



CONSERVATION HORIZONS
KEEPING CONSERVATION AND
LAND TRUSTS VITAL FOR THE NEXT AGE

A California Council of Land Trusts' Initiative



Conservation Horizons is an initiative of the California Council of Land Trusts.

Conservation Horizons was launched with the generous support and confidence of Resources Legacy Fund's Bay Area Conservation Initiative, funded by the Gordon and Betty Moore Foundation and The David and Lucile Packard Foundation. We are also appreciative of support from the S.D. Bechtel, Jr. Foundation and the Cooley Law Firm of San Francisco for this project.

California Council of Land Trusts is deeply grateful to the *Conservation Horizons* Committee for its thoughtfulness, insight and commitment to considering conservation's future.

We also extend appreciation to more than 75 land trusts, public agencies, nonprofit experts, and philanthropic donors that provided input and shared their experiences.

This report and all associated documents can be viewed and downloaded at www.calandtrusts.org/horizons

© 2015 All rights reserved





Table of Contents

- 05 Letter from the Conservation Horizons Committee
- 07 Executive Summary
- 12 Conservation Horizons:
Keeping Conservation and Land Trusts Vital for the Next Age
- 13 Our Success
- 16 What the Future Brings
- 23 Guiding Principles for Keeping Conservation Vital
- 28 Plan for the Future
- 34 Conclusion

Illustration

- 24 Figure 1: Conservation Spectrum

Appendices*

- A Facts and Trends for the Future
- B Data Sources for 'Facts and Trends'
- C A California Conservation Retrospective
- D Sources and Endnotes

* Can be viewed at www.calandtrusts/horizons



A Letter from the Conservation Horizons Committee

TO CALIFORNIA LAND TRUSTS, AGENCIES, AND PARTNERS:

We came together as the *Conservation Horizons* Committee because we care about conservation, and we are concerned about the future for our land trusts that have so effectively worked to protect California's important natural systems.

Our work over the past 18 months made vivid the changing faces and needs of California. While none of what we discovered was singularly surprising, the sum total of our findings was imminently compelling. In fact, it is almost impossible to find a business, agency, or organization in California today, including land trusts, that is not talking about how these changes impact them and how they need to adapt in order to deliver new and relevant goods and services, grow market share, retain public support, or simply stay in business. Those that do not change with California run the risk of demise, while those that do will thrive.

Our recommendations seek to set forth practical first steps for recalibrating our priorities, methods, structures, systems, funding, programs, and projects so land trusts will continue to thrive. We urge all of us to tackle these challenges together by taking these essential first steps to ensure our conserved lands stay protected and our conservation work connects with the lives of all Californians.

With all best wishes for conservation's continuing success,

Alina Bokde, *Los Angeles Neighborhood Land Trust*

Ron Brown, *Save Mount Diablo*

Michele Clark, *Yolo Land Trust*

Gail Egenes, *Riverside Land Conservancy*

Dave Holland, *San Mateo County (retired)*

Hop Hopkins, *Panther Ridge Farm and Outdoor School*

Gary Knoblock, *S.D. Bechtel, Jr. Foundation*

Bill Leahy, *Bill Leahy Consulting Group*

Sam Livermore, *Yosemite Conservancy and Save the Redwoods League*

Walter Moore, *Peninsula Open Space Trust*

Curt Riffle, *The David and Lucile Packard Foundation*

Charles Thomas, *National Park Service*

Julie Turrini, *Resources Legacy Fund*

Nita Vail, *California Rangeland Trust*



Courtesy of San Joaquin River Parkway and Conservation Trust, photo by Sharon Weaver; Opposite page: Courtesy of Feather River Land Trust, photo by Michael Hofmayer



Executive Summary

DURING THE PAST THIRTY YEARS, California land trusts have worked with public agencies, supporters, and funders to conserve the state’s most important natural systems. We marshalled financial and public support to preserve over two million acres of remote wildlands, regional open space, working lands, and parks. We proved ourselves effective, versatile, and creative, growing our organizations and building our expertise. We contributed significantly to building the state’s world-class system of protected lands that provide a multitude of benefits to our people, communities, and state. Our success far exceeds what anyone might have first imagined.

Our work has always been about addressing threats and facing challenges. It has been about making sure that together we are part of larger statewide discussions and solutions on how to protect our natural systems, while working individually in our communities to deliver on-the-ground conservation wins. Today is no different. In fact, this is what brought the California Council of Land Trusts (CCLT) to launch *Conservation Horizons*, which seeks to ensure conservation’s future is as successful as its past.

The Conservation Horizons Committee, comprised of land trust leaders, conservation funders, and community supporters, spent the last 18 months tackling the future. We took a comprehensive look at accomplishments to date, as well as the breadth and depth of the challenges and opportunities ahead. This scan led to an organizing framework to guide our future work together with a practical plan for how to embark on that work immediately. The over-arching goal of the Committee’s work was to ensure land trusts remain an integral part in protecting the state’s important natural systems and connecting all Californians and their communities to them. This is the imperative for keeping land trusts vital and sustainable.

Today’s California is increasingly urban and ethnically diverse. For example, today, 95 percent of Californians live in urban areas or urban clusters. Latinos are the largest ethnic group in California today, and by 2050, two-thirds of the residents in four of California’s six regions are projected to be non-Caucasian. “Millennials” (generally recognized as the generation born between 1980 and 2000) will be the dominant decision-makers for the next 35 years. People are losing connection with the outdoors, while the threats of climate change and development pressure continue to challenge protection of our natural systems. As land trusts, we do not reflect the demographic make-up of California. Our protected lands are not readily accessible to most Californians, nor do they provide the range of outdoor experiences many Californians seek. These are just a few of the many facts and trends summarized in our report that provide the frame for our recommendations forward, challenging us to refocus our efforts



toward protecting our conservation lands and connecting them to all Californians. We hope you review this carefully as we found the future needs and challenges sobering, but the wins to be had encouraging and inspiring.

As in the past, our work should continue to focus on land, communities, people, and partners. Regardless of where and how we work individually, or what our individual mission and goals are, these principles should continue to guide our conservation work ahead, but in ways that reflect current realities and future needs. We must:

LAND – Preserve, protect, and restore our most important natural resources, working lands, and recreational spaces.

