acting as nature's advocate because we know that these science-based solutions are vital for our community to adapt to our changing climate.

During the holidays, we can secure the well-being of our communities—and their future—by supporting the land that sustains us. Inspired by the extraordinary trials that Sonoma County overcame this year, five Alumni Board Council members have issued an End-of-Year Challenge to raise \$1,200,000 by December 31 to support our work. When you give today or before the end of the year, your gift will count toward the Challenge and make a tremendous impact. Please use the enclosed envelope or go to sonomalandtrust.org/give. If you're able to help, we thank you!

Melissa Bennett is development program manager.



(Left) Glen Oaks Ranch after the Nuns Fire in 2017. (Right) By spring 2019, with the forest largely recovered, hikers once again enjoyed getting out on the trails at Glen Oaks Ranch. Photos by Corby Hines.

PROVIDING NATURE PROGRAMS TO YOUNG PEOPLE

BY MIRELLA RAMOS

As Sonoma Land Trust continues its work to protect vital landscapes, one thing remains evident—the future of conservation will depend on our youth. In an era in which the fight for both climate resiliency and equitable access to nature can no longer be deferred, the need to foster a connection to nature in today’s children and teens is more important than ever.

Since the 2017 start of our first youth program, Bay Camp (*Campamento de la Bahía*), a bilingual summer camp, your Land Trust has continued to create new program opportunities for young people. Working with schools and community partners, we’ve challenged ourselves to build on our success and serve youth equitably. The current pandemic brought a new challenge—what do we do when we can’t operate as usual? Inspired by nature’s resilience, we too flexed our resiliency muscles!

In part, we focused on bringing nature to both children and adults through online presentations, arts and crafts, games and more. We’ve created bilingual nature activities for youth and their families to interact with the nature closest to them—in their neighborhood. As we all continue to shelter in place, connecting to the natural world in whatever ways we can remains essential.

WHAT ON EARTH IS SLIME?

Although we can’t take students out to the Sonoma Baylands right now, it hasn’t stopped us from connecting 3rd- and 4th-grade classes with the fascinating ecosystems at the San Pablo Bay National Wildlife Refuge (our former bayside portion of Sears Point Ranch). Our field trip program SLIME (Students Learning in Marsh Environments) serves the four counties of the North Bay—Marin, Napa, Solano and Sonoma. By the end of this year, we will have served over 40 classes.

Through SLIME, we take students on virtual visits of the Land Trust’s 1,300 acres of restored wetlands. Our comprehensive curriculum includes conservation



Teens in the first cohort of the Conservation Council shared valuable feedback, went on several field trips and utilized the van donated by Bothin Foundation. Photos by Corby Hines.

and restoration, marsh ecosystems and ecosystem services, and climate change and climate resilience. Through nature videos and photography, students discover the abundant life in the marshes of San Pablo Bay and the benefits they provide our communities. Teachers are given follow-up materials to engage their students in additional activities that further their connection with nature nearby. Virtually sharing our vital baylands with children provides a real-world example of landscape-scale restoration, creates connections to the land by linking the kids to their local watersheds, and inspires actions and behaviors that protect habitats.

Ms. Strong, a 4th-grade teacher in Fairfield, said about SLIME: “Thank you so much for joining our class. The students really enjoyed your presentation. As I mentioned, this certainly tied in great with what we are studying in science right now. The students will enjoy the additional activities you sent. Thank you again. It was certainly a *fun* day for the students!

A CONSERVATION COUNCIL FOR TEENS

The Conservation Council is an equity-based, youth-driven conservation research and youth development program for high school teens in Sonoma County. Despite the obstacles of 2020, we continued to explore new opportunities and, this summer, piloted this teen program.

Incorporating youth voices from the very start, we collaboratively designed the Conservation Council with a small cohort of local high schoolers. With over 100 applications and only nine positions to fill this year, we relied on science to help us in the selection process. We piloted a new review method that included using The Trust for Public Land’s mapping tool, ParkServe. Through the use of ParkServe, we were able to determine and prioritize applicants from park-poor neighborhoods and areas with high heat-island effects who we felt might benefit most from this program.

