



The Newsletter for Land Trust of Napa County / Winter 2023



Walt Ranch is Permanently Protected!

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The second-largest purchase in Land Trust history –

The 2,300-acre Walt Ranch property will become the Land Trust's newest preserve and is now protected in perpetuity.

Read more inside...

INSIDE

Window on Wildlife

Wildlife cameras capture surprises

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Letter from the CEO

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2023 has been a very exciting year for conservation in Napa and I want to thank you for your help in making this possible. I hope you enjoy this edition of our newsletter.

With your support, we've protected over 3,300 acres so far and as I write this, we are working on several more projects that could close before year-end—these could raise the total to over 5,000 acres.

In addition, we have completed a number of significant stewardship projects that protect Napa's rare species and strengthen the resiliency of both our natural systems and our community to the effects of climate change, in particular by reducing the risks posed by wildfires.

Land Protection—In this issue, you'll see some of the highlights, including **Walt Ranch**. This was one of our largest projects ever and the most expensive land protection project we have ever completed in our 47-year history. This was a major undertaking and in order to close the purchase, required that we take on debt, something we almost never do. But this was a very important project, so our board was comfortable doing that. And I'm pleased to say that we did raise the funds necessary to acquire the property and have now paid off the loans. Walt Ranch is now permanently protected as a new Land Trust nature preserve. Thank you to Craig and Kathryn Hall who donated over 25% of the value and to everyone who contributed to this effort. We could not have done it without you. We are still raising funds so that we can appropriately manage this large 2,300-acre property, protect its natural values and open it to the public.

We just closed the 650-acre **McCormick Ranch** on the ridge just west of St. Helena. This was a long standing project in partnership with conservation organizations in Sonoma County (about 40% of the property is in Sonoma County).

I want to thank the **Sears Black family** for donating over 100 acres in Angwin to add to the Wildlake Preserve. Thank you Ashley, Chris and Joyce!

We also helped the Napa Open Space District acquire an addition to The Cove, **their park on Mount Veeder**.

Stewardship—We actively manage the lands we own. This is becoming increasingly important as we face the growing challenges presented by climate change, especially wildfires. In the past year, we made major strides. We completed **forest thinning** and fuel break projects on four different preserves. These projects remove fuel loads and ladder fuels that intensify a wildfire's threats to both communities and to the forest. The projects retain the largest trees and their canopies, increasing the forest's resilience to wildfires, while removing vegetation that threatens the forest's native diversity.

We also completed our seventh year of a model **rotational grazing project** using goats and sheep. This project has proven successful at both limiting wildfire risks and restoring native species. In 2020, it stopped a fire that spread onto our property from neighboring land. And regular botanical monitoring has demonstrated that in grazed areas, native species are returning, while in ungrazed plots, invasive species predominate, creating significant fuel loads.

Finally, we are pursuing projects to protect some of **Napa's most vulnerable species**, Monarch butterflies, which have experienced dramatic population declines, and California Red-legged Frogs, a federally listed species that has disappeared from 70% of its range. Both projects are strengthening these populations in Napa.

There is much more in this newsletter. I hope you enjoy it. And again, thank you so much! None of these conservation accomplishments would have been possible without your support.

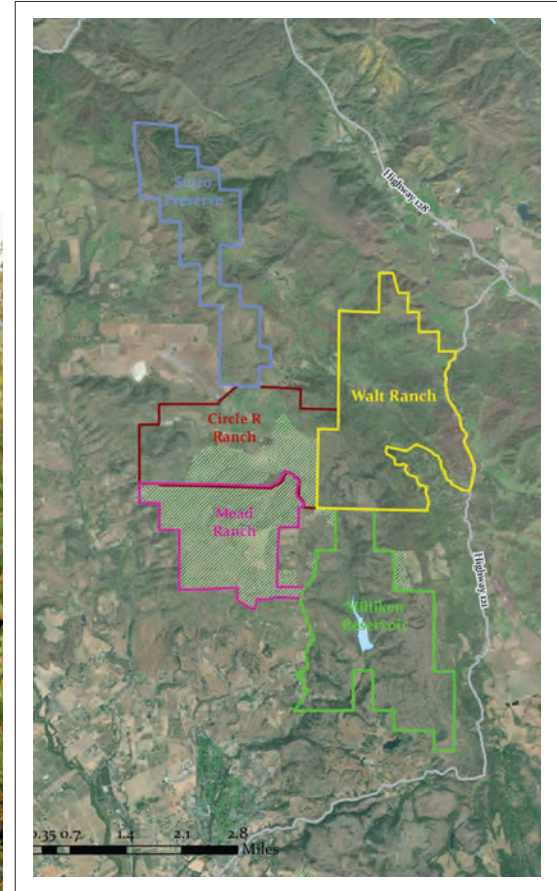
Best wishes for the Holidays and the New Year.

Best,

Doug Parker, CEO

COVER STORY

Walt Ranch Is Permanently Protected!



"It's one of the most important projects we've ever done," said Land Trust CEO, Doug Parker. "It's right next to over 5,000 acres of protected land and lies within two priority wildlife corridors. There are a number of rare species found on the property, including wildflowers that exist only in Napa County and the surrounding area and nowhere else. Milliken Creek runs through the property, a source of water for the City of Napa. It meets all the criteria for a priority conservation project."

This has been a major undertaking for us and we're excited to have completed the preservation of this important biological resource for Napa County.

Earlier this year, the Land Trust purchased the property at a discounted price. Craig and Kathryn Hall donated over 25% of the value of the property. Additional funding for the purchase came through grants totaling \$18M from the State Coastal Conservancy, the Gordon and Betty Moore Foundation and the Wildlife Conservation Board.

The Land Trust is now focused on building a fund to pay for ongoing land stewardship and other expenses of this large property, including a required management plan. The stewardship work to be done will include forest thinning, grazing and prescribed burns to lower fuel loads, building trails, erosion control on old ranch roads to protect streams, restoration of rare species and reducing the threat of invasive species.

A \$1 million donation from the William and Inez Mabie Family Foundation has been committed to kickstart the effort of creating a fund needed to responsibly manage the preserve and develop compatible public access.

Doug Parker called the Mabie Family Foundation gift "critical." "It will be expensive to manage the property and this generous donation will go a long way toward initiating that effort," he said.

Eventually, the property will be open to the public for hiking, biking and public use.

*Above Left and Right: View of oak woodlands on Walt Ranch.
Map of Walt Ranch showing nearby protected lands.*

(continued on page 5)

Black Sears Family Adds to Land Trust's Wildlake Preserve

The **Land Trust and the Black Sears family** completed an addition to the Dunn-Wildlake Preserve, with the Black Sears family donating 117 acres to the Land Trust. The parcel is adjacent to the preserve and will enlarge the permanently protected property to 3,200 acres.

“I want to thank the Black Sears family for their ongoing stewardship of this property for 35 years and for their commitment now, to protect its natural values forever,” said Doug Parker. “Their generosity will create a legacy extending far into the future.”

Joyce Black Sears grew up in Oakville and spent countless hours of her childhood roaming the forests and meadows with her brother. In turn, she and her husband, Jerre, moved to Angwin to raise their daughter, Ashley, again in the forests of Napa.

“Quite by accident or by providence, Jerre and I began farming Zinfandel on land purchased just a few years afterwards on a parcel that came up for sale,” said Joyce Black Sears. “The ‘Hard Luck Vineyard’ became Black Sears Vineyard.”

