



Land Trust of Santa Cruz County

2019-2022 STRATEGIC PLAN

Adopted by the Board of Trustees June 28, 2019
Public Program Version

Since 2006, the work of the Land Trust has been guided by a succession of Strategic Plans. Year by year the Trust has expanded and grown. Our projects now include farmland protection, a wildlife tunnel, and 50 miles of trails.

This Strategic Plan marks a milestone in the Trust's growth as we build trails and de facto public parks – we are becoming more people-centered, as much about connecting people to nature as we are about protecting nature.

This plan recognizes the challenges of taking on as much as the Trust is taking on. We take them on because we love this place and want to do everything that we can do to protect it for generations to come.

MISSION

The mission of the Land Trust of Santa Cruz County is to protect, care for, and connect people to the extraordinary lands that make this area special.

PROGRAM GOALS

The Trust's work is organized around four major project areas:

- Protect Wildlands
- Save Farmland
- Build Trails
- Steward the Land

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1. PROTECT WILDLANDS

1.1 Wildlife Crossings and Corridors

Long Term Goal: Ensure key species, such as Mountain Lion, have protected habitat within and the ability to safely move across the key corridors in the landscape, free from highways and other barriers to movement.

Basic strategic approach: The Land Trust will work with California Department of Transportation (Caltrans), wildlife experts, and landowners to identify and protect, through easements or acquisition, key parcels needed to preserve habitat and to develop critical wildlife corridors and crossings.

3-year outcomes:

- Secure funding (\$3 million) for construction of Highway 17 Wildlife Tunnel
- Protect land through acquisition or easements as part of the Gabilan Wildlife Corridor
- Evaluate, as they become available, the protection of additional lands near the Highway 17 Wildlife Crossing

1.2 Pajaro Hills

Long Term Goal: Protect key areas of oak woodlands, grasslands and riparian corridors that are intrinsically ecologically valuable, promote resilience to climate change, are critical to connecting large intact wildlife lands, and are a critical viewshed contributing to the rural character of Santa Cruz County.

Basic strategic approach: The Land Trust will work with conservation partners and funders to develop a strategy for the protection of these corridors. The Land Trust will use its relationships with major landowners and others to influence the conservation outcome. The protection of these lands will be done in a manner that recognizes and supports the traditional working landscapes of the region, including timber, grazing, and farming.

3-year outcomes:

- Secure an easement on the Repass Ranch
- Protect land sufficient for a wildlife corridor across Highways 129 and 101



1.3 Sandhills

Long Term Goal: Expand the protection of the Santa Cruz Sandhills prioritizing the areas delineated in the *Conservation Blueprint* and to ensure that there are sufficient buffer lands protected to support the long-term viability of these habitats.

Basic strategic approach: The Land Trust will complete the Sandhills projects currently in the pipeline. On an opportunistic basis, the Land Trust will consider the acquisition of additional easements or other means of protection.

3-year outcome: For each property that comes on the market, the Land Trust will develop a strategy and preliminary budget to evaluating feasibility of protection.

1.4 Santa Cruz Mountains

Long Term Goal: Expand the protection of the Santa Cruz Mountains to protect the habitat, watershed and aquatic resources, provide ecological and recreational connectivity from the parks of the Big Basin region south, safeguard critical water

supplies, enhance resilience to climate change, support sustainable forestry practices, and protect the viewshed that is critical to the rural character of Santa Cruz County.

Basic strategic approach: The Land Trust will work in partnership with others to develop public access, ensure long-term stewardship, and promote—through active advocacy— “working forests” as an important conservation alternative to fully protected parkland. There are few significant acquisition opportunities left in the mountains and the Land Trust will consider them on a case-by-case basis.

