

CONSERVATION

# FRONTIERS

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BAYER FARM/PHOTO COURTESY OF LAND PATHS

## This Issue

# New Era of Local Opportunities for Land Trusts

*California's changing climate, demographic shifts and transit-oriented development are all contributing to a renewed sense of urgency to provide local parks and urban greening to those communities who need them most. Land trusts are well-positioned to take a proactive approach to helping California achieve a greener vision of local conservation by seizing an opportunity to apply their resource preservation expertise to the projects that will be funded through three programs signed into state law. Over the next several years, land trusts will see another \$650 million in public funds come into play for local projects that will connect them to new partners, new opportunities and a renewed commitment to their communities.*

### Introduction

Over time, the conservation community has been focused on protecting rural and wild areas – vast stretches of open space, coastal properties and farmlands that offer tremendous recreational and habitat preservation opportunities at a statewide level. These are often the landscapes land trusts highlight as their greatest achievements.

However, Californians want a spectrum of outdoor options that range from neighborhood parks to remote wilderness areas – options that are often left lacking at the

local level. Population growth and increasing infrastructure demands further exacerbate the problem, and create a landscape where a shift in the orientation of open space preservation is imminent.

Land trusts can be an integral part of this change. In fact, more and more land trusts are translating that need for change into opportunity. From the Rio Vista project by Amigos de Los Rios to Big Sur Land Trust's Mark's Ranch, land trusts are addressing the realities of a rapidly growing California that is increasingly creating new challenges

for delivering the benefits of open space at the very local level.

Unfortunately, public funding for local projects, ranging from community gardens to non-motorized trails, has been limited or even non-existent for several years. As an example, competitive funding for urban parks from Proposition 40 dried up more than five years ago, and money available in Proposition 84 has yet to fund local parks and urban greening projects.

But that time has passed, and three new state programs will help increase the conservation and creation of parks, open spaces and natural areas in urban areas:

- **The Statewide Park Development and Community Revitalization Act of 2008** is the vehicle for distributing \$400 million in local parks funding available through Proposition 84.
- **The Housing Related Parks Program** will provide \$200 million in Proposition 1c funds for urban, suburban and rural parks in communities that build affordable housing.
- **The Strategic Growth Council** will deliver \$150 million in grants for urban greening and planning grants from Proposition 84.

Bond dollar infusions for local parks, rural, urban and suburban parks, and urban greening that include urban streams and forests will set the stage for a new era of local opportunities—and with it new opportunities for land trusts.

### Redefining the Local Landscape

Half of the built environment that we will see in 2025 does not exist now. This is a staggering statistic when we consider the conservation challenges already faced by land trusts and local governments throughout California. It forces us to redefine many of the parameters in which we evaluate resource conservation, while also providing a rapidly-moving target to create more livable open spaces within our communities.

These changes and challenges are already happening at the local level. Arguments that drove the need for urban investments include health and environmental concerns, higher crime rates, unemployment, poverty, school drop-outs, and health ailments, such as obesity and asthma. Now add more recently-emerging environmental challenges such as urban

heat island effect, atmospheric carbon dioxide, water shortages, and increased fire risk.

This has created a new template for the built environment that has now shifted the state towards less emphasis on seeking solely an urban solution, but rather local greening solutions for all of California. So what might those priority projects be in the near future? And what is the role of land trusts?

Much of this investment will begin with local parks. Cities across the United States suffer from limited park access, but California's park deficiencies are stark in comparison. Based on acres per person, Los Angeles has about a third of the park space of New York City. Even Chicago, Boston, and Philadelphia all lead Los Angeles in park space.

However, these needs are being viewed through a larger lens today, with equal emphasis attached to developing green communities to improve quality of life and provide positive incentives to increase open space and meet recreation needs at the local level. Greening residential areas with affordable housing units are included as is a more comprehensive vision of mak-



Education student illustrating Salinas River coastal watershed from overlook at Marks Ranch.

ing walking trails, urban forests, community gardens and open space conservation core elements of local communities.

Land trusts are the local experts that can capture the California vision and translate that vision into on-the-ground projects that strategically serve the State's natural infrastructure needs while meeting the goals of greener communities.

In addition, this is the time for land trusts to diversify into conservation projects that serve either a different or broader segment of California's population. While there is an emphasis on directing these new funds toward more urbanized communities in which land trusts have not had a strong presence, these programs are not just for the most highly-urbanized communities – many land trusts will find that the areas in which they work can satisfy the program requirements. For example, large areas of the Central Valley are extremely park poor.