Now, 35 years later, Ashley and her husband, Chris Jambois, are continuing the work of caring for the vines and making Black Sears wines while their three boys run through the forests of Howell Mountain.



Above: Pictured at one of their favorite sites on the property (from left to right) is Oren Jambois, Ashley Jambois, Chris Jambois, Dashiell Jambois, Lucien Jambois and Joyce Black Sears along with dogs Sam and Daisy.

“We believe that nature has a place in the wine industry and that to ensure the future of our beloved Valley and industry, it’s important to care for and protect the remaining undeveloped land,” said Ashley Sears Jambois. “Land protection is essential to the flora and fauna as well as the watershed.”

The forested property is completely undeveloped and has varied habitats, chiefly Douglas fir and mixed hardwood with madrone and several oak species, as well as foothill pine and chamise/chaparral. According to a botanical survey completed on the property in 2022, nine special status species were identified, including Napa Lomatium, Cobb Mountain Lupine, Napa Checkerbloom and Nodding Harmonia. These are all rare, endemic wildflowers that exist only in Napa and 3-4 other counties—nowhere else in the world.



Some of the rare wildflowers found on the Land Trust’s newly donated land, from left to right: Nodding Harmonia (*Harmonia nutans*), Cobb Mountain Lupine (*Lupinus sericatus*), Napa Checkerbloom (*Sidalcea hickmanii* ssp. *napensis*).

“The property’s biodiversity is very significant,” said Doug Parker, “and the property is in a key location, part of a larger conservation goal to develop a continuous corridor of protected land for wildlife along the ridge above the eastern side of the valley. In this section of that corridor, we are working to connect protected lands from Robert Louis Stevenson Park and Wildlake, to forested land in Angwin that we’ve protected in partnership with Pacific Union College, to Las Posadas State Forest and then to Lake Hennessey. Protecting this property is a key step toward that larger vision.”

“Based on information gathered by our motion-activated camera project nearby, we know this area is significant for wildlife,” said Parker. “We often get photos of bobcats, mountain lions, deer and bears here. When compared to similar projects elsewhere in the region, the numbers are significant, especially for bears—more bears than any other place in the Bay Area—a strong indication that the natural system is functioning and worth protecting,” continued Parker.

“Each year we have visiting mountain lion and we have bear that glean fruit from our vines,” said Ashley. “We’ve even built

a bear ladder over the vineyard fence, although they seem to prefer using the stumps and trees to get over. It is possible to live with the wildlife, but first we must understand that their needs are as important as our own. And their most important need is space, protected land.”

“And now, because of the Black Sears family’s generosity and far-sightedness, the wildlife that roam these forests and the rare wildflowers will continue to have this place into the future,” said Doug Parker.

For years, the Black Sears family had a special place on the property for relaxation and contemplation that they called ‘The Point’. “As we’ve seen the Valley change so much in terms of development, it became apparent that we wanted to ensure the permanent protection of the place that we love so dearly,” said Ashley. “Gifting this piece of land to the Land Trust feels like the best way to pass on the torch of stewardship.”

“We honor this land and Harry Tranmer for his foresight as a founder of the Land Trust of Napa County,” said Joyce Black Sears. “May nature thrive on this beloved land in the care and protection of the Land Trust in perpetuity.” ■

COVER STORY CONTINUED

Walt Ranch Is Permanently Protected!

We thank everyone who contributed to this project and all our supporting members. Your support is critical to the Land Trust’s ability to take on this kind of large-scale project, and carry it forward to permanent protection.

The Land Trust will now complete biological surveys and continue its fuels reduction work while creating a plan

for public use. In the meantime, the Land Trust has offered its members a chance to get out early and catch a sneak peek of the land through guided hikes offered via its field trip program. ■

Left and Right: Jepson’s leptosiphon and California brodiae, rare species found on Walt Ranch.





Land Trust Helps Open Space District Expand New Park

Photo: Acquisition of 42 acres in the Mayacamas Mountains, connects Mount Veeder Road to The Cove, a 160 acre property owned by Napa Open Space District.

The **Land Trust's** purchase of 42 acres in the Mayacamas Mountains helps the Napa County Regional Park and Open Space District expand and open a park for the public. The land is along Mount Veeder Road and connects to The Cove, a 160-acre rustic camp property already owned by the Open Space District (NOSD). Until now, the Cove did not have optimal access.

The Cove draws visitors for recreational use and access to the peak of Mt. Veeder, offering spectacular 360-degree views. This new acquisition will provide access directly off Mount Veeder Road, an ideal future entrance for visitors.

The property was owned by a family of 10 cousins who, knowing about their land's proximity to The Cove, approached NOSD in the hopes of protecting the property instead of listing it for sale. NOSD then approached the Land Trust to explore the possibility of protecting the land in the short-term, before the family turned to the alternative of a listing.

The Land Trust often works with public partners to protect land when time constraints make it impossible for a public agency to pursue a transaction on their own. In this case, the Land Trust was able to come to terms with the landowners and close the transaction in a short time frame. The purchase closed in August, with the Land Trust taking title. The Land

Trust and NOSD also entered into an agreement that NOSD will purchase the property from the Land Trust within three years, once funding is available.

Chris Cahill, NOSD's General Manager, praised the Land Trust for securing the property and closing the deal quickly. His initial dialogue with the family began in May 2023, so this transaction went from an idea at that time, to a closing in August. Not all transactions have to take a long time!

Besides its benefits for public access, this project also protected a property with significant conservation values. First, the property is located within a key gap in a corridor of protected land that extends from the top of Mount Veeder almost to the valley floor near Yountville. Protecting corridors like this allows for the continued movement of wildlife across the landscape.

The property provides habitat for priority species. The California Natural Diversity Database identified Giant Salamander, Napa False Indigo and Black Swift. Additionally, the parcel is located at the top of the Dry Creek watershed and protecting its springs and drainages will protect this watershed. For all these reasons, the Bay Area Conservation Lands Network identified the property as "essential" to conservation goals across the Bay Area. ■

Mabie Foundation Donates \$1M to Land Trust for Management of Walt Ranch

The **Land Trust** is pleased to announce a significant donation toward the management and public access of the recently acquired Walt Ranch. The William and Inez Mabie Family Foundation has committed one million dollars to ensure appropriate management of the property's natural values and to ensure public access into the future.

The 2,300-acre property was purchased by the Land Trust on May 31st. The property has a wide range of habitats, including oak woodlands and open meadows, as well as rare species and a range of water resources, such as Milliken Creek that runs through the property and on to Milliken Reservoir, a municipal water source for the 80,000 residents of the City of Napa.

"We are so thankful to the William and Inez Mabie Family Foundation for this generous grant," said Doug Parker. "Protecting the land was critical. But beyond that, it will be expensive to manage this large property in an appropriate way and this gift goes a long way toward initiating that effort."

Parker said that there are a diverse array of projects that will have to be undertaken on the property, from protecting rare species and removing invasive species, to reducing fuel loads through forest thinning, mowing, grazing and controlled burns, all aimed at reducing the risks from wildfires, while strengthening the resilience of the property's natural values to the stresses caused by climate change.

"In particular, this gift is crucial to assuring public access compatible with protection of the property's natural values. The Foundation's generous grant will help create and maintain the main trail on the property."



