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SONOMA COUNTY

## **Sonoma Land Trust purchases biodiversity hotspot for 30x30 goals**

*After 20 years of discussions, an extraordinary property will be protected forever*

**March 14, 2023, SANTA ROSA, CALIFORNIA** — Sonoma Land Trust announced that on March 10 they purchased a 174-acre property located on Bennett Valley Road, adjacent to Trione-Annadel State Park. The property, known as the [Sonoma Mountain Vernal Pools](#), will protect rare and threatened plant species, seasonal vernal pools, and conserves a significant portion of an important wildlife corridor. As a partner in the project, Sonoma County Ag + Open Space has purchased, and will forever hold a conservation easement on the property, which will ensure the conservation of its vast and diverse natural resources for generations to come. This purchase was also generously supported by the Gordon and Betty Moore Foundation, the State Coastal Conservancy, and the California Natural Resources Agency.

This is Sonoma Land Trust's first land purchase of 2023, and it conserves a healthy, ecologically sensitive habitat, while also contributing to California's 30x30 goals, the state's initiative to conserve 30% of its lands and waters by 2030. Currently in Sonoma County, approximately 22% of our lands have been conserved due to the work of land trusts, county and other government agencies, and conservation partners. To reach the goal of conserving 30% of the county by 2030, [78,000 more acres must be protected](#) in the next seven years. Land trust acquisitions and conservation easements are a crucial part of reaching this goal and Sonoma Land Trust's work towards conserving 30x30 is helping to combat the biodiversity and climate crises.

In 1959 Benjamin Swig, a noted real estate developer and philanthropist, purchased land along Bennett Valley Road as a weekend and seasonal respite from his busy urban life, saying simply, "I wanted a place to rest." Eventually, the property was transferred to two sisters, Benjamin's granddaughters, Patricia Dinner and Carolyn Ferris, and over the past 60 years it has been the central gathering place for five generations and holds some of the family's most cherished memories and gatherings. These celebrations are rooted in a tradition of honoring the bounty that the land provided, and it was this love for the land that motivated the family to conserve it forever through the transfer to Sonoma Land Trust.

Patricia Dinner, who raised her family on the property, spoke to this reverence for the land when she said, "It saddens me that we are seeing large pristine areas developed by urban sprawl leaving fewer natural, unspoiled spaces. My sister and I are thrilled that our kids have decided to do this and grateful to Sonoma Land Trust for making it happen. Through this transfer, we honor their great-grandfather by protecting the gift he gave them all those years ago."

"When we sat down to explore options for the property, our first priority was not interfering with the natural habitat and feel of the area," said Lucas Heldfond, great-grandson of Benjamin Swig and son of Patricia Dinner. "Working with Sonoma Land Trust has given us the opportunity to

continue being responsible stewards and has helped realize our priority for keeping it as open space. They enabled us to meet our financial and tax goals without development, all while returning the land to public use – as it has been for most of time. It is heartening to us all that this land will remain open and will be an integral part of Sonoma Land Trust’s vision for a wildlife corridor that spans from the coast to the mountain ranges.”

“Sonoma Land Trust staff began conversations with the landowners almost 20 years ago and with some patience and planning, we are thrilled to finally see this extraordinary property established as an [ecological preserve](#) with healthy resources that support a variety of species, some only found in California,” said Sonoma Land Trust’s Executive Director Eamon O’Byrne.



The acquisition of the Sonoma Mountain Vernal Pools property protects rare and threatened plant species; conserves a significant wildlife corridor between Point Reyes, Sonoma, Napa and Lake counties; contributes cool, clean water to Yulupa Creek, a tributary of Sonoma Creek which supports steelhead and chinook streams.

"Climate change is on the march, and we know we need to do everything in our power to protect biodiversity, safeguard people from climate impacts that are already here, and provide access to nature for generations to come," California Natural Resources Secretary Wade Crowfoot said. "We are excited to be part of protecting and restoring the Sonoma Mountain Vernal Pools to strengthen connections with nature and move us closer to protecting 30 percent of our state’s land and coastal waters by 2030."