Our broader collective conservation vision is of an integrated system of expertly-managed, protected lands across the state – from neighborhood parks to working lands to remote wilderness areas – for people to use and enjoy and for

important natural systems to thrive. This will require an equitable focus and investment on conserving high priority conservation and working lands outside metropolitan areas and in creating and improving parks and open space that serve our urban and other underserved communities.

COMMUNITIES – Connect all Californians with our protected lands in ways meaningful to them.

Each land trust must more actively engage and connect its protected lands and conservation efforts with people in its community. Also, we must find ways as an industry to equitably connect our conservation work with all California communities, particularly residents in park-poor and income-poor communities that have been traditionally underserved by conservation.

PEOPLE – Reflect the ethnic and socio-economic diversity of the public we serve in our land trust leaders, staff, and programs. Land trusts must reflect the diversity of California by hiring diverse staff and leaders; investing in training and mentoring to retain diverse staff and leaders; recruiting more diverse board members; and engaging diverse members of communities in planning and implementing projects and programs.

PARTNERSHIPS – Build collaborative cross-sector partnerships. Building relationships with new nonprofit organizations, public agencies, companies, and funders will make possible a whole new generation of conservation projects that will broaden our reach into communities and our conservation impact.

Effecting change is never easy, and for our community, it will not happen overnight. Our plan identifies practical first steps that each land trust can take immediately to move in new directions that still honor its core mission and values, as well as additional steps for CCLT and its industry partners to take to grow resources and support for these new directions. The goal is to build momentum through multiple hubs



of new energy and innovative projects, sharing experiences, strategies, and developing new sets of tools and best practices. This is how we were successful in the past and how we will continue our success into the future.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR LAND TRUSTS – Each land trust can immediately take action to:

- 1. Deepen – Don’t Change – Your Mission.** Land trusts should continue their work to protect high priority natural and working lands and waterways, as well as parks and open space that directly serve urban and traditionally underserved communities. In addition, we need to sharpen our focus on more effectively and efficiently managing our protected lands through coordinated regional stewardship arrangements with land trusts, public agencies, and community-based groups.
- 2. Know Your Community.** Land trusts need to develop a more comprehensive understanding of the human side of their communities in order to connect more broadly. This means taking a deep look at who lives and works in the region you serve and figuring out how land conservation can engage and enrich the totality of your community.
- 3. Advance One New Direction.** Each land trust can start by advancing one new direction that broadens the connection with people in its community in ways both meaningful to them and consistent with the land trust’s mission. The effort may consist of undertaking a new project or program, working with a new partner, engaging on new community policy issues, using a new conservation tool, or seeking a non-traditional funding source.
- 4. Diversify Your Board and Staff.** By diversifying boards and staff in age, ethnicity, and background, land trusts will broaden their capacity and credibility to authentically engage with local communities, connect with new partners, and grow broader constituencies. It will require land trusts to make an intentional commitment to inclusivity and diversity, to listen to new voices and act on new ideas, and to support the development and retention of diverse staff and leaders within organizations.

ACTIONS FOR THE CALIFORNIA LAND TRUST SECTOR – CCLT will work with conservation partners to deliver new strategies, tools, and resources to assist land trusts moving in new directions:

- 1. Develop Tools for Advancing Conservation Practice.** CCLT will work to identify, create, and deliver new tools to broaden land trusts’ conservation reach and effectiveness in the areas of policy and funding; metrics, evaluation and reporting; land trust operations; more effective and inclusive communications; and tools and data to understand our communities.
- 2. Provide Education, Training, and Mentoring.** Drawing upon the tools described above, CCLT will equip land trusts with the skills and expertise to meet our present and future challenges. In addition, CCLT will provide certain transition models and assistance to inactive land trusts, as well as facilitating conversations about right-sizing leadership, structure, function, resources, and efforts to advance these future conservation directions.



Photo courtesy of Palos Verdes Peninsula Land Conservancy

*“Urban river parkways can significantly advance public health and wellness by providing attractive places for residents to recreate and embrace more active lifestyles... river parkways counter sedentary behaviors and factors linked to obesity, diabetes, loss of muscle mass, and other life threatening chronic diseases” — from **Urban River Parkway: An Essential Tool for Public Health** by Richard J. Jackson et al.*



Photo courtesy of Sierra Foothill Conservancy

- 3. Catalyze New Partnerships and Pilot Projects.** CCLT will build relationships and engage with new sectors and partners, and catalyze pilot projects that increase and support greater connection between land and people. This will also allow us to experiment with new tools, develop best practices, and accumulate lessons learned.
- 4. Increase Visibility and Confidence in the Benefits of Conservation.** CCLT will assist land trusts to use accurate, inclusive language and communicate effectively with new and broader audiences about how conservation solves problems, enriches lives, and provides vital community assets. Increased visibility brings greater scrutiny as well. If the California land trust community is to succeed in an increasingly competitive environment with changing public attitudes and priorities, we need to better demonstrate our results, efficiency, transparency, accountability, and success.

No one dreamed that California land trusts would accomplish what we have today. Yet, we face significant challenges to meet the changes well underway in California and keep conservation and land trusts vital. The changes already occurring and those on the horizon call on all of us to align our resources, tools, capacity, and organizational structures to face them head on. Considerable work is before us to ensure land trusts will continue to play an important role in protecting our state’s critical natural systems in ways that connect with all Californians. *Conservation Horizons* offers land trusts a framework and practical steps to guide us into the future.

Conservation Horizons: Keeping Conservation and Land Trusts Vital for the Next Age

CALIFORNIA COUNCIL OF LAND TRUSTS launched *Conservation Horizons* to ensure the future of California conservation is as successful as its past. The *Conservation Horizons* Committee spent more than 18 months examining conservation accomplishments and prospects in light of the state's demographics, politics, funding, and natural resource needs. We see a host of changes on the horizon, so we need to align our resources, tools, capacity, and organizational structures to face them. As we enter a new era of conservation, we asked: What changes can we anticipate? What conservation needs will the state face? How do we ensure conservation lands remain protected? How do we serve all Californians and engage them in our work?