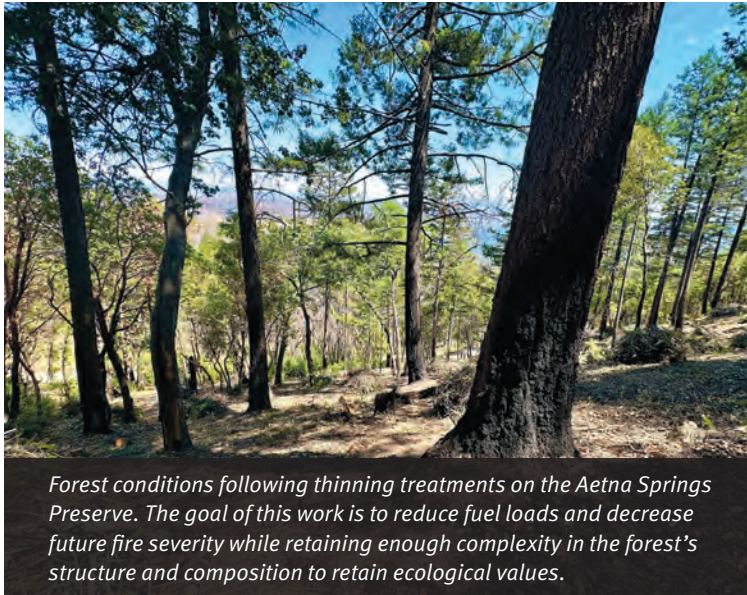
Views of Walt Ranch

And because of this commitment, this trail will be permanently named in honor of the Mabie family and the Foundation," said Doug Parker.

The Foundation was founded by William and Inez Mabie during their lifetimes to facilitate their charitable giving. William and Inez Mabie were engaged in substantial ranching, farming, and real estate ventures, principally in the Northern California counties of Santa Clara and San Benito. Upon their deaths in 1995, the Foundation received the bulk of its assets from the estate of Inez Mabie, and the Foundation continues the charitable giving initiated by Mr. and Mrs. Mabie during their lifetimes.

"This gift to the Land Trust of Napa County fulfills a goal of the Mabies and their foundation which is to protect and preserve environmentally sensitive lands for the future generations of Northern California," said Yeoryios C. Apallas, president of the Mabie Foundation.

"This is a great boost toward our efforts to manage this large property and prepare it for public access. We are still raising funds toward the goal of ensuring that the Land Trust has the funding needed to manage this property over the long term and we very much appreciate the Mabie Foundation's help in kicking off this effort," said Doug Parker. ■



Forest conditions following thinning treatments on the Aetna Springs Preserve. The goal of this work is to reduce fuel loads and decrease future fire severity while retaining enough complexity in the forest's structure and composition to retain ecological values.



Land Trust Continues Fuels Reduction, Forest Health and Resilience Work

Working closely with the Napa Communities Firewise Foundation (NCFF), CAL FIRE, The Napa Resource Conservation District (RCD) and other partners, the Land Trust (LTNC) continued to make progress on fuels reduction, wildfire protection and forest health and resilience projects across its preserve system in 2023.

LTNC was awarded a North Bay Forest Improvement Program Grant through the Napa RCD to thin 32 acres of forest on its Aetna Springs Preserve in northern Napa County. The goal of the project was to make this forest more resilient to climate change and wildfire, and to reduce fuel loads given its proximity to Angwin and other developed areas. Specifically, the objectives were to decrease fire severity and tree mortality and prevent a crown fire by reducing ladder fuels, to increase the health and growth of remaining trees by reducing resource competition, and to increase habitat diversity by allowing for the persistence of trees other than the dominant Douglas fir, including oaks, ponderosa pines and madrones. This work builds on a 1.6 mile roadside shaded fuel break project completed on the Preserve in 2021 with technical and financial assistance from the Natural Resources Conservation Service. The section of Aetna Springs Road running through the preserve was an important access and containment point for firefighters as 2020 wildfires burned toward the communities of Angwin and Calistoga.



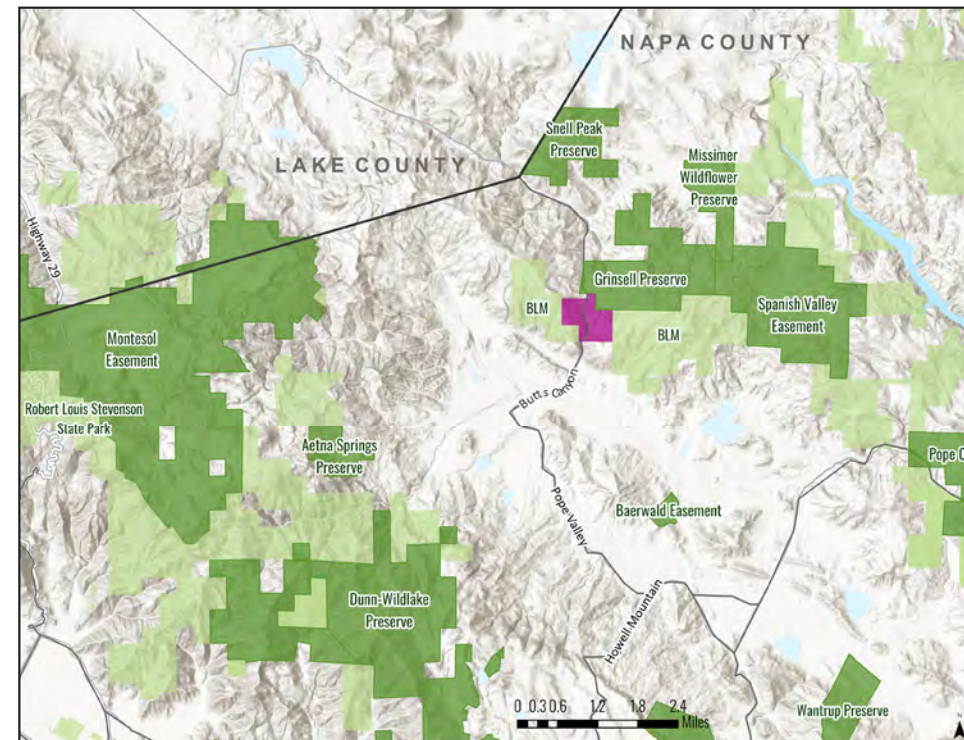
Crewmembers work to thin dense stands of dead and dying, small diameter trees for forest health and resilience, and fuels reduction on Aetna Springs Preserve.

LTNC completed multiple priority fuels reduction and fire protection measures on its Sutro Preserve in the Atlas Peak area as well. The Land Trust coordinated with NCFF to improve a strategic ridgetop firebreak along a roughly three-mile long stretch of the preserve. LTNC also coordinated with NCFF to improve fire engine access between Atlas Peak Road and Highway 128 at Lake Hennessey, including routes through the Sutro property. In addition, LTNC completed a fuels reduction project on the southern end of the preserve adjacent to Foss Valley, which was an important point of containment during the 2020 LNU Lightning Complex fires.