The success of this initiative will require the participation of landowners across the state who currently manage large properties with beneficial natural resources. Funding for the conservation of these properties is available and incentivizes participation in this initiative.

"The protection and restoration of the Sonoma Mountain Vernal Pools is a true “multi-benefit” project. Not only is it a tremendous step towards achieving the State of California’s 30x30 initiative to conserve 30 percent of our state’s lands and coastal waters by 2030, it will create

new trail connections and recreation opportunities for the public, and provisions allowing for cultural uses for Tribes. We are very proud to be involved with a project that will help restore biodiversity, expand access to nature, facilitate cultural access to Tribes, and mitigate and build resilience to climate change,” State Coastal Conservancy's Executive Officer, Amy Hutzler, said.

Because of its location and beauty, there was pressure for development of this land, but the landowners recognized that the land's unique natural resources were invaluable. Their decision to work with Sonoma Land Trust provides protection for this remarkable place while contributing to the regional conservation priorities that can protect our communities from the worst effects of climate change through land conservation and restoration.

“This is an important conservation opportunity to protect oak woodlands and vernal pools in a key part of a threatened wildlife corridor,” said Dan Winterson, who manages the Bay Area Conservation Program at the Gordon and Betty Moore Foundation. “We are very pleased that we were able to support Sonoma Land Trust's persistent efforts to bring this project to fruition.”

#### Protecting Sonoma Mountain Vernal Pools:

- Ensures the ongoing health of property's natural features, including two rare vernal pools, mature oak woodlands, intact grasslands, and portions of Yulupa Creek which feeds cold water to the Sonoma Creek, home of steelhead trout and chinook salmon.
- Provides an opportunity to connect a new corridor of protected lands for both wildlife and people alike between the adjacent state and regional parks.
- Permanently conserves 174 acres of land, protecting nature so that nature can protect us.
- Opens opportunities for land management and habitat restoration for climate resilience.

“The conservation of the Sonoma Mountain Vernal Pools property is yet another great example of how we can do more together. Through the commitment and investment of Sonoma County's taxpayers, Ag + Open Space has the means to help protect our most precious and resource-rich natural and working lands with conservation easements,” says Ag + Open Space General Manager, Misti Arias. “It all starts with our community, and the investment they've made in conserving and caring for the land.”

Sonoma Land Trust will own the property and manage it for several years as part of their ecological preserve portfolio with the goal of eventually transferring the property to a public agency.

Access to the property will be provided through pre-scheduled guided outings only. Initial tours are set to begin in May 2023. Registration opens in April, visit [www.sonomalandtrust.org/outings](http://www.sonomalandtrust.org/outings) to learn more.

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#### **About Sonoma Land Trust**

Sonoma Land Trust works in alliance with nature to conserve and restore the integrity of the land with a focus on climate resiliency and is also committed to ensuring more equitable access to the outdoors. Since 1976, Sonoma Land Trust has protected more than 56,000 acres of scenic, natural, agricultural, and open land for future generations. Sonoma Land Trust is the



recipient of the 2019 Land Trust Alliance Award of Excellence and is accredited by the Land Trust Accreditation Commission. For more information, please visit [www.sonomalandtrust.org](http://www.sonomalandtrust.org)

### **About Sonoma County Ag + Open Space**

Sonoma County Ag + Open Space permanently protects the diverse agricultural, natural resource and scenic open space lands of Sonoma County for future generations. The agency is responsible for the conservation and perpetual stewardship of over 122,000 acres of land throughout our region. These agricultural and open space lands are protected through a quarter-cent sales tax approved by voters in 1990 and reauthorized in 2006. For more information, please visit [www.sonomaopenspace.org](http://www.sonomaopenspace.org)

### **Power In Nature Coalition**

Sonoma Land Trust is a member of the Power in Nature Coalition is a statewide community-driven initiative that is committed to reaching the goal of protecting 30% of California's land and coastal waters by 2030 (30x30). The California Natural Resources Agency (CNRA) released the Pathways to 30x30 report to provide a framework for California to protect 30% of its land and coastal waters by 2030. Learn more at [www.PowerInNature.org](http://www.PowerInNature.org)