Conservation Horizons provides a framework for approaching these questions and a practical plan for addressing them. This report begins with a high-level summary of our conservation accomplishments. It then identifies the most compelling facts and trends that will inform our future work. Finally, we devised principles to guide our future work as well as tangible steps to undertake in the next two years.



Photo courtesy of Palos Verdes Peninsula Land Conservancy

Our Success

CALIFORNIA LAND TRUSTS HAVE PRODUCED tremendous results during the past 35 years with a combination of hard work, generous financial support, and collaborative partnerships. In addition to protecting the ecological integrity of our natural systems, these lands feed people, fuel the economy, provide beautiful scenic areas for enjoyment and recreation, deliver clean water, minimize flood events, sequester greenhouse gases, and mitigate climate change impacts. Land trusts have been creative and pro-active. We tested and refined best practices for stewarding protected lands, including conservation easements. We anticipated future challenges, designed systems to respond, and organized staff and funding to implement solutions.

California's land trust community has an impressive track record. Our past accomplishments lay the foundation for our future direction. In short, California land trusts have:

- Conserved more than 2 million acres of important wilderness, habitat, open space, recreational, and agricultural lands, including some of California's most iconic state parks dating back as early as our oldest state park, Big Basin Redwoods State Park, as well as one of our newest, Los Angeles State Historic Park.
- Developed sophisticated, science-based conservation planning tools to identify conservation priorities and guide public and private conservation investments.
- Partnered with federal, state, regional, and local agencies, elected officials, businesses, universities, ranchers, farmers, and other partners to advance a wide range of conservation results.
- Built support for conservation among a cadre of volunteers, donors, members, and visitors to protect land.

Calling All Third Graders

Palos Verdes Peninsula Land Conservancy has brought the beauty and knowledge of nature and cultural history to touch the lives of virtually every third grader in their local school system for nearly 20 years. Working today with 23 local schools, the Conservancy's Third Grade Naturalist Program gives students a rich, multi-faceted experience they will carry with them into adulthood. The program begins with in-class sessions complete with touchable objects and visual aids, which is then followed by a nature walk to study plants and animals in their natural habitat.

-
- Created and refined tools and practices to expand our conservation reach and effectiveness, including development of model easement stewardship practices and new strategies for improving natural resource management.
 - Improved the conservation outcomes of mitigation projects by participating in site selection, design, and restoration, and by responsibly owning, managing, and monitoring mitigation properties and associated endowments.

We have also grown together as a community to expand our conservation impact. Together, we created significant public funding for conservation, including over \$15 billion in state-approved bond funds and significant additional funding through local and regional funding measures, all matched by strategic philanthropic funding. These funds have allowed land trusts, state and federal agencies, regional park and open space districts, and 58 counties and 478 cities and towns to conserve a variety of important lands and waters for Californians. We created many of the first laws in the nation to improve and protect conservation lands, tools, volunteerism, funding programs, and endowments. We actively participated in the national land trust movement, incubating model projects and programs and sharing our experiences with land trusts in other states.



Photo courtesy of Los Angeles Neighborhood Land Trust

Making a Lasting Impact on Its Community

Los Angeles Neighborhood Land Trust (LANLT) transforms under-utilized or abandoned lots and nuisance sites into parks and community gardens for urban, low-income, park-poor communities of color. Its goal is to build usable community space and healthy communities. It engages and supports active public engagement at every step in a project – before planning begins through the neighborhood’s active role in park management. LANLT serves communities throughout the Los Angeles area with nearly two dozen community sites.

LANLT’s largest project, Fremont Wellness Center & Community Garden, is a 1.5-acre site located on the Fremont High School campus. This project was designed to meet public health concerns: students have the poorest health rate in the Los Angeles School District and residents in surrounding neighborhoods have high rates of heart disease and stroke. Fremont Wellness Center & Community Garden offers multiple benefits: healthy food, medical care, recreation, and open space.

Benches and trees amidst the community garden create a peaceful, safe haven. Teachers use the garden for healthy food and nutrition instruction. A key element of the project is the on-site medical clinic, run by project partner University Muslim Medical Association. Other partners include the Los Angeles Unified School District, Community Coalition, and Fremont Parents Association.



Photo by Scott Hein

Deftly Deploying an Alternative Tool

Save Mount Diablo (SMD) employs land use advocacy to protect far more land than it could through acquisition alone. By actively participating in the development of regional and local land use policy and by responding to development applications, it achieves a balance between growth and economic development and the protection and enhancement of open space and working landscapes. As a result, SMD has protected thousands of acres that would have been lost to development pressure. These protected lands provide wildlife habitat, watershed protection, and recreational spaces for the more than one million residents of Contra Costa County and serves as a visible beacon and landmark for the San Francisco Bay Area.



What the Future Brings

CALIFORNIA LAND TRUSTS FORMED to respond to pressing needs of the day. Initially, our work sought to protect our natural lands and open space from imminent threats, including development and resource extraction. We soon realized the critical role our farms, ranches, and forests play in our natural systems and to our local economies, and so expanded our focus to include working lands. We successfully worked within our political, funding, and social environments.

We face profound change as we look toward the next few decades. Demographic changes and climate impacts are well underway, while the dynamic political and financial environments bring their own challenges to our work. The “facts and trends” in Appendix A captures the breadth and depth of the changes ahead. Below is a summary of key points from those facts and trends.

Demographics

- By 2050, California’s population will grow by 35 percent, the equivalent in size of metropolitan Los Angeles. More than half of us will live in southern California, 22 percent will live in the Central Valley, and 90 percent will live in only 12 of California’s 58 counties.
- Today, 95 percent of Californians live in urban areas or urban clusters. This is not expected to change.
- Today, Latinos are the largest ethnic group in California. The majority of residents in four of the state’s six regions are non-Caucasian. By 2050, four of the state’s regions will have a super-majority (i.e., two-thirds) of non-Caucasian residents, and Latinos will comprise nearly half of the population.
- Nearly a quarter of Californians live in poverty today. Poverty levels for communities of color are double those for Caucasians.