Finally, these local conservation efforts will be heavily dependant upon partnerships and projects providing multi-use benefits. In fact, all of these programs that have been set into motion by the Legislature and Administration explicitly call for a broad range of partnerships that can contribute to maximizing efficiencies in how local parks, tree canopy and other conservation projects are rolled out in new and existing California communities.

What land trusts do today, as a community, undoubtedly affects the landscape of tomorrow. How we mitigate for that expansion of the built environment that is less than 20 years away depends on seizing the opportunity provided now through these new conservation tools that can help keep California a truly Golden State at every level, in every community.

### Land Trusts at the Table

Voters have provided 2/3 of a billion dollars to pump into local land and water conservation and the Legislature has provided the statutory tools to help. However, renewing and retooling California's commitment to creating healthy sustainable communities will require more than dollars and policy to realize conservation at the local level. It will require the leadership, expertise and project development skills of land trusts.

Polling shows Californians are deeply concerned about growth but are con-

## Don't Forget Urban Forestry Funds



WHILE SEVERAL new programs are being ushered in to support local open spaces, there are other existing programs that speak to some targeted local resource needs, including Proposition 84 funding for river parkways, urban streams and urban forestry.

Though land trusts have benefited from all three programs, urban forestry tends to be overlooked because of its perceived limited scope of providing dollars solely for tree planting projects. But that has changed, too.

California ReLeaf sponsored and successfully shepherded passage of Assembly Bill 2045 (De La Torre) in 2008, which offers significant changes to the Urban Forestry Act of 1978. Because bond funds are written specifically for projects pursuant to this Act, the amended statute applies to Proposition 84 funding, of which more than \$8 million of the \$20 million set aside for the program has already been appropriated.

"The program will now really work for the 21st Century," says Martha Ozonoff, Executive Director of California ReLeaf. "It's been 30 years since the Act was created, and our changing environment over those decades demanded that we promote the use of urban forest resources for purposes of increasing integrated, multibenefit projects in local communities."

There are two important changes to the Act. Cal Fire continues to administer the urban forestry funds, but new language allows for partnerships with such agencies as the Department of Water Resources and the Department of Fish and Game. In addition, the Act now encourages multi-benefit projects to improve water conservation, energy conservation, stormwater capture and reuse, urban parks and river parkways, air quality, water quality, and flood management.

The chaptered version of AB 2045 is available online at [www.calandtrusts.org](http://www.calandtrusts.org). For more information on urban forestry grant programs and your land trust's eligibility to apply, contact California ReLeaf at (530) 757-7333, or go to [www.californiareleaf.org](http://www.californiareleaf.org)

flicted about how to deal with it. Land trusts have a demonstrated capability in creating winning projects that the community can embrace. Land trusts are the institution that can best connect with their communities, partner with local governments and other NGOs, and help frame and develop projects for long-term sustainability.

Most importantly, by taking advantage now of new programs for local parks, urban streams, landscaping and trails, land trusts' involvement can shape a vision for strategic growth in the state that can:

- engage and empower millions of Californians in environmental restoration and climate protection;

- allow more residents to easily and immediately implement "strategic greening" that maximizes functional benefits in terms of human and environmental health;
- allow for new partnerships with local governments, state agencies and NGOs;
- lead a statewide agenda for local land conservation strategies that raises visibility, leverages resources, and develops long-term public participation.

Several land trusts have already taken a leadership role in shaping a local vision. Land trusts such as the Trust for Public Land have made local greening an important part of their conservation agenda for decades, and now local and regional land

trusts are joining in this effort. They are committing to more than projects – they are committing to the community.

For example, the Los Angeles Neighborhood Land Trust (LANLT) works with communities to create neighborhood parks and community gardens as a way to strengthen and empower the residents in underserved areas. But even in areas often associated with vast stretches of open space, such as the central coast, groups like the Big Sur Land Trust, whose focus has generally been tailored towards protecting natural California landscapes, has succeeded in adding local parks for community enjoyment to its agenda (see case study).

These new funding tools can become a critical conservation resource for land trusts statewide. Local governments charged with meeting climate change and affordable housing needs while simultaneously planning for community greening can become valuable partners to land trusts that can bring local parks knowledge and development

to the table. Similarly, cities and counties that receive grants for sustainable community planning will need the guidance and project expertise of the conservation community. And although California continues to face fiscal uncertainties related to the bond freeze, land trusts should be working right now to identify those projects that best meet the needs of the programs and the park-poor areas that will be best served by these new recreational resources.