By prioritizing youth from these areas, we



Council members set wildlife cameras as part of a biodiversity survey at Laufenburg Ranch.

believe our program will empower these young people to investigate environmental justice issues in their communities and become stronger advocates for change. Our council members are 78 percent BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, People of Color), with over 60 percent of them living in communities affected by heat islands, and 33 percent living in areas of very high park need. Teens in the Conser-

vation Council are provided stipends for their participation as well as necessary outdoor safety equipment, like waterproof hiking boots.

Sonoma Land Trust considers our lands as community assets and outdoor classrooms where children and adults of all ages can experience and learn about the natural and cultural resources found

there. Our preserves have hosted studies into predator behavior, native animal surveys, Sudden Oak Death research and human impacts on wildlife, and are perfect places for the Conservation Council students to do their research.

The input of the first cohort of the Conservation Council was invaluable and helped us identify which studies the teens found most interesting, which of our preserves they connected with most strongly and which outdoor skills they wanted to learn. Across the board, pilot participants reported that they enjoyed the field trips and Zoom meetings, and felt safe with our COVID protocols. The words they used most often to describe their experiences were “educational,” “fun” and “exciting.”

These next couple of months will be busy for the next group of the Conservation Council as the teens plan and implement a biodiversity survey at Laufenburg Ranch through the use of wildlife cameras. The Land Trust will use their research results to gain a better understanding of the species present on the preserve and the animals’ use of the land, which will then be used to inform future land management and stewardship strategies.

By utilizing several of our nature preserves, the teens will have the opportunity to connect with a wide array of habitat types, like coastal prairies, marshes and oak woodlands. From steep hikes up the sides of mountains to flat, meandering trails along the bay, council members will improve their outdoor skills on varying terrains and increase their knowledge of the diverse landscapes of Sonoma County.

Whether we are meeting with teachers and students online or outdoors with the Conservation Council, your Land Trust is dedicated to connecting youth to all their communities—animals, plants, soils and waterways included!

Mirella Ramos serves as bilingual youth programs coordinator.

Heat Islands

Neighborhoods that lack sufficient parkland experience higher temperatures due to the lack of natural spaces that would otherwise provide shade and moisture. Caused by a decrease in natural spaces and an increase in urban infrastructure, such as roads and buildings, heat islands can cause an increase in energy consumption and, in extreme cases, heat-related illnesses and deaths. Low-income and BIPOC communities, which are usually impacted by environmental injustices, are likely to be affected the most by global warming.

CELEBRATING, HONORING AND REMEMBERING

The following donated gifts, made from April 1, 2019–October 31, 2020, honor exceptional individuals and celebrate special events. It's a privilege for Sonoma Land Trust to receive these donations from the heart.

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Season's Greetings!



Recipient of *Bay Nature's*
2021 Local Hero Award for
Conservation Action

CONGRATULATIONS TO WENDY ELIOT!

In her 21 years as conservation director for Sonoma Land Trust, Wendy Eliot secured over \$50 million dollars of funding and conducted complex negotiations to protect nearly 20,000 acres of parkland, wildlife habitat and working lands—from the Sonoma Baylands to Lake Sonoma to the coast. She advanced groundbreaking regional conservation strategies, including the regional Sonoma

Valley Wildlife Corridor program, the Santa Rosa Southeast Greenway, and protection of over 5,000 acres of diked land along San Francisco Bay for restoration to counter the impacts from sea level rise and to protect vital habitat and human infrastructure.

Bay Nature will present the 2021 awards at a virtual event in April.



Congratulations, John,
on your promotion to
land acquisition director

JOHN McCAULL BECOMES LAND ACQUISITION DIRECTOR

Upon Wendy's retirement in October, John McCaull, who joined Sonoma Land Trust in 2013, was promoted to land acquisition director. John, an attorney and former lobbyist, has managed key projects, such as the Sonoma Developmental Center and McCormick Ranch, and coordinated our advocacy for funding

measures, like AA for the Bay and M for Sonoma County Parks. Prior to joining Sonoma Land Trust, he served as state lobbyist for Sonoma County Ag + Open Space and Sonoma Water, as California State Director for American Farmland Trust and as California Legislative Director for the National Audubon Society.