Public Health

- California is growing older, more obese, and unhealthy. More than half of our teens experience respiratory problems – a fact expected to remain unchanged or grow.
- Climate change will increasingly impact public health. By 2050, for example, the number of days over 95 degrees are predicted to triple in downtown Los Angeles, quadruple in areas of San Fernando Valley, and increase five-fold in Los Angeles County’s high desert. The increased heat will have a serious effect on those with respiratory health impairments, the elderly, and others.
- One million Californians do not have access to safe drinking water, and state and federal water agencies have expressed concern about the quality of drinking water for an additional two million.

“We’re living in a region that produces the finest fruits and vegetables in the world, and yet the children of this valley rarely taste those fruits and vegetables.”

— Mark Arax, Los Angeles Times reporter and author of the book *West of the West*

- Nearly two million low-income Californians live in “food deserts”, areas without ready access to fresh, healthy, and affordable food.

Culture and Attitudes

- People are losing connection with the outdoors. More than half of people over age six do not participate in outdoor recreation. Nearly half of our children report “lack of interest” as the top reason they do not spend time outdoors.
- “Millennials” (generally recognized as the generation born between 1980 and 2000) will be the dominant decision-makers for the next 35 years. They will have great buying and political power, but only 4 percent identify the environment as a top concern.
- Public opinion research and voter outcomes consistently find people of color support environmental protection at higher levels than Caucasians. For example, a January 2015 poll found that 54 percent of Latinos identified global warming as “extremely or very important to them personally” in comparison to 37 percent of Caucasians. Similar percentages were found when asked about whether the federal government should combat global warming. In 2006, 80 percent of Latino voters supported Proposition 84 (a 2006 state ballot measure to fund land and water conservation) while only 48 percent of non-Latino voters voted in favor.

Access and Public Lands

- California has more than 49 million acres of land in protected status, equating to 47 percent of all acres. The largest category is 44 million acres of federal lands. Many of the federal acres allow multi-uses including conservation and some resource extraction, such as production and harvest of timber.
- California’s protected lands are generally not located where Californians live. Some rural counties have hundreds of protected acres per resident while many urban residents have the open space equivalent of an 8.5” x 11” sheet of paper per resident.
- Significant inequities exist between wealthy and lower-income communities with respect to access to nearby park and open spaces. For example, San Diego has one acre of parkland for every 21 residents while Fresno has one acre of parkland for every 159 persons. Generally, recreational spaces on protected lands in California are not designed to provide the range of outdoor experiences sought by our diverse populations. On properties held by land trusts, passive recreational activities, such as hiking or photography, are the most common use when public access is allowed. Invisible barriers and other obstacles to visiting protected lands exist for many Californians.

Natural and Conservation Resources

- Wildlife habitat losses are projected to continue, making it vital to focus protection on wildlife corridors to stem habitat fragmentation.



- One million acres of farm and ranch land are projected to be lost by 2050. Farming operations will continue to face long-term challenges from economic fluctuations and water supply issues.
- Climate change will increasingly impact natural and agricultural resources, including more frequent and severe wildfires and storms as well as increasing impacts of sea level rise.
- Without considering changes due to climate change, we will need one-third more water to serve our increased population by 2050. Spring stream flows are projected to fall by 30 percent from increased temperature and decreased snowmelt.
- The health and biodiversity of natural resources on protected lands face increasing challenges including invasive species, fire suppression, road and facility maintenance, landscape fragmentation, mineral development, and climate change.

Conservation Activities

- Protected lands are not being adequately managed. Few agencies have sufficient funding to manage lands they hold. State Parks report significant deferred maintenance costs, by some estimates exceeding more than \$1 billion. Most land trusts conduct minimal levels of resource management on their lands.
- Every acquisition increases an organization's stewardship obligation. Endowments are not necessarily the long-term solution for the costs of management, monitoring, and enforcement because they are insufficient in size and are not expected to keep pace with inflation.

Tools

- The federal deduction for conservation easement donations unleashed private land protection nationwide over the past 20 years. While state programs have provided funding for easement acquisitions in California, conservation easements still comprise a small proportion of protected lands in California.
- Land trusts have relied chiefly upon one strategy for achieving their conservation goals: the direct acquisition of real property. Only a handful of land trusts use other tools, such as advocating for local land use policies, working with landowners on more sustainable land management practices, or water flowage agreements.

Funding

- We do not have sufficient funding – nor a plan for securing sufficient funding – to address projected future needs, including management of existing protected lands, acquisition of priority lands and parks, public access infrastructure, or programming on protected lands.
- We continually face changes in philanthropic giving that could impact our programs and conservation priorities.



Courtesy of Sierra Foothill Conservancy

Cows Feed our People and Tend our Natural Lands

Conservation and ranching can go hand-in-hand with thoughtful grazing management. Sustainable grazing improves biodiversity, soil health, and healthy ecosystems, increases the water- and carbon-holding capacity of soil, and protects water quality and supply, while also producing a safe and reliable food product.

Ranch owners throughout California have worked with land trusts to place conservation easements on their property. For example, the California Rangeland Trust holds easements on over 283,000 acres of privately owned rangelands. The Marin Agricultural Land Trust has conserved more than 47,000 acres of working farms and ranches – almost half of the private agricultural land in Marin County.

Like many land trusts, Sierra Foothill Conservancy (SFC) holds conservation easements on ranches and leases its fee-owned properties to cattle grazers as an important tool for habitat and land management. Recognizing that land trusts can play an even more active role in the sustainable grazing supply chain, SFC created, owns, and operates Sierra Lands Beef LLC (SLB). SLB is a producer partnership aimed at benefitting local communities, economies, and the environment.

SLB advances holistic land management that benefits both land and cattle. It grazes healthy livestock in ways that also preserves grasslands, maintains biodiversity, and protects riparian areas. SLB works in partnership with other cattle producers to create a regional sustainable production system while also grazing its own cow herd and producing beef product on lands owned and eased by SFC. Funds raised through SLB support SFC's land conservation mission. Through SLB, SFC seeks to provide cattle with continuous access to fresh feed, clean water, and a healthy, low stress life that benefits the land and larger ecosystem through conservation grazing practices.