LTNC also began fuels reduction and wildfire protection work within its newly acquired Walt Ranch property. In coordination with NCFF and CAL FIRE, the Land Trust reduced heavy fuel loads along a roughly one mile length of road that has been important for the protection of the Circle Oaks community, and is an alternate evacuation route for residents of upper Atlas Peak Road. ■



Key Wildlife Corridor Expanded



The **Land Trust completed the acquisition of 257 acres** of undeveloped land in Pope Valley. The newly acquired property is adjacent to over 7,000 acres of existing protected land, including a Land Trust Preserve as well as federal land managed by the Bureau of Land Management (BLM).



The land will be added to the Land Trust's adjacent Grinsell Preserve, making the preserve now over 1,500 acres.

The permanent protection of this property also safeguards some of Napa's most rare and threatened native plants.

"This land is significant strategically because it connects existing protected land along a key wildlife corridor," said Doug Parker. "It connects a 1,280-acre preserve we purchased three years ago with over 480 acres of BLM land, extending the corridor we have been working to protect between Robert Louis Stevenson State Park and Lake Berryessa. This has been identified as one of the key pathways for wildlife movement across the North Bay."

"The property includes serpentine soils that support a number of rare wildflower species that are found in only a few counties in this area," said Doug Parker, "nowhere else in the world."

The Bay Area Conservation Lands Network has identified the property as "essential", their highest ranking, to the conservation goals of the Bay Area based upon its location and natural values. ■

Top Left: Map of protected area; Right: Two-carpellate Dwarf Flax, found in only four counties in California, with the majority of its populations in Napa and Lake Counties.

Land Trust Coordinates Major Endangered Species Conservation Project



Napa is now home to a booming new population of the largest native frog in California, the federally threatened red-legged frog. In early 2022, the Land Trust of Napa County (LTNC) started an endangered species conservation project within its 2,000-acre Wragg Ridge Preserve in southeastern Napa County. The Wragg Ridge Preserve lies within a recognized Core Recovery Area for the species.

Funded by the Endangered Species Conservation and Recovery Program (U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service) and the California Department of Fish and Wildlife, the focus of this project is to restore habitat and populate three ponds with red-legged frogs. Over the past two years, eggs from a nearby donor site were successfully translocated to Wragg Ridge. Thousands of eggs hatched and hundreds of tadpoles survived to metamorphose into sub-adult frogs.

In early spring of 2023, we translocated six additional egg masses, two to each of three ponds. Those egg masses were monitored and hatched 1,542 larvae. This Summer and



Fall, we caught and tagged 193 metamorphosed red-legged frogs. Although that is only a 12.5% metamorph rate, it is approximately six times a typical success rate. In total, in this second year of the project, we captured and tagged 506 metamorphic frogs, twice as many as we tagged in 2022. We also constructed an additional 19 upland habitat piles and observed frogs moving through uplands and into habitat piles.

Over the final year of the project, LTNC will track individual survival and reproduction, enhance upland habitat piles, and conduct botanical surveys to track post-fire changes in habitat structure and additional species of greatest conservation need, such as yellow-legged frog, yellow-breasted chat, and three bat species.

“We were excited to permanently protect the Wragg Ridge Preserve, when we purchased it five years ago,” said Mike Palladini, LTNC Stewardship Director. “This project demonstrates how important it is to go beyond just the acquisition of important natural areas. With carefully planned and implemented restoration projects, protected areas like this one harbor the potential to counteract the negative trends for native species that have been declining for many years.” ■

Left to Right: A second-year California red-legged frog, hatched from eggs translocated to LTNC's Wragg Ridge Preserve as part of an endangered species conservation project. Frogs established on the preserve through this project are substantially larger and mature earlier than previously documented.

Field crews measure and tag California red-legged frogs as part of LTNC's endangered species conservation project. PIT tags will allow biologists to gather important information on frog development, survival, movement and habitat use.



Sutro Preserve Western Monarch Conservation Project in Full Swing

Land Trust stewardship staff have literally been breaking ground this fall to enhance habitat for highly threatened western monarch butterfly populations. LTNC Staff and American Conservation Experience crews planted over 200 Heartleaf milkweed (*Asclepius cordifolia*) plants on our Sutro Ranch Preserve. Milkweed is critical to monarch reproduction. This type of milkweed may also be important in helping monarchs adapt to climate change-related shifts in migration and breeding because it emerges early in the growing season.

Monarch butterfly populations have decreased in size by over 95% since the 1980s. Monarchs face a variety of threats, including the loss of habitat, pesticides, disease, and the effects of climate change. Two of the critical strategies aimed at population recovery are protecting and restoring breeding and overwintering

habitat. Because more than one-third of the best California wintering habitat is on privately owned land, collaboration across jurisdictions and organizations is essential.

In coordination with the Napa County Monarch Work Group and with funding from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and a local donor, LTNC staff first collected seeds from some of the 600 identified Heartleaf milkweed plants. Partners at the Laguna de Santa Rosa Foundation then tested various ways of germinating seeds. The growth and planting of these first 200 pilot plants is an important milestone, as it was unknown if propagation was possible. Next steps include mapping and tracking of milkweed plants, cultivation and planting of several additional native nectar plants, continued removal of invasive species, and tracking use of the project area by monarchs during migration and breeding. ■



Top Image to Stacked Images:

LTNC Stewardship Project Manager, Megan Lilla gives AmeriCorps crew members and volunteers a tutorial on milkweed planting methods.

A heartleaf milkweed seedling, propagated from seed collected from the Sutro Preserve monarch conservation project area is ready to be planted.

Seeds dispersing from an established heartleaf milkweed plant on Sutro Preserve. Milkweed seed collection and propagation have been key to enhancing breeding habitat for western monarchs.

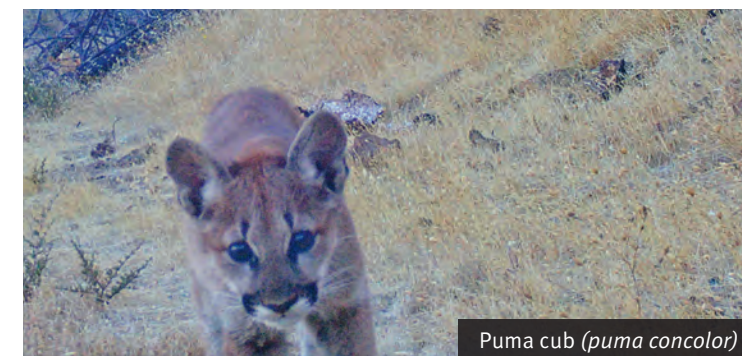
A monarch caterpillar on heartleaf milkweed.



