

# SPRING 2021

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... to protect the land forever

DEEPENING OUR MISSION TO BE

a **FORCE** for  
**NATURE**

THE SONOMA LAND TRUST CAMPAIGN

Sonoma Land Trust is taking bold action through our \$80 million *A Force for Nature* campaign, which launched publicly on May 25 with a virtual event. With more than \$59 million raised and pledged as of April 30, 2021, we are approximately 74 percent of the way to reaching the goal! This campaign pairs human resolve with nature-based solutions to build a more resilient Sonoma County.

To make the greatest impact, we have deepened our mission to adapt to the changing climate and reflect the diversity of the

communities we serve. We must start by acknowledging that Sonoma County landscapes are not only breathtaking, but also breath-giving. Nature is not a nice-to-have amenity; it is the infrastructure of all life.

This is the most consequential decade for our planet; climate change and consequent wildfires, drought and species extinctions threaten our safety, resources, biodiversity, and physical and mental health. Nature is the most powerful tool we have for meaningful climate action.

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***This is the most consequential decade for our planet.***

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(Continued on page 4)



## A NOTE FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

# A CAMPAIGN FOR THE COUNTY

Dear Friends:

As I revel in the glorious outburst of color and life that is spring in Sonoma County, I'm also reflecting that among the many lessons the pandemic has taught us, it's not to take any of these weeks of joy and inspiration for granted. Even as we gingerly inch our way back to some level of normalcy, Northern California is already in the midst of extreme drought, with soil moisture at or near record lows. The evidence could not be clearer—the next decade will be crucial in deciding what kind of future we have.

That's why the Land Trust is choosing now to launch its "A Force for Nature" campaign. As we confront the varied and complex threats of climate change, the good news is that many of the solutions lie under our feet!

For 45 years, thanks to your unwavering support, we've been conserving the uniquely special landscapes of the county. Building on our deep experience in protecting the land, and relying on nature's own innate resilience, the campaign seeks to strengthen our natural infrastructure—watersheds, forests and wetlands—to improve groundwater recharge and

stream flows, reduce wildfire risk and safely absorb the impacts of sea level rise.

It's a lot to take on, to be sure, but this point in history calls for nothing less. You are our best hope for ensuring a thriving, climate-ready future for all of our communities. How are you planning to be A Force for Nature?

**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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# Increasing the flow for Coho

## NEW RUSSIAN RIVER SUBWATERSHED STRATEGY

BY SHERI CARDO

On a spring day in 2016, a one-year-old Coho salmon smolt, having been born and raised in Dutch Bill Creek, felt the ancient urge to start its quest down the creek to the Russian River and then to the sea. A passage as old as time. But this particular spring, like the two that preceded it, the creek had dried out before reaching the river due to the drought and the young Coho was unable to move forward. Like many of the thousands of other smolts in that same creek who had begun life with such promise, it did not survive.

The degradation of habitat and lack of sufficient freshwater flows in the river and its creeks, the result of human activities like mining, logging, agriculture, residential development and now climate change, are major reasons that Coho salmon are endangered. The Coho require adequate cool water at every step of their lifecycle: over the summer when they're growing up, in the spring when they head for the ocean to mature and two years later when they return to spawn.

Not surprisingly, what's good for the fish is also good for the more than 600,000 people who rely on the Russian River for their drinking water. For these reasons, Sonoma Land Trust has developed a new strategy based on the latest science for targeting areas along five tributaries of the Russian River Watershed where the need for stream flow is greatest—and where there are partners already working with whom we can collaborate:

- Dutch Bill Creek
- Green Valley/Atascadero Creeks
- Mill Creek
- Mark West Creek
- Maacama Creek

“Land conservation and water are intricately connected,” says Sara Press, land acquisition program manager and developer of the Russian River Subwatershed Strategy. “Protecting and managing land can influence how much water is in the



In the spring, juvenile Coho, or smolts, require sufficient freshwater to leave the creek in which they were reared and head for the river and then the ocean to mature.

***Protecting and managing land can influence how much water is in the creeks, how clean it is and whether it stays cool enough for fish.***

creeks, how clean it is and whether it stays cool enough for fish.”

The Land Trust considered how it could use its unique skills to make a meaningful difference to water flow in these five critical subwatersheds. In addition to our traditional tools of buying and managing land and using conservation easements to protect land, we determined we could use some innovative approaches, like water transactions, to ensure there is water in key locations at key times for Coho.