Photos courtesy of Western River Conservancy

Natural Conservation Partners

With their deep connections to land, fish, and wildlife, Native American tribes and conservation organizations are natural partners in protecting our rivers, forests, and wild places. The unique partnership between the Yurok, California's largest Native American tribe, and Western Rivers Conservancy (WRC) brings this into sharp relief. WRC and the Yurok have worked together over several years on a project that will ultimately protect 47,000 acres including the entire lower Blue Creek watershed, as well as extensive frontage along the lower Klamath River.

The Yurok and WRC each contributes its relative expertise to the project. WRC has played the lead role in negotiating with and acquiring the property from Green Diamond Resource Company, including cobbling together necessary funding, while the Yurok is stepping up as the long-term owner and manager of the property. The end result is a salmon sanctuary and climate preserve along Blue Creek as well as an economic and cultural base for the Yurok through the Yurok Tribal Community Forest. Conserving the Blue Creek watershed in this way ensures the survival of one of the West's great salmon streams, protects vital wildlife habitat in one of the most biologically rich areas on Earth, and reestablishes a sacred homeland for the Yurok.

This innovative project also involves creative finance tools that bring new sources of private funding to support conservation. In addition to more traditional public and private conservation funding sources, WRC utilized private equity funding through the New Markets Tax Credit Program, which is a federal program designed to spur revitalization in low-income communities. Additionally, a low-interest program-related investment loan provides bridge financing, which will be repaid with revenues generated from the sale of carbon offsets from the Yurok Tribal Community Forest.





Photo courtesy of Phil Robertson

- Since 2000, the state has expended more than an average of \$1 billion per year for land and water conservation.
- It is unclear whether our public investments are appropriately allocated among the array of conservation needs. For example, the \$5.4 billion for land and water conservation in Proposition 84 contained \$400 million for urban parks, facing over \$3 billion in project demand, and \$15 million for farmland.
- Conservationists rely primarily upon “bucks and acres” as metrics to assess our conservation impacts. These metrics are insufficiently sophisticated to measure the array of immediate and long-term conservation outcomes, social impacts, and economic benefits.

Land Trusts

- 82 percent of California land trusts were created in the last thirty years.
- More than 220 organizations in California self-identify as land trusts. More than two-thirds of these organizations are all-volunteer and a large number are inactive. Three counties have more than two dozen land trusts each, several have more than a dozen land trusts each, while other counties have none or only one land trust.
- Land trusts hold 1.1 million acres of land covered by conservation easements. Ten land trusts hold 77 percent of these acres.
- Land trusts hold nearly 600,000 acres in fee title. Thirteen land trusts hold 88 percent of these acres.
- Land trust leadership and staff do not reflect the gender, age, or ethnicities of their communities. Land trust leadership is overwhelmingly older, male, and Caucasian. Land trust staff is nearly balanced on gender, tending toward balance on age, but still predominately Caucasian.

California has been changing – more than many of us may have realized – and much more change is in store for us. This is not a modest generational change with incremental adjustments in terms of attitudes and concerns. Demography, culture, technology, and economics are combining to change how we will work, who we will serve, and what we must accomplish.

Rather than holding on to past ways, we can embrace change to shape a vital and sustainable future. The challenges we face present new opportunities to deliver the benefits of protected lands to many more Californians. Indeed, the key to our long-term sustainability resides in adapting to California’s demographic, cultural, political, financial, and technological changes. In other words, our long-term sustainability is directly dependent on making conservation relevant to all Californians.



Guiding Principles for Keeping Conservation Vital

THESE FACTS AND TRENDS PAINT A CLEAR PICTURE of the challenges and opportunities ahead. The future calls us to continue our work in protecting the state's most valuable natural resources in ways that connect deeper with all California communities. The planning, policy, real estate, and relationship-building expertise we developed over the years provide a strong foundation for our work in the future. Not too far in our past, we embraced the “new” of launching local land trusts, developing conservation easement tools, refining conservation planning, and creating new conservation funding sources. We were smart and scrappy, and were rewarded with the public's support for our work.

For our success to continue, we need to come together again to figure out how to most effectively deploy our expertise and resources to address the state's current realities and future needs. We need to figure out how to make conservation relevant to an ever-changing California. *Conservation Horizons* is about just that. It is about building upon our past work in ways that ensure we will be an integral part of future solutions.

We devised four principles to guide our conservation work for the future. The principles rest upon the four pillars of land, communities, people, and partners. Regardless of geography, goals, strategies, or type of work, these principles can serve as the lens through which individual actions are considered.

The focus of our work has always been, and will continue to be, on land, communities, people, and partners. How we balance our time and resources among these four pillars to address the state's future needs is the challenge before us, and requires a recalibration of our past effort and investment. The following principles are designed to provide guidance for our conservation work ahead.

LAND – Preserve, protect, and restore our most important natural resources, working lands, and recreational spaces. The focus of most of our past work has been on building the state's protected conservation land base through fee and conservation easement property acquisitions. With public and private funding available for acquisitions, we effectively built real estate expertise to acquire conservation lands throughout the state. However, these results constitute just the beginning of advancing a broader collective conservation vision of an integrated system of expertly-managed,

The Conservati



FIGURE 1: The Conservation Spectrum. We need protected lands across the Conservation Spectrum, from parks, gardens, and green space in highly urbanized areas to working lands and to wilderness in our most remote areas. For conservation to serve all Californians, we need equitable investment across the Spectrum.

on Spectrum



Uptown Studios



protected lands across the state – from neighborhood parks to working lands to remote wilderness areas – for people to use and enjoy and for important natural systems to thrive. Our future land efforts will require a more even-handed focus in the following old and new directions to fully advance that vision:

- **Finish the Job.** Although the rate may slow in coming years, there are still high priority conservation and working lands outside metropolitan areas that are suitable for acquisition investment, particularly those lands that carry multiple benefit attributes such as wildlife linkages, wilderness or park infill, water quality and quantity, flood management, food safety, and threatened and endangered species.
- **Urban and Metropolitan Conservation.** We know that our protected lands are not generally located where most of Californians live. A strong component of our future conservation effort must seek to reverse this trend. This means marshaling resources, expertise, and new funding to invest in new parks and open space that serve our urban and other underserved communities in ways that meet their needs. Those land trusts operating in or near growing metropolitan areas are best positioned to take on new urban protection projects although the entire land trust community can support equitable investment in metropolitan areas.
- **Stewardship and Restoration.** All land trusts know that acquisition is only the first step in protecting important conservation lands. Fee properties later neglected and conservation-eased properties left unmonitored can quickly diminish significant public and private investments and undermine public confidence in our collective efforts.