This is an exciting opportunity for land trusts to deliver the benefits of open space to larger numbers of Californians and serve important needs in their local communities that could rely on land trust expertise to help improve and sustain their quality of life for now and generations to come.

#### To Learn More

This report and more information, including statutes and grant guidelines, is available at [www.calandtrusts.org](http://www.calandtrusts.org). ■

#### Conservation Frontiers is published by California Council of Land Trusts.

*The statewide voice for more than 150 land trusts, the California Council of Land Trusts is a collaboration of land trusts delivering policy solutions and speaking for the conservation of special lands and waters throughout California.*

*The Council helps land trusts protect the natural areas and farmlands important to the state and local communities by increasing the resources and tools available to conserve and steward land.*

*We leverage our expertise in policy and stewardship to advocate for the most effective ways to ensure that local places of value and importance are protected and stay protected for the benefit and enjoyment of Californians.*

*We work to inspire awareness, vision and commitment among California's leaders and communities to protect the Golden State's natural heritage.*

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## case study

# Big Sur Land Trust and Marks Ranch

THE BIG SUR LAND TRUST (BSLT) is leading a community-driven conservation effort to create a vibrant community park at Marks Ranch for the people of the Salinas Valley. They have approached this local conservation opportunity by empowering the community as partners in their efforts.

Using three priorities to guide the planning and vision process for the property (youth education, recreation, and community and outdoor gathering), BSLT is working to build a network of partners among many organizations to carry out environmental, cultural, art & music, historical and agricultural education programs at the property. Community partners include the Ventana Wildlife Society, Monterey County Parks Department, YMCA, Boys & Girls Club of Monterey County, and the Community Foundation for Monterey County.

Executive Director Bill Leahy notes that the Marks Ranch project reflects the new vision and values of The Big Sur Land Trust.

“All residents of our community deserve the chance to enjoy parks and trails. Parks encourage physical activity, improve our community's natural resources and offer hands-on learning experiences. Yet, the citizens of Salinas have limited options for recreational opportunities.”

With only about three percent of the total area of the City of Salinas dedicated to parkland, Leahy concludes “future families and children of Salinas should have access to more safe outdoor spaces and natural areas. Marks Ranch can help fill the need for a safe and sacred place, close to home, where families and people can gather to connect with a classic Central California landscape.”

BSLT is collaborating with Monterey County Parks Department to incorporate Marks Ranch in the expansion of Toro Park, and continues to seek more partners to conduct potential programs at the park such as historic preservation and interpretation, community landscape gardens, art and music education, soccer/playing fields, community center and a venue for community celebration.

## snapshot of local parks and urban greening programs



PHOTO COURTESY OF RICH REID

Marsh Park, a project of the Trust for Public Land, is one of the kinds of projects that the new programs will support.

### Anatomy of the Programs

These new local conservation programs all share the common link of necessity and strategic vision. As mandated or otherwise suggested in both Proposition 84 and Proposition 1c, implementing legislation had to be crafted before these dollars could be delivered. The Legislature's ultimate approach to these issues will hopefully ensure long-term success for these new programs that seek to increase sustainable communities, combat climate change, and create a more vibrant and livable environment for those parts of California that need it most.

The bills that provide a statutory framework to the programs were signed into law by Governor Schwarzenegger in 2008, and all grant guidelines have been completed as of February 2010.

### The Statewide Park Development and Community Revitalization Act of 2008

Proposition 84 provides \$400 million to the Department of Parks and Recreation for competitive grants for local and regional parks. It included some granting criteria, but did not specify which of the numerous programs within the Depart-

ment would be utilized for these funds. Consequently, the Legislature looked to remove some of the confusion from the many existing programs and create one comprehensive mechanism for distributing Proposition 84 local parks funding.

Nonprofits should be very competitive in this program, which focuses on three primary objectives

1. The acquisition or development of property for parks and recreation areas and facilities in the most critically underserved communities across the state.
2. Promoting multi-benefit projects designed to provide efficient use of water and other natural resources, such as climate-appropriate vegetation and stormwater runoff.
3. Provide for a breadth of recreation opportunities that include places for organized team sports, outdoor recreation, and informal turf play; nonmotorized recreational trails; permanent play structures; landscaping; community gardens; nature appreciation and study, and outdoor education.

Stakeholders across California worked with rural and inner-city legislator for two years to craft a program that addresses

parks deficiency throughout the State. As CCLT observed in a letter of support, "From Lodi to Los Angeles, from San Francisco to the Sierras, rural and urban park-poor communities throughout California will benefit from these park funds."