Window on Wildlife: Wildlife Monitoring Effort Produces Striking Images

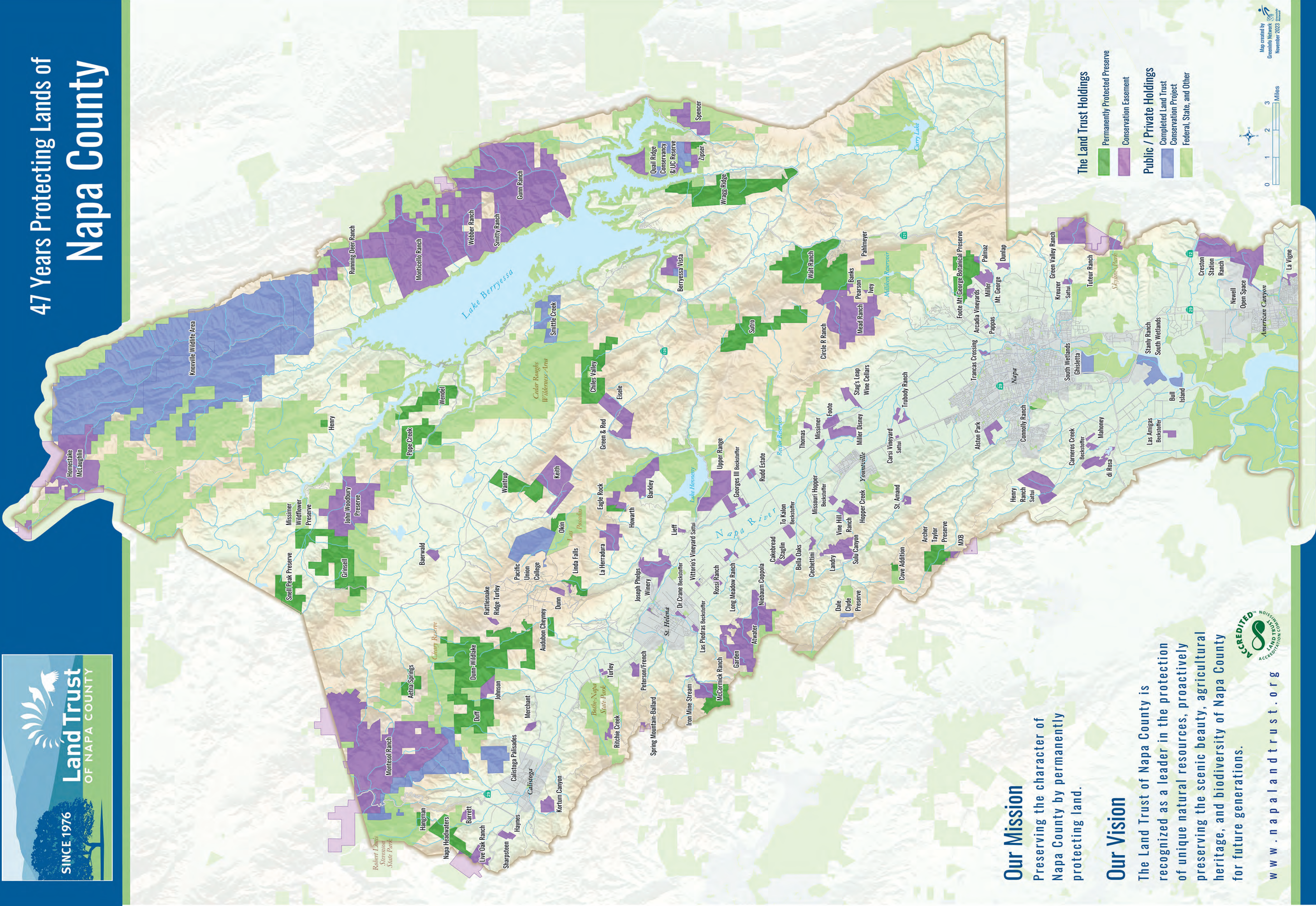


Over the last seven years, the Land Trust has been using an array of 20 motion-activated cameras deployed across nearly 5,000 acres to track the long-term health of wildlife populations in Napa County's protected wildlands. The Land Trust catalogues and analyzes the photo data from these cameras using a standardized scientific protocol referred to as the Wildlife Picture Index, or WPI. In addition to generating important, long-term data on species distribution and abundance, the WPI project has produced striking images of a diverse array of bird and mammal species. Here are a few of our favorite images from 2023. We hope you enjoy them too! ■





47 Years Protecting Lands of Napa County



Our Mission

Preserving the character of Napa County by permanently protecting land.

Our Vision

The Land Trust of Napa County is recognized as a leader in the protection of unique natural resources, proactively preserving the scenic beauty, agricultural heritage, and biodiversity of Napa County for future generations.

 www.napalandtrust.org

Map created by
GreenInfo Network
November 2023



Prescribed Grazing Data Analysis Yields Interesting, Encouraging Results

The **Land Trust** has completed a three-year grassland restoration and fuels reduction project in a 230-acre project area on Wantrup Preserve in Pope Valley. With funding from the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) Conservation Innovation program, we addressed a key question in grassland and oak woodland stewardship—How and when should we graze to best support native plant biodiversity? To guide our stewardship practices and share insights with partners across the region and state, the Land Trust experimentally tested how native plants respond to the grazing of small ruminant in the dry season.

Targeted grazing by sheep and goats reduces the heavy accumulation of non-native dry matter (weed thatch) that often acts as a physical barrier to the growth and reproduction of native plant species. Multi-paddock, dry-season grazing allows remaining native plants to grow and disperse seeds prior to grazing. Using an experimental design of replicated, paired grazed/ungrazed plots, we compared dry matter as well as richness (number of species) and abundance of native and non-native plants

Over the study period (2019-2021), we detected 209 plant species. Most species in our study were native (67%). Our paired experimental design allowed us to use mixed-effect

statistical models to compare plant biodiversity between grazed and ungrazed plots, with consideration of the effects of year, plot type, and grazing intervals.

Our statistically significant findings provide initial insight into how to create the conditions that will allow remaining native species to become more competitive. **We found greater abundance and richness of native species and especially native forb species in grazed plots compared to ungrazed plots.**

The mean abundance of native species in grazed plots (18.4%) was twice that of ungrazed plots (9.2%). The response was even stronger for the subset of native herbaceous flowering plants where abundance in grazed plots was more than twice that of ungrazed plots. We found no difference in non-native abundance between grazed and ungrazed plots.

This innovative project provides evidence that grazing small ruminants in the dry-season both effectively reduces the heavy build-up of weed thatch/fine fuels and significantly benefits biodiversity. To share these findings, the Land Trust worked with the Napa Resource Conservation District to organize a workshop and field trip to the Wantrup Preserve. Representatives from the Natural Resources Conservation Service, the Napa and Solano Resource Conservation Districts, Sonoma Agricultural and Open Space District, Marin Agricultural Land Trust, and UC Cooperative Extension, as well as local landowners and ranchers/grazers attended. ■

Left Page and Bottom Right: Sheep and goats reducing a heavy buildup of non-native, dry plant material in blue oak woodland on Wantrup Preserve.

Top Right: One of 180 experimental vegetation plots set up to quantify the effects of carefully controlled, dry-season goat and sheep grazing on Wantrup Preserve.

“This is a stellar example of a multi-benefit project. Not only has there been a reduction in potentially hazardous fuels and an increase in native plant biodiversity, the Land Trust has also strengthened regional and state partnerships and expanded our stewardship toolkit,” said Tosha Comendant, LTNC Senior Stewardship Program Manager.

“Now our objective is to seek funding to continue dry season grazing and then expand the method to additional suitable Land Trust preserves.”

The Land Trust’s ongoing conservation grazing on the Wantrup Preserve has been supported in part by a generous grant award from the Wayne Grey Wilson Foundation.



Land Trust partners with RCD on valley oak savannah and vernal pool habitat restoration



Land Trust stewardship staff members Jennifer Colin and Joe Clark install protective cages at valley oak restoration site on Wantrup Preserve to prevent livestock damage to oak seedlings.