COMMUNITIES – Connect all Californians with our protected lands in ways meaningful to them.

Conservation is about more than protecting land. Conservation is also about connecting people to the land we protect so they can experience its wide-ranging benefits. In the years ahead, land trusts need to focus on deepening community connections at two levels. First, each land trust must find ways to more actively engage and connect their protected lands and conservation efforts with the people in their communities. Second, in the broader sense, we must find ways to work together as an industry to more equitably connect with all California communities, particularly residents in park-poor and income-poor communities that have been traditionally underserved by conservation. Deeper community connections at both levels will require land trusts to reach out in different ways, listen to new voices in their communities, partner with non-conservation focused organizations, and/or design new programs and projects that reflect the needs and realities of a broader group of people. Deeper community connections will build more livable communities and grow broader constituencies in support of conservation which is critical for ensuring continued public, political, and financial support for our work.

PEOPLE – Reflect the ethnic and socio-economic diversity of the public we serve in our land trust leaders, staff, and programs. Land trusts must reflect the diversity of California. This means involving urbanites, millennials, younger generations, Latinos and other people of color, and socio-economic diversity in our organizations and programs at all levels. This means hiring more diverse staff and

“Factors such as perceived discrimination, socialization and upbringing, fear of personal safety, concern about not having the right outdoor gear or equipment, and/or lack of knowledge and awareness, are a few of the many reasons provided for lack of visitation to more vast outdoor environments.” — Dr. Nina Roberts, Professor, San Francisco State University

leaders, welcoming more diverse board members, and engaging diverse members of our communities in actively planning and implementing projects and programs that reflect their needs. It means investing in the training and mentoring necessary to ensure diverse leaders and staff can succeed and advance in our organizations.

PARTNERS – Build collaborative cross-sector partnerships. Land trusts have long recognized the importance of building partnerships. We quickly learned the nexus between building relationships and conservation results. We learned how to talk to all types of landowners, including developers, farmers, and ranchers who were initially skeptical we could work together. We also learned how to advocate for ourselves on important policy issues and how to raise funds for our projects from a wide range of foundation and individual funders. Finally, we learned how to work with each other in shared regions and even on shared projects. We see numerous untapped partnership opportunities for land trusts in the future that will make possible a whole new generation of conservation projects that will broaden our reach into communities and our conservation impact. We can generate real opportunities to work with new nonprofit organizations, public agencies, companies, and funders to achieve our shared goals.



The Critical Work to Sequester Carbon

Climate change is impacting everything from weather patterns to water supply to public health. The loss and degradation of California forests are a major source of CO₂ emissions, but these forests are also uniquely positioned to be a leader in sequestering carbon due to certain kinds of forests and our carbon market structure. As Joel Bourne in a National Geographic article entitled “The Super Trees” reported “Thanks to their phenomenal growth, resistance to disease, insects, and rot, and their incredibly long lives, redwood forests are the best of all forests at capturing carbon dioxide from the atmosphere and locking away the carbon in their wood. California’s voluntary market for forest landowners is among the most rigorous in the world.”

Pacific Forest Trust (PFT) recognized early the need to act on climate change, and the role forests play in carbon sequestration. PFT led the development of the first state-backed voluntary forest offset protocols in 2006 with rigorous accounting standards as well as the inclusion of forests in the state’s regulatory climate law: AB32. This enabled forests to be included in the now billion-dollar investments to help solve the climate crisis. They also showed landowners that stewarding their forests for climate benefitted their bottom line — the van Eck forest, a working forest on 2,200 acres in Humboldt County, is managed by PFT and was the first California registered emissions reduction project. On the van Eck property alone, over 400,000 tons of CO₂ have been sequestered since 2005.



Plan for the Future

EFFECTING CHANGE IS NEVER EASY, and for our community, it will not happen overnight. The land trust community we have today was built in response to a particular set of financial, political, demographic, and natural resource demands. To address our new realities and demands, we must commit to protecting a more diverse portfolio of important lands and resources, connecting more diverse communities to the land, engaging in cross-sector partnerships, and diversifying our organizations so they reflect the public we serve.

Trite as it sounds, change starts with a first step. We can each start with the basic steps of making one new partner or doing one new project. Moving toward a more vital and sustainable future for your land trust is as simple as beginning to talk with new people and organizations in open and respectful ways. As the case studies illustrate, there is no secret or magic involved. Some land trusts are already doing this work and other community-based organizations have valuable expertise to bring to projects.

The plan that follows is designed to set forth tangible steps each of us can accomplish during the next two years to build momentum for future action that will result in our long-term sustainability. The first part contains tangible steps any land trust can take, starting immediately. The second part describes the activities we need to advance at the industry level to support the changes needed at individual land trusts. This plan is designed to build the skills, capacity, and resources for the broad, long-term effort.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR LAND TRUSTS

1. Deepen – Don’t Change – Your Mission

We have more work to protect priority natural and working lands and waterways. We still have priority wilderness and park inholdings, wildlife corridors and buffer lands that require protection and restoration to preserve our fully-functioning natural systems. California’s working lands face multiple pressures calling for effective strategies and investments.

We also have much more work to steward and manage the lands we have already protected. This will require new funding strategies, deeper cooperation with private landowners, ensuring conservation easement enforcement, and continued evolution of best management and restoration practices.

Further, it is widely understood that protected lands know no boundaries. For the long-term conservation and sustainability of natural and working lands, we need to move toward coordinated regional stewardship among land trusts, public agencies, and community-based groups across regions and the state. Many organizations share goals around improved land and resource management,

“While there are many reasons for diversity work, there is a strong business case for this important enterprise. The challenges of diversity are demanding the environmental movement to be more innovative, effective and legitimate by broadening its agenda, perspectives, impact, and talent.” — Jeff Cook, Environmental Careers Organization

expanding outdoor opportunities, and engaging urban communities and communities of color. Examples include *Parks Forward* and public health initiatives to get people outdoors.