3-year outcomes:

- Implement the public access plan for San Vicente Redwoods
- The Trust will evaluate acquisition of the San Vicente Redwoods fee title to safeguard / enable our long-term trail objectives and obligation

2. SAVE FARMLANDS

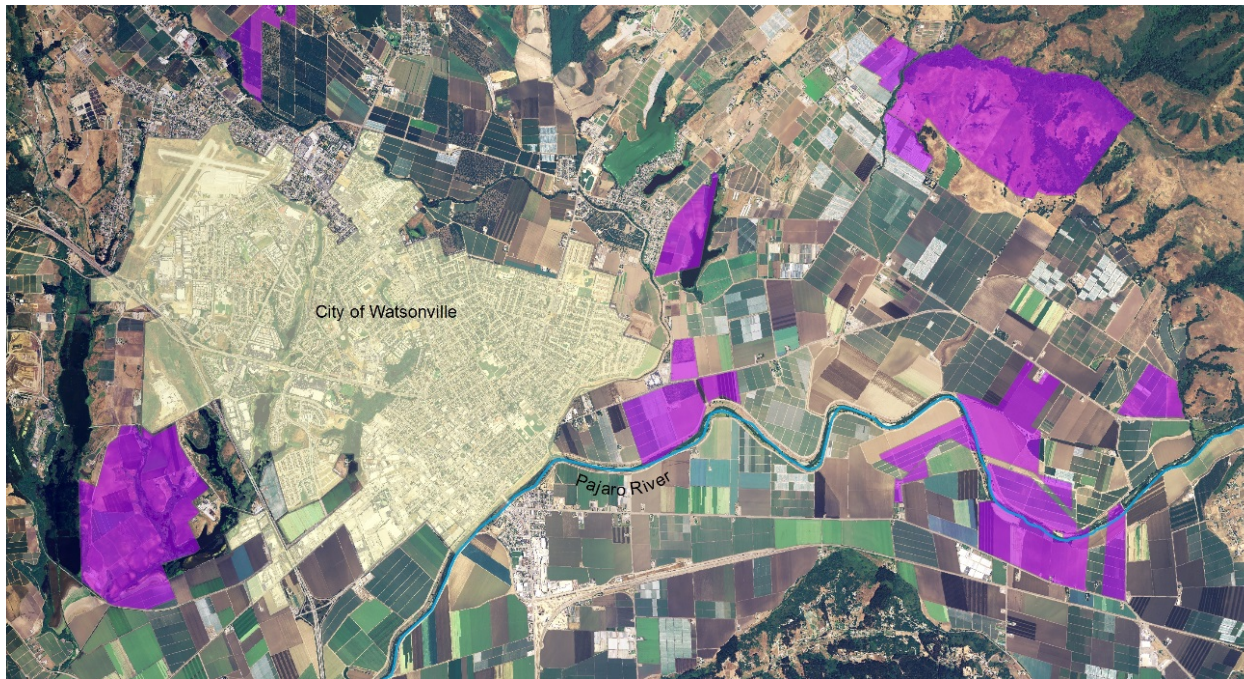
2.1 Pajaro Valley

Long Term Goal: Protect and support the economic viability and long-term sustainability of the farmlands, wetlands and water resources of the Pajaro Valley.

Basic strategic approach: The Land Trust has developed a detailed protection plan for the area, tiered off of the *Conservation Blueprint*. A variety of economic factors have virtually frozen the easement market in the Pajaro Valley. Until these factors change, the focus of the Land Trust will be to develop relationships in the Valley and to explore other ways to support agriculture there, including evaluating smaller urban agriculture parcels by case-by-case basis.

3-year outcomes:

- Work with the Conservation Fund to buy and resell farmland for continued farming with an attached easement held by the Land Trust
- Protect 500 acres of farmland in the Pajaro Valley through acquisition or easements
- Evaluate smaller urban agriculture parcels on a case-by-case basis.
- Explore ways to support a replacement for Watsonville’s sunsetting Measure U
- Develop a plan for engagement in the farmworker housing issue, especially as it pertains to Land Trust lands



Protected land in the Pajaro Valley

2.2 Other Santa Cruz County Farmland

Long Term Goal: Protect and support the economic viability and long-term sustainability of the farmland and rangeland across the county.

Basic strategic approach: The Land Trust will utilize its farmland protection plan to evaluate projects on a case-by-case basis, adding in the evaluation of farmlands that include the ancillary benefits of habitat, connectivity and the potential for public access—especially connectivity with other trail systems.

3-year outcome: Seek ownership of 700 acres of coastal farmland from the Trust for Public Land.