Projects can be either an acquisition and development project (acquisition without a development component is ineligible) so that the project results in a new opportunity for recreation, or a development project. Projects must also meet six eligibility requirements and bonus points are available for additional elements. Program administrators are planning on at least two rounds of competitive applications for a total of \$368 million in funds. Grants will range from \$100,000 to \$5 million.

The grant guidelines and further information can be found at [http://parks.ca.gov/?page\\_id=1008](http://parks.ca.gov/?page_id=1008).

### The Strategic Growth Council

The Strategic Growth Council was created to coordinate programs of selected state agencies "to improve air and water quality, improve natural resource protection, increase the availability of affordable housing, improve transportation, meet the goals of the California Global

PHOTOS COURTESY OF (L TO R) AMIGOS DE LOS RIOS, BOLSA CHICA LAND TRUSTS, LANDPATHS



Rio Vista Park



Bolsa Chica



Bayer Farm

Warming Solutions Act of 2006, encourage sustainable land use planning, and revitalize urban and community centers in a sustainable manner.” In addition, the Council is charged with awarding grants and loans from Proposition 84 funds in two areas: urban greening and sustainable communities planning.

**Urban Greening Program.** The Urban Greening Program is the where land trusts will be eligible and competitive. The Program’s goal is two-fold: (1) creating “urban greening plans that will serve as the master document guiding and coordinating projects”, (2) fund projects that “incrementally create more viable and sustainable communities”. Approximately \$70 million will be available for these two types of projects in an anticipated three funding cycles. The spectrum of projects include urban forestry, local parks and open space, greening of existing public lands and structures, urban streams, and non-motorized urban trails.

All projects must:

1. Use natural systems or systems that mimic natural systems or create, enhance or expand green spaces.
2. Provide multiple benefits, including, but not limited to, a decrease in air and water pollution, a reduction in the consumption of natural resources and energy, an increase in the reliability of local water supplies, or an increased adaptability to climate change.
3. Be consistent with promoting infill development and investment in existing communities; protecting, preserving and enhancing environmental, agricultural and recreational resources, and encouraging resource-efficient new development.

4. Reduce as permanently as feasible, greenhouse gas emissions consistent with state law and any applicable regional plan.

Examples of acceptable projects that help reduce greenhouse gases and provide multiple benefits include the establishment or enhancement of local parks and open space; urban forestry/forestry; greening of existing public lands, structures and schools; urban streams including restoration; community, demonstration or outdoor education gardens or orchards; non-motorized urban trails; fee or easement acquisitions to permanently protect agricultural uses, open space, etc.; wetlands preservation.

Under the urban greening program, land trusts will have the opportunity to deliver projects that provide many local community benefits while also contributing to climate change reduction targets.

The grant guidelines and further information can be viewed at [www.sgc.ca.gov](http://www.sgc.ca.gov).

### The Housing-Related Parks Program

Proposition 1c provides \$200 million for the Housing Urban-Suburban-and-Rural Parks Account. The Legislature created the Housing-Related Parks Program to utilize these funds through an incentive-based grants program. The Department of Housing and Community Development will administer the Program. The Program’s focus is to award local governments that meet certain criteria for newly constructed affordable housing units with grants for the creation, development, or rehabilitation of park and recreation facilities.

This is obviously new terrain for many land trusts, but one they can explore for new partnerships as well as strengthening their existing partnerships with cities, counties and open space districts. Because the awards are designed to be incentives directly to local governments for their affordable housing efforts, non-profits and special districts will be eligible to work in a subcontract capacity with the city or county receiving the award.

The program’s focal points are:

1. Provide grants for the creation, development, or rehabilitation of park and recreation facilities for housing starts for newly constructed affordable housing units.
2. Acknowledge jurisdictions that have met or exceeded housing production thresholds established by the Department by providing bonus awards to those jurisdictions that can demonstrate grant funds will be spent to improve a park or community recreational facility that will serve a disadvantaged community or that meet the definition of a park-deficient community.
3. Provide for a breadth of recreation opportunities that include places for organized team sports, outdoor recreation, and informal turf play; non-motorized recreational trails; permanent play structures; landscaping; community gardens; nature appreciation and study, and outdoor education.

The grant guidelines and further information can be viewed at [www.hcd.ca.gov/hdp/hrpp](http://www.hcd.ca.gov/hdp/hrpp).