2. Know Your Community

Land trusts have increasingly turned to science-based planning and invested in specialist staff to identify natural and working land priorities for acquisition. We must make a similar investment in understanding the human side of our work. We encourage each land trust to take a deeper, more comprehensive look at who lives and works in its local geography. Each land trust should make an effort to understand the unique human challenges facing the community it serves, including in the areas of education, housing, jobs, public health, and local food. Then, consider how land conservation can address those challenges and enrich the lives of everyone in the community including those who may have been traditionally underserved by conservation. It is essential to understand the diverse ways that people prefer to interact with protected lands, the different values that land may hold for them, and the invisible barriers that may exist to access the outdoors. Community leaders from other nonprofits, businesses, and agencies can help.

3. Advance One New Direction

We know that conservation in the future will require deeper connections with people. We also know that land provides excellent opportunities to make those connections. Every land trust does not need to undertake a broad suite of new projects or programs that could stress existing resources and capacity. Instead, we recommend each land trust start by undertaking one new effort that connects with a new component of its local community in a way that is consistent with its mission.

No matter your land trust circumstances – rural, urban, habitat, farmland – you can undertake a project that directly connects people with land in ways that are meaningful to them. While few land trusts may work in highly urbanized areas, nearly every land trust is based in or near an urban cluster. A land trust can also partner with other organizations to connect urban residents with rural protected lands.



Serving It Up

One in every three bites of food we eat comes from a plant that must be pollinated by a bee or other pollinator. Yet, up to a third of our commercial bees are lost each year, placing our food supply at risk. Placer Land Trust is working with beekeepers to place bees on a one-acre site at Doty Preserve during the critical winter and early spring months when they need nutritious forage. PLT is also partnering with UC Davis researchers to develop a seed mix that will provide nutrients for the bees.

Your one new direction can be a project, partner, tool, or funding source:

- **Undertake One New Project.** Opportunities abound to undertake a new project. Land trusts do not need to recreate the wheel. Look to successful examples elsewhere, including education and field trip programs with local schools, community gardens, healthy foods programs, cultural and historical events, senior center environmental programming, to name a few. This report provides several case studies of exemplary work by California land trusts.
- **Work with One New Partner.** Land trusts have a great track record of working with other land trusts, public agencies, and landowners to conserve land. We can expand our impact by drawing on new voices and partners to help at all stages of program design and implementation. Through engagement, new partners and local communities can help design programs and projects with high value to users. Some will be interested in taking on the responsibilities associated with programming on protected lands. New partners can bring valuable resources that will help deliver conservation benefits that are valued by local communities.
- **Use a New Conservation Tool.** Land trusts have effectively used the acquisition tool to advance conservation. Conservation easements have been a great tool for expanding land protection. Similarly, we need to develop new tools that will advance our new directions, and new strategies to address our communities' recreational and other public access needs. Be open to using a new legal, program, or policy tool for advancing your conservation activities. Examples include leasing land for a community garden, working with landowners to improve stewardship practices, using your real estate expertise with local groups to design and create green spaces at schools and churches, or advocating for conservation-friendly land use policy.
- **Seek One New Funding Source.** Projects that engage and connect with people open the door to new and different public and private funding sources, such as those in the area of public health, affordable housing, economic development, civic programs, and tourism. Building cross-sector connections can bring new funding sources to your projects.



Photo courtesy of Wildlife Heritage Foundation

Working with Schools and Local Governments

Wildlife Heritage Foundation's Education and Outreach program works with Placer County schools to provide opportunities for youth to explore nature first-hand – and get covered in mud in the process! More than 4,000 students ranging from kindergarten to twelfth grade have participated. The Foundation has also successfully formed partnerships that include a local family resource center and the City of Lincoln. Additionally, it offers native ecology programming for various city-run programs and a regional Salmon Festival that connects the community with local watersheds.

“Boomers could be the last generation to remember a time when it was considered normal and expected for children to play in woods and fields. When we leave this earth, will the memory of such experiences leave with us? Reconnecting the young to the natural world (as we reconnect ourselves) could be our greatest, most redemptive cause.” — **Richard Louv, Author of Last Child in the Woods**

- 4. Diversify Your Board and Staff.** We must diversify our boards and staff by age, ethnicity, and background in order to authentically engage with our local communities, connect with new partners, and grow broader constituencies. It will not happen overnight or easily – the current projects and activities of many land trusts may not interest the members of new communities or sectors. It will require your land trust to make an intentional commitment to inclusivity and diversity, have honest conversations, and undertake new activities. Relationships built through demonstrating genuine interest in community service and developing projects or programming aligned with your community’s needs will facilitate recruitment of diverse board and staff. Further, it is not enough to hire new staff or recruit new board members. We will need to actively support the development and leadership of these new voices within our organizations to ensure their successful engagement and tenure.

ACTIONS FOR CALIFORNIA LAND TRUST SECTOR

To support land trusts moving in these new directions, certain work needs to happen at the industry level. CCLT will work with new and traditional partners to catalyze, create, and deliver strategies, tools, training, resources, partnerships, and visibility to assist land trusts. Specifically, we will:

1. Develop Tools for Advancing Conservation Practice

CCLT will identify, create, and deliver new tools to broaden our conservation reach and effectiveness. These tools will be developed and disseminated to land trusts and partners.

- **Policy and funding** – improve laws, regulations, and public plans to address a range of conservation needs, including acquisition, stewardship, programming, and new protection tools.
- **Metrics, evaluation and reporting** – develop improved metrics for evaluating the impact and benefits of protected lands as well as a system for collecting, evaluating, and reporting on our collective accomplishments and progress.
- **Land trust operations** – develop new tools to address challenges and opportunities in the future, such as stewardship strategies, funding models for areas without a wealthy donor base, and best practices for responsible dissolution for inactive and other land trusts.
- **Communications** – create and disseminate language and messaging that is more effective and inclusive for new partners and audiences.
- **Community profile** – develop tools and data to expand understanding of communities, with ready access to multi-sourced data from assorted sectors. Land trusts can use the information to identify community needs related to conservation to inform discussions with partners.