A water transaction could be an agreement with a willing landowner to reduce water use during critical dry periods or the building of a storage tank to fill during the winter for use in the summer—thereby

leaving more water in the stream during the summer months when the fish most need it.

“If we create better conditions for the salmon, a keystone species, we’ll create better conditions for the whole ecosystem,” says Sara.

Bringing the land connection to the work that other organizations have started to ensure more water in the streams might make the crucial difference the next time a young Coho heads for the ocean.

*Sheri Cardo is Sonoma Land Trust’s director of communications.*



Because of a growing awareness that land conservation is a key strategy for addressing our climate and extinction crises, California and the Federal government have set a 30 x 30 plan to conserve 30 percent of our lands by 2030. Learn more at [www.californianature.ca.gov](http://www.californianature.ca.gov).

Your land trust plans to protect thousands of acres of land rich in biodiversity over the next decade in support of the 30 x 30 goal. These lands will be managed collaboratively and with innovative approaches to build a more resilient Sonoma County.

## AN INVESTMENT IN NATURAL SOLUTIONS

We have developed six natural solutions as part of our strategic planning process that consider the health of our land, water and community members. These solutions work in alliance with nature to preserve our land and resources, and ensure safe access to nature and an equitable distribution of its benefits to all members of the community.

As we say at the Land Trust—the solutions are right under our feet! There are many ways to take action through your support of Sonoma Land Trust. From the Russian River Watershed to the dramatic Sonoma Coast to the tidal marshes along the Sonoma Baylands, the land that Sonoma Land Trust is preserving has the power to fight climate change.



### PROTECTING OUR BIODIVERSITY

Million-acre Sonoma County sits at the core of a biological hotspot, which means we have some of the world's richest ecosystems, but also some of the most threatened. To support our vital biodiversity, Sonoma Land Trust is conserving lands threatened by development and preserving large, intact landscapes and wildlife corridors so that vulnerable populations of animals and plants can thrive. (See page 8 for news about two recent biodiverse land protection projects.)



### ADAPTING TO RISING WATERS

We are working to adapt and mitigate the impacts of flooding from sea level rise and intense storms through the acquisition and restoration of wetlands, creeks and tidal marshes in the Sonoma Baylands. Wetlands, which act like sponges, are critical buffers to sea level rise, slowing down waves and storm surges to prevent flooding from extreme downpours.



### LIVING WITH WILDFIRE

Working with the community, local government agencies, nonprofits and Indigenous tribes, we are working toward the goal of restoring fire's ecological role on the landscape through improved forest management practices and the return of controlled burns on up to 50,000 acres in Sonoma County. These efforts will help mitigate the effects of climate change, promote ecosystem health and biodiversity, and improve fire resilience and safety for our communities.



### SECURING FRESHWATER FLOWS

Water and land are inextricably linked as water flows over, through and across our landscapes. Using innovative science, we have identified the most strategic parts of the Russian River system to acquire, protect and restore. Our goal is to expand essential habitats for fish, birds and other wildlife while simultaneously building community resilience to severe storms, droughts, flooding and sea level rise.



### PRESERVING NATURE NEARBY

Parks can make cities healthier by lowering temperatures, improving air quality, reducing GHG emissions and providing opportunities for recreation. Through acquisition and transfer of land to county and city parks, we are expanding access in areas that lack nearby open space and facilitating innovative park-planning processes that meet the needs of all our communities.



### EMPOWERING OUR COMMUNITIES

We approach our work with an equity lens to ensure access and distribution of nature’s benefits to all residents. Through inclusive educational programming, we are supporting diverse and equitable communities and cultivating the next generation of nature advocates for Sonoma County.

## HELP US REACH OUR DESTINATION!



*Thank you for being a force for nature! We are grateful for your continued support.*

THANK YOU

The **\$80 million A Force for Nature Campaign** is raising funds and awareness for our projects and programs, as well as securing commitments for future funding through planned gifts. Thanks to the generous support of our members, business partners, foundations and government funders, we are approximately 74 percent of the way to reaching our goal.

Supporters can participate in the campaign by continuing to make their annual gifts. Many will make a planned gift to Sonoma Land Trust—another great way to participate in the campaign. And some will make special gifts in support of ambitious goals spelled out in our new strategic plan.