The **Land Trust** has started restoring 53 acres of valley floor within the 730-acre Wantrup Preserve in Pope Valley thanks to a generous grant award administered by the Napa County Resource Conservation District (RCD) and funded by the Napa Valley Vintners. The project targets valley oak savannah and vernal pool habitats, two very significant ecosystem types found in Napa County. Valley oak (*Quercus lobata*) trees can live to be up to 600 years old and are among the largest species of oak. They are a drought sensitive species that lost most of their habitat by the turn of the century due to depletion of ground water and development. Vernal pools are seasonal wetlands that do not drain after the winter rains due to impenetrable soils. Many sensitive endemic and rare plant species that depend on vernal pool systems have been observed in the pools on the Wantrup preserve.

Valley oak savannahs and vernal pools were historically abundant, however now only about 10% of each of these habitats' original footprints remain in the state today. Throughout the valley floor on Wantrup, past grazing practices degraded both of these ecosystem types by suppressing the growth of native plant species, and encouraged the spread of invasive plants such as Harding grass (*Phalaris aquatica*), yellow star thistle (*Centaurea solstitialis*), and medusa head (*Elymus caput-medusae*).

The Land Trust has started grazing the valley floor at strategic times of year with high intensity, short-term sheep grazing, after which we anticipate positive effects on the vernal pool habitat areas. This grazing method will help abate the invasive species surrounding the vernal pools. We began grazing and



monitoring the vernal pool areas of the valley floor this summer and will continue this method in 2024. Based on our prior grazing results at Wantrup, we expect to see an increase in native cover and a decrease in invasive species throughout the grazed areas. We have also started manually removing invasive plant species in the vernal pool areas with the help of hired American Conservation Experience (ACE) crews.

This fall, Land Trust staff collected ripe valley oak acorns on-site and planted them at 106 locations throughout the 53-acre project area. With the help of an ACE crew, we constructed vaca cages (sturdy wire meshing to keep cattle out), and rodent exclusion cages for each of the planting sites. Our planting sites are located in wide-open areas where there is adequate room for these trees to grow and flourish over the next several centuries!

The Wantrup valley floor has a range of valley oaks from newly sprouted saplings, to 5-10 year old trees that were planted by local students, to 30-40 year old trees planted by our former Wantrup caretaker and botanist Joe Calizo. At the far end of the spectrum, we have majestic 200 to 400 year old trees loaded with acorns stored by the resident woodpeckers and teaming with life! It is an inspiration to look around the valley floor and to see the generations of trees sprouting up, a key part of the recovery of this landscape to its origins as a rich savannah with thriving habitats. ■

Top Images, Left to Right: Valley oak acorns collected from mature trees on the Wantrup Preserve as part of long-term Land Trust oak woodland restoration efforts.

AmeriCorps crew members installing protective cages in an oak restoration area on Land Trust's Wantrup Preserve to prevent damage to valley oak seedlings by rodents and cattle.

Land Trust Honors Bruce Phillips and Phillips Family with 2023 Acre by Acre Award

The **Land Trust** is proud to announce that Bruce Phillips and the Phillips Family are the recipients of the 2023 Acre by Acre Award, which was presented at the Land Trust’s Cornerstone Society Gathering on October 13th.

The Acre by Acre award honors outstanding conservation accomplishments in Napa that epitomize the aspirations expressed in the Land Trust’s mission: to preserve the character of Napa by permanently protecting land.

The Phillips family’s involvement in conservation has been ongoing for many years. The family donated a conservation easement to the Land Trust to permanently protect much of their property at Vine Hill Ranch. Bruce Phillips also served on the Land Trust board for seven years, where he served as both Vice Chair and then Chair. During his time as Chair, Bruce helped complete a strategic plan for the organization that continues to provide guidance on conservation priorities for the Land Trust.

Additionally, Bruce was also the founder of the Cornerstone Society, the Land Trust’s principal giving circle which has been integral to developing critical philanthropic support for the organization. Bruce and his parents hosted the very first Cornerstone Society dinner in 2014, at Vine Hill Ranch. ■



Bruce Phillip receiving the 2023 Acre by Acre Award, presented by CEO Doug Parker

“**Having protected almost 20% of Napa County’s rich agricultural, open space and biodiverse resources since in founding in 1976, the Land Trust of Napa County continues to advance its mission to perpetually protect Napa County’s singular agricultural lands, water resources, wildlife and wildlife corridors, scenic open space and unique biodiverse resources for future generations. My family is proud to continue to support the Land Trust’s efforts,” said Bruce.**



Land Trust Cornerstone Society members gathered together at Castello di Amorosa for a festive evening celebrating another successful year in conservation.

The event was generously hosted by Dario and Irina Sattui at their authentically styled 14th-century Tuscan castle and winery. During the dinner, LTNC announced the protection of over 4,000 acres since last year’s celebration. **And since the Cornerstone Society was formed nine years ago, the Land Trust has been able to permanently protect over 40,000 acres!**

Dario, a lifelong steward of the environment, has placed 600 acres of land into conservation easements with the Land Trust. No structures will ever be built on these acres—they will remain protected forever. The winery’s vineyards are certified organic, and the winery is Napa Green-certified.

The Land Trust thanks the members of our 2023 Cornerstone Society and offers our sincere gratitude for their generous support of our ongoing mission to preserve Napa’s incredible biodiversity, wildlife corridors, watersheds, forests and unique agricultural and natural resources in perpetuity.



We wish to once again thank our hosts Dario and Irina for a wonderful evening! Land Trust CEO Doug Parker, the Board of Trustees and staff extend our gratitude to all of these far-sighted local families and organizations helping protect Napa for the long term. ■

Top image and inset: Event location Castello di Amorosa, and guest enjoying dinner

Give the Gift of Membership

This upcoming holiday season, connect someone you love with the Land Trust. Great for birthdays and special occasions, as friendship and business gifts, or ... just because! By giving the gift of membership, your broad support will help preserve and steward Napa County for future generations.

With several donation categories to choose from, gift giving is fast and easy. Visit napalandtrust.org/get-involved/gift-of-membership.



Welcome New Board Members Annie Favia-Erickson and Kim Johnson



As a Viticulturist and Vintner, **Annie Favia-Erickson** has been an advocate for holistic farming in the Napa Valley since the 1990s. She began Favia Wines in 2001 with her husband and partner Andy Erickson and ERDA TEA in 2018.

Her deep love and reverence for the natural world drives not only her work growing grapes, herbal

teas, olives, vegetables, fruit and flowers, but also her passion to help the Land Trust to maintain the natural ecosystems and beauty of the Napa Valley.

“I feel blessed to live in the Napa Valley,” said Annie, “and feel a responsibility to help the Land Trust preserve its biodiversity, beauty and resources.” ■



Kim Johnson is a San Francisco management consultant-turned-Napa Valley vintner. She co-founded the boutique wine Okapi with her husband Dan Johnson in 2009 and subsequently built an ardent following for the brand.

In the corporate world, Kim specialized in marketing, strategic communications and employee engage-

ment. She began her career in hospitality sales and marketing, ultimately leading the corporate marcom teams for two hotel companies before transitioning to consulting when she joined KPMG as a marketing director in the tech practice. From there, she held senior consulting roles with The Gallup Organization and Bonfire Communications, helping leaders create change and unlock the human potential inside their organizations.