2. Provide Education, Training, and Mentoring

CCLT will develop and provide education, training, and mentoring to equip land trusts with the skills and expertise in new tools, best practices, communications, relationship-building, cultural literacy, program design, board and staff recruitment, and advanced topics in real estate and stewardship.



Educational and training formats will include workshops, long-term learning circles, field classes, webinars, video, and publications (online and print).

Dozens of inactive land trusts figure among California's more than 200 land trusts. Although many hold a few fee title properties or conservation easements, their financial and organizational stability are questionable in terms of stewarding their protected lands. Yet, these properties are part of the portfolio of California's protected lands, and it is worth our collective effort to ensure that fee and conservation-eased lands with high-quality conservation values remain protected. CCLT will offer transition models and provide assistance to voluntary efforts aimed at keeping these lands protected. In addition, active land trusts may need help in facilitating conversations about right-sizing their leadership, structure, function, resources, and effort to advance these future conservation directions.

3. Catalyze New Partnerships and Pilot Projects

CCLT will build relationships and engage with new sectors and partners that also work in the new directions we are moving. Work is already underway in California that parallels our efforts to connect people with protected lands. We need to expand our collective understanding of these related efforts, and explore partnership and programmatic opportunities. We need to begin work with partners to increase support for conservation in highly urbanized areas which is critical to land trusts' future.

While we will continue supporting traditional projects, CCLT will catalyze pilot projects that increase and support greater connection between land and people and underserved areas. Pilot projects will also allow us to experiment with new tools, develop best practices, and accumulate lessons learned. The projects may be acquisition or other strategies to protect land, programming and capital improvements on protected lands, or supporting regionally-based stewardship strategies.

4. Increase Visibility and Confidence in the Benefits of Conservation

Our community must improve our communications about how conservation solves problems, enriches lives, and provides vital community assets. As we endeavor to build new constituencies in support of

Within a 10-minute Walk

Recognizing that even children who live in rural areas can lack the time or opportunity to participate in outdoor activities, in 2004 the Feather River Land Trust pledged to begin conserving natural areas within a 10 minute walk of every public school in the Feather River watershed. The Learning Landscapes project also supported local schools by creating outdoor classrooms on every campus in the region. The outdoor classrooms have improved outdoor access through better entry, signage, trails and seating, creating an ideal outdoor learning environment. Additional direct support is given to teachers through field kits and regular workshops that train teachers how to independently use their Learning Landscapes.



Photo courtesy of Feather River Land Trust

conservation, we will broaden the types of conservation projects and programming we undertake, but it is also important that we use more inclusive language and communicate in ways that are effective with new and broader audiences. It is also important that our communications are accurate; if we say we are serving the local community, then we must really be doing so. Over time, as we increase the number of projects with broader appeal, we will have more to communicate. CCLT will commission and disseminate strong, correct messaging for new constituents.

Increased visibility brings greater scrutiny as well. If the California land trust community is to succeed in an increasingly competitive environment with other pressing public challenges and changing public attitudes and priorities, we need to better demonstrate our results, efficiency, accountability, transparency, and success. For example, if we want cap-and-trade funds for conservation, we must be able to quantify the carbon sequestration and/or avoidance of carbon releases that conservation projects provide. The need to measure and evaluate applies to both public and charitable funding sources that increasingly choose among competing priorities and strategies. Developing and utilizing additional metrics and evaluating the impact of our conservation projects are critical if we are to compete successfully for future funding. CCLT will work with partners to create strong metrics for evaluating our impact and a system for ongoing reporting.



Take Me to the River

For more than 20 years, San Joaquin River Parkway and Conservation Trust (SJRPT) has run River Camp, which connects Valley children to the San Joaquin River and natural surroundings through play and exploration. In 2012, SJRPT expanded programming to offer summer camp to children from the town of Firebaugh.

The youth in this low-income, underserved community are primarily the children of farm laborers and farmers. While their parents work, the kids have few opportunities to participate in summer activities outside of their homes. The Fire-

baugh program is a mix of environmental education and standard camping activities. An important program element is teaching about water safety, an issue of high concern to parents because of flood danger during wet years.

Camp Firebaugh's success can be seen in the faces of the kids and in its numbers. The camp welcomed 100 students in 2012 and doubled that in 2013. The camp is funded through scholarships. "It's just been an eye opener for many of the kids of Firebaugh who had never swam in the river before or have even been that close to it," explains Marcia Sablan, a doctor in Firebaugh.

Conclusion

NO ONE DREAMED that California land trusts would accomplish what we have today. Yet, we face significant challenges to meet the changes well underway in California and keep conservation and land trusts vital. The changes already occurring and those on the horizon call on us to align our resources, tools, capacity, and organizational structures to face them.

Regardless of differences in geography, goals or strategies, each land trust can rely upon the guiding principles as the lens to view any possible individual action. While continuing to conserve and restore natural and working lands, including equitable investment in metropolitan areas, land trusts can work to connect all Californians with protected lands, ensure our organizations reflect the diversity of California, and build collaborative partnerships with other sectors.

We can each take tangible steps to deepen our mission, know our communities, advance one new direction, and diversify our boards and staff. CCLT will be there to help at each step with tools, training and mentoring, catalyzing partners and projects, and building the visibility and confidence in conservation.

Considerable work is before us to keep protected lands and land trusts vital in the next age of California conservation. Today is the day to start.



Photo courtesy of Northcoast Regional Land Trust

Enriching People and Nature

Northcoast Regional Land Trust (NRLT) is developing a multi-benefit project at Freshwater Farms Reserve, its 74-acre tidal wetland and agricultural property in Humboldt Bay. Wetlands restoration, salmon habitat enhancement, cattle grazing, educational programs, and a farm stand all come together in one unique location designed to serve a diverse and changing community. NRLT includes the community in planning for future improvements including a hiking trail, canoe and kayak launch, and educational garden.





916.497.0272 www.calandtrusts.org