**To be a force for nature, please use the enclosed envelope or visit [weareforcefornature.org](http://weareforcefornature.org), our special campaign website. To inquire about making a gift or to learn more about our Legacy League, please contact Shannon Nichols, director of philanthropy, at (707) 933-7220 or [shannon@sonomalandtrust.org](mailto:shannon@sonomalandtrust.org).**

### VOLUNTEERS ARE AT THE HEART OF THE CAMPAIGN

Three co-chair couples lead the Campaign Steering Committee, which works in partnership with staff to ensure the campaign’s success. Our Board of Directors has also been instrumental to this campaign through their generous donations of time, talent and treasure.

#### Campaign Steering Committee Co-chairs

Simon and Kimberly Blattner  
Tim Portwood and Jim Lauber  
Harry and Dee Richardson

#### Campaign Steering Committee Members

Scott Hafner  
Steven Hightower  
Nancy Otto  
Ellie Rilla  
Allison Sanford

# “DANKE SCHOEN” TO OUR LEGACY LEAGUE MEMBER IN BERLIN

BY RETA LOCKERT



His Muniz Ranch place is stones' throws away, but Legacy League member Mark Ginsburg participated in our January virtual Pole Mountain hike in the pre-dawn hours from his apartment in Berlin. He bought his 17 acres with views both of the ocean and the hills to the east after losing his heart to the area as a guest journalist on a classic car rally from Nob Hill to Mendocino. "I lost it very fast—we weren't allowed to stop!" he recalls.

After three decades steeped in the New York City arts scene and his writing, Mark explored relocation. It seemed the right

time to investigate his matrilineal roots (he's writing a biography of his Austrian-born mother Ina Ginsburg, a crusader for the arts), and buying in Berlin in 2011 made economic sense. But he also loved the West Coast. "Nature is the real culture of California," he says. A carpenter friend in Jenner encouraged him and Mark found the local community helpful

over 10 years with Feldenkrais and received his blessing to evolve the work. She now provides special focus on lessons for special needs children, which Mark finds especially rewarding.

Although he appreciates the opportunity to live and work in Berlin during this "singular era of peacetime in Europe," Mark

## *Nature is the real culture of California.*

and responsive. "I was even shown the bend where the stagecoach used to be robbed. The Jenner area is saturated with colorful history."

Now practicing an evolution of Moshe Feldenkrais' Awareness Through Movement called "Neuromovement," developed by San Rafael mentor Anat Baniel, Mark continues to be fascinated by the body's ability to benefit from neuroplasticity. After being a journalism professional for decades, today he uses language, and his hands, to assist adults and kids move more freely and, as a consequence, think more openly and creatively.

Mark was first exposed to the Feldenkrais Method in the late 1970s during theater training in Manhattan. Baniel had spent

looks forward to relocating to his property on the ridge near the Jenner Headlands eventually. And he's certain he'll want many goats nibbling the tall grasses—and will therefore wholeheartedly accept Land Trust board member Jennifer Bice's invitation to meet her Redwood Hill goats. He included Sonoma Land Trust in his estate plan because, "When you make a donation, it's something that will outlast all of us. I can't think of much else in life that has that kind of permanence."

*Reta Lockert is the Land Trust's donor relations director and most tenured employee at 38 years and counting. For information about joining the Legacy League, please contact her at [reta@sonomalandtrust.org](mailto:reta@sonomalandtrust.org).*



## IN CASE YOU MISSED THESE ILLUMINATING VIRTUAL PROGRAMS ...

### **The California Serengeti**

Travel back in time to when what is now San Francisco Bay was teeming with mammoth, mastodon and fierce predators.

### **The Yurok Tribe's Traditional Use of Fire**

Explore the traditional use of fire as well as contemporary adaptations of these practices on a changed landscape.

### **Wildflowers, Wildlife and the Wild Within**

Dive into the colors of spring and explore the extraordinary relationship between local wildflowers and wildlife.

Visit [sonomalandtrust.org/nature-at-home](https://sonomalandtrust.org/nature-at-home)

# MAKING PROGRESS ON DIVERSITY, EQUITY AND INCLUSION

BY SHERI CARDO

“This is nothing short of an organizational cultural revolution,” says Neal Ramus, community programs director of Sonoma Land Trust. “It’s fascinating, slow going and the right thing to do.”