“Whenever I see visitors posing in front of the “Welcome to Napa Valley” sign, I’m reminded what a privilege it is to live here, and I want to help preserve the character of this special place through my engagement with the Land Trust.” Kim said. ■



THANK YOU Landowners, Donors, Members and Volunteers

Your contributions and efforts have helped protect:

- **157 Properties** through Conservation Easements
- **19,0000+ acres** now owned by the Land Trust
- In total, more than **92,000 acres** protected
- Over **17% of Napa County** protected in perpetuity

Farewell Outgoing Board Members Paul Asmuth, Malcolm Mackenzie and Herta Peju



Paul Asmuth served on LTNC’s Board of Trustees for six years beginning in 2017, serving two terms. During his tenure, he served on the finance and audit committees and he and his wife Marilyn served as hosts for the 2019 Cornerstone Society dinner. Paul is the General Manager of The Napa Valley Reserve and also serves on the Meadowood Napa Valley Executive Committee.

“The work that the Land Trust does to protect large tracts of land is critical to the protection of rare biodiversity in our region, as well as the survival of key species,” said Paul. “Through these protections, the Land Trust staff has done exceptional work helping to preserve the beauty and wildness of Napa County for generations to come.”

In 2016 Paul became a Certified California Naturalist and is the founder and manager of a 475-tree, coast redwood carbon sequestration forest, irrigated with wastewater effluent. Paul explained that, “helping our environment is everyone’s responsibility. The amazing coast redwood sequesters more carbon than any other tree on our planet, and is native to our region, so I’m pleased to help through this project and with the Land Trust.” ■



Malcolm Mackenzie served on LTNC’s Board of Trustees for six years beginning in 2016, serving two terms. During his tenure, he served as Secretary of the board and as a member of the Executive Committee. Malcolm is an experienced lawyer and a former respected senior partner with Coombs & Dunlap, LLP. He specialized in estate planning and administration, real estate and litigation.

“As a mainstay in the community for over forty years, the Land Trust protects land across Napa that directly benefits our quality of life in a number of ways,” said Malcolm. “I’m proud to have served on the Board of Trustees and look forward to continuing however I can to help them pursue their mission.”

Malcolm attended Stanford University and graduated with honors. He then went on to receive his law degree from Boalt Hall School of Law, University of California at Berkeley. He moved to the Napa Valley with his family in 1970 to join Coombs & Dunlap, and has been active in many church, school, and community activities.

Malcolm has served as President of the Napa County Bar Association, City Attorney for the cities of Napa and Calistoga, President of the Richard M. Sangster Inn of Court, and President of the Board of Directors of the Episcopal Diocese of Northern California. ■



Herta Peju served on LTNC’s Board of Trustees beginning in 2020. Herta is the owner and co-founder of Peju Province Winery in Rutherford, a family-owned and operated wine business fostering sustainable and environmental consciousness since 1983.

After earning a bachelor’s degree in science from the University of Southern California, Herta worked with her late husband Tony Peju, expanding floral shops into a nursery business. While searching for a larger farm to continue the nursery business, they came upon a 30-acre parcel in Rutherford that changed the course of their lives. With farming in the family’s blood and wine grapes already growing on the land, they built Peju Province Winery.

“Supporting the Land Trust as a Board member enabled me to contribute back to the Napa Valley community while working to preserve and protect its stunning views, native plants and wildlife,” said Herta. ■

Welcome Tosha Comendant, LTNC's New Senior Stewardship Program Manager

We are very excited to welcome Tosha Comendant to the Land Trust's Land Stewardship team as Senior Stewardship Program Manager! We did a brief **Q & A** with Tosha to introduce her to our members, supporters and partners.

Can you tell folks a bit about your professional background and your connection to Napa County?

My family's connection to Napa Valley goes back to 1916. I grew up exploring the creeks and woods around Chiles Valley, St. Helena and Angwin, developing a deep love for our rugged wildlands, expansive views, and awe-inspiring biodiversity. I studied Integrative Biology at UC Berkeley and completed my doctorate and postdoc in Ecology and Evolutionary Biology at UC Santa Cruz. Prior to joining The Land Trust, I worked in science and stewardship roles at Pepperwood Foundation in Sonoma County, Conservation Biology Institute, and The Nature Conservancy in Washington DC. I feel grateful to live in a place where I can easily hike, bike, and enjoy great food!

...and with your extensive experience and skill set, including high level conservation science work, can you talk a little about why you were interested in joining our local conservation nonprofit?

Joining the Land Trust feels like a full-circle moment, as I started my career in the land trust community. I see this role as an opportunity to leverage my global, regional, and local non-profit organization experience and partnerships to advance protection and stewardship in our watersheds and wildlands. My twins are now fourth generation Napa County residents—it's my hope that their kids and grand-kids will also be able to experience the beauty of connected wildlands and the delight of mountain lions, black bears, monarch butterflies, and red-legged frogs.

Can you talk a little about what your work for the Land Trust will focus on?

As a part of the stewardship team, my efforts will focus on enhancing the health, resilience, and connectivity of our 24 permanent preserves. I will collaborate with the stewardship team to identify science-based priorities, secure funding for new and ongoing projects, strengthen partnerships, and manage restoration, assessments, and monitoring projects. Taking care and connecting the Trust's preserve network is both a privilege and a major responsibility.

You've been doing initial site visits to the preserves to begin getting to know these conservation lands on the ground. What has struck you about these protected natural areas?

Exploring the preserve network over the past few weeks fills me with optimism. Everywhere we visited – coniferous forests, oak woodlands, serpentine chaparral, and riparian forests – is teeming with life. It has also left me with a sharper understanding of the colossal task we have to remove invasive species, restore prescribed fire and grazing, control and prevent erosion, and actively improve landscape health.

And what do you see as the value of the Land Trust's Land Stewardship program, and of actively managing these conservation lands?

I believe that land protection without active stewardship is an unfinished investment. By taking an active role in stewarding natural areas, we are doing what we can to enhance the quality and abundance of our water, air, land, and biodiversity. These components of environmental health are the foundation of Napa's character, beauty, and quality of life. Actively managing our landscape provides core benefits to our community including improved soil and water condition, lower risk of catastrophic wildfire, enhanced resilience to drought and changing climate, and lower risk of population declines and extinctions.



Tosha Comendant,
Senior Stewardship Program Manager

McCormick Ranch Provides Key Linkage

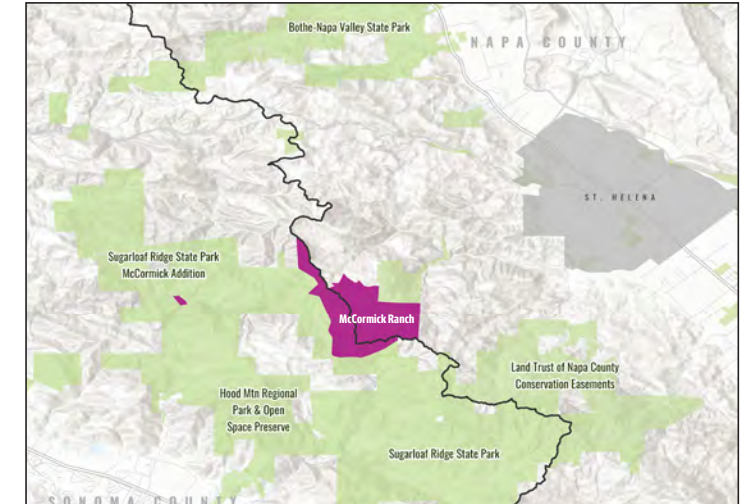


The **Land Trust** is pleased to announce the protection of 654 acres at McCormick Ranch. The property is on the Sonoma-Napa line just west of St. Helena. This project was a partnership between conservation organizations in Napa and Sonoma – 401 acres of the property are in Napa and 253 acres in Sonoma. LTNC now owns the 401 acres in Napa, while Sonoma acreage will eventually be owned by Sonoma County Regional Parks.