3. BUILD TRAILS — PROVIDE ACCESS

3.1 Wildland Trails

Long Term Goal: The Land Trust will provide multiple types of access to various user groups, consistent with protecting the conservation values of the land and the limited financial resources available. We will deliver public access at a standard of quality that

exceeds others in the region, particularly with regards to sustainability and visitor experience.

Basic strategic approach: The Land Trust has identified several projects for developing and improving access. These projects are in varying stages of planning, development, and implementation. We will develop trail access with emphasis on enhancing the visitor experience, minimizing environmental impact, reducing risk management and controlling costs. We will promote diversity and inclusion by engaging the local community, and by designing trails and facilities that encourage use by underserved populations.

3-year outcomes:

- Watsonville Slough Farm Trails: Initiate the construction of a five-mile trail system (non-farm areas)
- San Vicente Redwoods Trails: Complete construction of the Phase 1 trails (10 miles) and staging area
- Support Bureau of Land Management in establishing trailheads and trails connecting San Vicente Redwoods Trails across Cotoni-Coast Dairies National Monument
- Byrne-Milliron Forest: develop and implement an access concept that addresses permitting issues and appropriate intensity of use.
- Glenwood Preserve: complete east Preserve trails.
- Antonelli Pond: maintain access and add a site host
- Davenport Bluffs: maintain existing access while pulling trails back from bluff edge
- Star Creek Ranch: provide limited access to members

3.2 Coastal Rail Trail

Long Term Goal: The Coastal Rail Trail plan is implemented as part of a transformative vision of connecting trails and parks across the county and providing an alternative to vehicle transportation.

Basic strategic approach: The Land Trust will take the lead in raising private funds to accelerate the building of the Coastal Rail Trail. These funds will serve as a catalyst by providing matches for grants, funding design and engineering, or funding specific sections. The Land Trust will follow the priorities of the Santa Cruz County Regional Transportation Commission (RTC) and local jurisdictions for building segments.

3-year outcome: The Land Trust will raise \$1.5M to meet obligations on the Live Oak segment

3.3 Diversity and Inclusion

Long Term Goal: to increase use of our access properties by members of underserved or disadvantaged groups.

Basic strategic approach: We will actively seek out and facilitate use of our access properties by underserved or disadvantaged groups.

3-year outcome: Trails are open at Watsonville Slough Farm

4. STEWARD THE LAND

4.1 Stewardship of lands owned and managed by the Trust

Long Term Goal: The conservation values of the lands owned and/or managed by the Trust are protected.

Basic strategic approach: The Trust owns or manages land to protect the conservation values of the property and to advance other Trust goals, such as public access.

The Trust bases stewardship on five pillars: Land Trust Alliance accreditation, obligations to donors and grantors, best available science, industry standards, and prioritization. In compliance with our commitment as an LTA Accredited organization, the Land Trust will maintain program plans that describe the general approach, staffing, cost of the stewardship, easement monitoring and LTA compliance programs.

3-year outcomes:

- Management Plans for all properties are periodically updated and implemented
- Stewardship costs are incorporated into the financial analysis and decision process for new property acquisition
- Easements are monitored and enforced consistent with Land Trust Alliance (LTA) standards

4.2 Watsonville Slough Farm

Long Term Goal: The Watsonville Slough Farm is recognized as a model of how to enhance the protection of critical natural resources while demonstrating the efficacy of a variety of sustainability practices with broad applicability to farming in the Pajaro Valley.

Basic strategic approach: Using the Watsonville Slough Farm Management Plan as a starting point, the Trust, working closely with local agricultural leadership, will implement a program focused on practices that advance ecological and economic sustainability. While the primary goal is the best stewardship of this site, another key goal is to share what we learn here with others.

Four key themes will be addressed – water use efficiency, improvements in water quality, and both habitat and public access improvements that are compatible with agriculture.

3-year outcomes:

- Implement objectives set forth in current Management Plan
- Good relationships with agricultural tenants are sustained
- Bryant-Habert Wetland Restoration Plan, Phase 3 is implemented
- Demonstration of agricultural drainage water quality treatment system is implemented



Additional sections of the plan detail the financial and organizational steps necessary to implement these projects.