This month marks two years since our DEI Plan was approved by the board of directors. The plan was the culmination of a three-year process and was published six months before the recent social justice protests began. We see this work as a way to deepen—not change—our mission to better reflect the ethnic and socioeconomic diversity of the public we serve.

“Because we were one of the early adopters in the land conservation community, we are looked to by other land trusts for how to do this,” says Neal. “But we’re still figuring it out ourselves.”

## MAKING PROGRESS

Our DEI Plan has a 10-year timeframe—which is a reflection of the long and diligent process such fundamental change requires. But that’s not to say we haven’t made some good progress.

Among the key impacts a focus on diversity, equity and inclusion has had on the Land Trust so far includes:

### Our land conservation strategy

In addition to the thousands of acres of parkland we’ve added within the county, we have recently focused on adding park conservation projects near where people live. The Santa Rosa Southeast Greenway, the Cooper Creek addition to Taylor Mountain Regional Park, Sonoma Developmental Center lands and the new Petaluma River Park are all recent examples of how we are helping to create spaces for people to get out into nature and be healthier and happier.



Youth programs coordinator Mirella Ramos leads a pre-pandemic, bilingual SLIME field trip in the Baylands.

### Spanish-language nature programming

Engaging the Latinx community by offering programs in Spanish is one of our new priorities. This makes our programs more accessible and engaging to multiple generations of Spanish speakers. March marked our first all-Spanish-language SLIME (Students Learning in Marsh Environments) field trip. Additionally, our On the Land team continues to innovate with virtual outings in English and Spanish to some of the Land Trust’s most sensitive and remote preserves. Participants have reported being surprised at how engaging and refreshing virtual outings can be!

### Learning from the tribes

We are doing our best to learn from and acknowledge the voices and experience of the Indigenous peoples who are the original stewards of this land and continue to have a relationship with it.

### Board of Directors’ commitment

Diversity among our board members is increasing in terms of ethnicity and gender, and both the board and staff have explored their own unconscious biases with an experienced trainer.

These are just a few of the ways in which your land trust is working to become a more equitable organization going forward.

“It’s a process,” says Neal. “We’re learning a lot, we’ve been humbled by our missteps and right steps, and we’re tracking what we’re doing to hold ourselves accountable.”

You can find Sonoma Land Trust’s DEI Plan at [sonomalandtrust.org](https://sonomalandtrust.org).

*We see this work as a way to deepen—not change—our mission to better reflect the ethnic and socioeconomic diversity of the public we serve.*



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## More than pretty places

# NEW PROTECTED LANDS EXPAND NATURE'S BENEFITS

This spring, your land trust protected two stunning and biologically significant properties in quick succession thanks to the funding already raised through the **A Force for Nature Campaign**.



Walter and Jean Foppiano Ranch

JERRY DODRILL

### Walter and Jean Foppiano Ranch (Russian River)

On April 30, the Land Trust closed on a conservation easement over the 758-acre Walter and Jean Foppiano Ranch, a cattle ranch on a beautiful peninsula of rolling hills and grasslands one mile east of Healdsburg and surrounded on three sides by the Russian River. The development risk in this part of the county is high. Under the conservation easement, which extinguishes the possibility of up to six estate homes and/or large-scale vineyards, the ranch's meadows, woodlands and nearly three miles of river frontage will remain undeveloped for perpetuity. The easement allows for sustainable grazing agriculture and a small herd of cattle will continue to graze peacefully there.

### Fitzsimmons Ranch (Mayacamas)

Earlier in April, Sonoma Land Trust acquired the 200-acre Fitzsimmons Ranch, an inholding within 2,000-acre Hood Mountain Regional Park and Open Space Preserve. We immediately conveyed it to Regional Parks for inclusion into the park, ensuring that future generations of visitors can enjoy it and wildlife can adapt to climate changes in this important section of the Mayacamas Mountains. Blessed with stunning views as far away as San Francisco, the ranch is part of an 85-mile wildlife movement corridor that connects Point Reyes on the Marin Coast to the interior mountains of Lake and Napa counties. It also possesses rare plant communities and is a significant source of water resources.



Fitzsimmons Ranch

SCOTT HESS

Learn more about both properties  
 at [sonomalandtrust.org](http://sonomalandtrust.org)