The property abuts 7,000 acres of previously protected land, including the 4,000-acre Sugarloaf Ridge State Park in Sonoma. Sugarloaf Park extends south along the Sonoma side of the county line to abut 1,500 acres protected through conservation easements held by the LNTC with four families - the Gardens, Atwaters, Halls, and Coppolas.

"This land is significant strategically," said Doug Parker. "The area has been identified as a key gap in a corridor identified in the Bay Area Critical Linkages Project that extends across the North Bay. This is the most important wildlife corridor across the area, stretching from the Point Reyes National Seashore in Marin to the Berryessa Snow Mountain National Monument in Napa."

Besides its strategic location, this conservation project also protects a wide range of other values. The property provides habitat for a range of priority species. This is the headwaters for a number of streams in Sonoma flowing down to the Russian River; in Napa, this includes the upper reaches of the watershed that drains into Sulphur Creek, which flows through the City of St. Helena to the Napa River. The property includes a significant amount of ridgeline that can be seen from Silverado Trail and parts of Highway 29. The property provides sweeping views across Napa Valley in one direction and across Sonoma to San Francisco in the other. The property will be open to the public and can link into a 26+ mile trail system at Sugarloaf and an 18-mile trail system at Hood Mountain Regional Park.



This is the last holding of what was the historic McCormick Ranch, which was over 3,000 acres and was originally settled in 1844 by William McCormick. Some of the Ranch was protected previously and is now part of Sugarloaf Park. The descendants of the McCormicks, the Learned/Perry family, donated a significant amount of the value of these 654 acres in order to ensure that it would be protected permanently. This property was also the site for Acorn Soupe, an environmental education program founded by Sandra Learned Perry, which provided programs for local students and was aimed at inspiring kids to have a life-long commitment to the land via education in nature.

Besides the family, the \$14.3 million project was funded by several key contributors, including the Gordon & Betty Moore Foundation, California State Coastal Conservancy, California Natural Resources Agency, California State Parks' Habitat Conservation Fund, Sonoma Land Trust and individual donors. On Dec 12th, the Sonoma County Board of Supervisors approved the final funding through a grant from the Sonoma County Agricultural Preservation and Open Space District for \$3.5M. For over 30 years, this District has been funded by a sales tax dedicated to open space protection and management.

"This was a great partnership project," said Doug Parker. "I want to thank first, Jim Perry and the Perry/Learned family for their commitment to this conservation project. They donated over \$3M in value, which is a very significant part of the property's value. Additionally, I want to thank all the funders for their help and all of our partners in Sonoma County, especially the Sonoma Land Trust for all their coordination and efforts. **We were pleased to participate with such a great group of partners on this important project.**" ■

Top Left: Mount St. Helena seen from McCormick Ranch

Top Right: Map of McCormick Ranch shared across Napa and Sonoma Counties

Protection Priorities



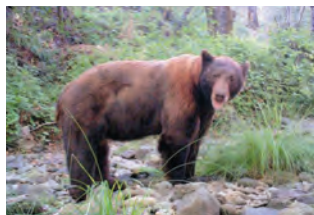
Biodiversity



Watersheds



Ranch Lands



Wildlife Cooridors



Scenic Vistas



Forests



Agriculture

By the numbers

92,000+ acres protected

17% of Napa County in 47 years and 275 projects

47,034 acres under Land Conservation Agreements

26,209 acres transferred to State and Local Agencies

19,063 acres owned by the Land Trust

157 conservation easements donated by over 95 property owners
(properties stay in private ownership, but LTNC holds the land conservation agreement)

22 properties transferred to resource agencies
(such as Fish & Wildlife and State Parks)

25 properties protected through Land Trust ownership
(land which is eventually transferred or becomes a Land Trust Permanent Preserve)

The Land Trust owns more than 19,000 acres, including:

Aetna Springs Preserve:

320 acres of undeveloped forest land

Archer Taylor Preserve:

400 acres with redwoods in Mayacamas Mountains

Audubon Cheyney Preserve:

120 acres in Bell Canyon

Chiles Valley Preserve:

1,150 acres key to connecting wildlife corridors

Connolly Ranch:

12 acres including the Environmental Education Center

Duff Ranch:

1,040 acres in the mountains east of St. Helena

Dunn-Wildlake Preserve:

3,205 acres of forest in Howell Mountain area

Foote Botanical Preserve:

767 acres on Mount George

Grinsell Preserve:

1,535 acres protecting rare species and wildlife corridors

Linda Falls:

177 forested aces near Angwin

McCormick Ranch:

401 acres connecting to Sugarloaf Ridge State Park

Missimer Snell Valley Preserve:

431 acres with rare native wildflowers

Sutro Ranch:

1,380 acres including Alas Peak ridgeline

Walt Ranch:

2,300 acres home to rare species, Oak woodlands and watersheds

Wantrup Preserve:

730 acres of oak woodlands in Pope Valley

Wragg Ridge Preserve:

1,950 acres protecting oak woodlands and wildlife habitat

Snow Visits Land Trust’s Protected Properties

Several Land Trust preserves received a memorable visit of snow in February, creating postcard-worthy images.

The Land Trust’s Linda Falls Preserve in Angwin saw the most snow, while the Pacific Union College forest, located down the road from the preserve, morphed into a winter wonderland as well. According to the National Weather Service, Angwin received an estimated eight inches of snow, with some residents reporting 10-12 inches.

The Land Trust’s Archer Taylor Preserve was also transformed with a light blanket of snow covering the renowned redwood stands and Maggie’s Peak. The National Weather Service estimated two to five inches fell along the Mayacamas mountain range between Sonoma County and Napa County. The Land Trust’s Sutro Ranch Preserve on Atlas Peak received a similar amount of snow. ■



Clockwise order: The trailhead at Linda Falls Preserve nearly disappears in the snowy landscape; Even Linda Falls itself received snow; Maggie’s Peak at Archer Taylor Preserve with a thin layer of snow on Feb. 24, 2023.



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**Land Trust of Napa County is a
nonprofit dedicated to preserving
the character of Napa by
permanently protecting land.**

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Upcoming Field Trips & Events

JANUARY

- 1 New Year's Day Hike Mt. St. Helena
- 7 Ten Terrible Weeds at ATP
- 14 ATP Cascades & Devil's Well
- 15 Linda Falls Preserve Workparty
- 22 ATP Workday: Meadows
- 26 Linda Falls Hike
- 28 Zem Zem Falls
- 29 ATP Workday: Trails

FEBRUARY

- 4 Wragg Ridge
- 5 Mushroom Exploration in PUC Forest
- 11 Redwood Ramble
- 12 ATP Workday: Meadows
- 18 Birding & Owling at Wantrup Preserve*
- 23 Loop North of Lake Berryessa
- 28 Linda Falls Preserve Workparty

*For Land Trust members only—a great reason
to join and support us! For details, to register
or to join as a member, visit napalandtrust.org.

We'd love to see your adventures!
Please share your pictures and use #gohikenapa

