

THE FIELD GUIDE

Newsletter of the Land Trust of Santa Cruz County

FALL 2025



LAND TRUST
SANTA CRUZ COUNTY

Dear Land Trust Members,

For some, the chaotic times we are living through can engender hopelessness – it's only natural when so much of what is happening is outside of our control. But by working with the Land Trust to conserve, care for, and connect all people to Santa Cruz County's incredible natural and working lands—you are having a profound impact on things you CAN control. Together, we are delivering tangible results for our neighbors—both people and wildlife. As a Land Trust member, you are literally catalyzing this impact. You can look at the land we are protecting and stewarding and say, “This is happening because of me!”

But I have an advantage. I come to work every day and interact with the team responsible for negotiating the transactions, planning restoration projects, stewarding the land, maintaining the trails, and planning the events. Your generosity does more than just protect land—it is what makes the work of these remarkable professionals possible. You don't get to talk with the team as often as I do, but that's why we gather the highlights in our Field Guide twice a year. We love connecting you—not only to the land itself—but to the amazing staff who are your “field agents” and the folks you have entrusted to protect and care for these incredible wild and working lands.

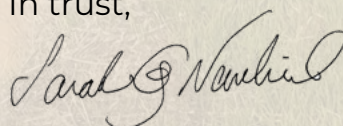
They are also the people who are enabling us to meet the milestones identified in our 2023-2027 Conservation Roadmap and I am pleased to share that progress with you in this issue. This plan is driven by our ambition to address

the issues that matter to our community. The strategic priorities we have identified span a diverse array of land types and reflect the diverse values the land brings to everyone in our community.

If this Field Guide leaves you hungry to connect with our team more, please visit us at our gorgeous new headquarters in downtown Santa Cruz.

We're YOUR Land Trust!

In trust,



Sarah Newkirk
Executive Director



FIELD NOTES



Highway 1 Salamander Crossing

In March, researchers concluded their salamander pond study at weelili onyenmak. They found ten individual Santa Cruz long-toed salamanders. In June, Land Trust stewardship staff and researchers began draining the perennial pond to support the eradication of invasive species such as crayfish, bullfrog, and fish that are impacting SCLTS reproduction.

June Beetle Surveys at Sandhills

In February, we conducted prescribed burning and vegetation management projects at Hihn Road and Bean Creek Road to reduce vegetation that was smothering potential habitat for June beetles. This spring, we worked with Jodi McGraw Consulting to survey June beetles and see what effect, if any, these projects had on the population. We're waiting for the final report but there seems to be an uptick in beetles at both properties!



Pollinator Garden at Antonelli Pond

We planted a pollinator garden at Antonelli Pond about a year ago when we celebrated completion of the new interpretive signs and all access ADA trails. As you can see in the photo, the garden is fully thriving (typically, 30% of the plants will die off). Our hosts on the site created a simple system to pump water out of the pond directly onto the plants.



Rocks Ranch Open Trails & Campout

In July, members joined us for a full day of open trails and a night under the stars at Rocks Ranch. We had a guided walk, nature journalling, a happy hour, and campfire gathering with conversation, music, smores, and much more! Member days like this provide an opportunity to spend time in beautiful, protected areas that aren't usually open to the public and we always have a blast! Join us next year and bring some friends!

"The entire event was fabulous this year! Nicely organized, fun group of campers, great food/drink offerings, particularly the happy hour spread. Kudos to everyone involved in organizing it. We're already looking forward to next year!"

- Donna

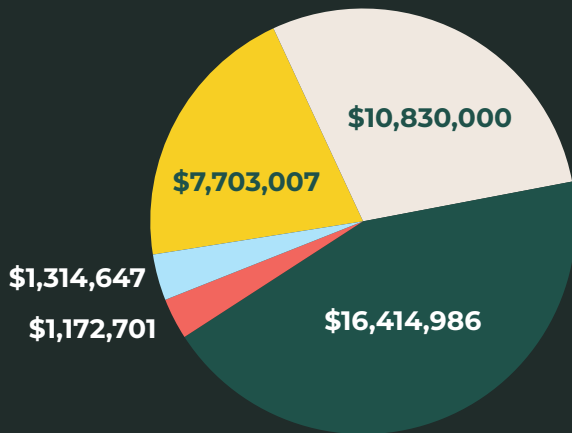


FINANCE REPORT

Your Trust in Us Supports Our Work

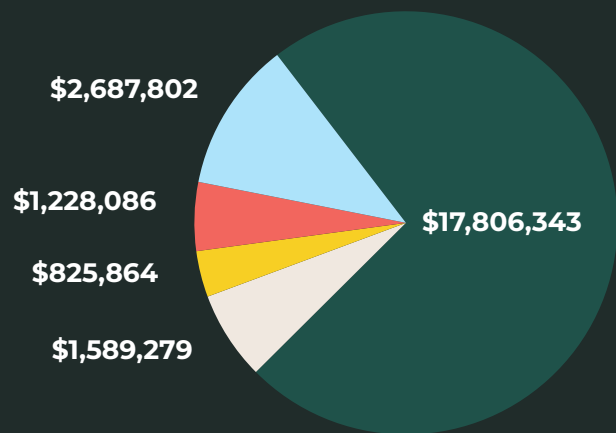
2024 FINANCIAL ACTIVITY

REVENUE



- GRANTS
- LAND DONATIONS
- DONATIONS
- PROGRAM INCOME
- INVESTMENT INCOME

EXPENSE



- LAND PROTECTION
- PUBLIC ACCESS PLANNING AND MANAGEMENT
- CONSERVATION STRATEGY & PLANNING
- EXTERNAL AFFAIRS, ENGAGEMENT, FUNDRAISING
- STEWARDSHIP & OPERATIONS



ACRES PRESERVED
19,000+



30+ OF PUBLIC
MILES ACCESS TRAILS

Member support is the foundation that makes all this possible!



MEMBERS
1300



**CONSERVATION CIRCLE &
LEGACY CIRCLE MEMBERS**
380



**ANNUAL VISITS TO
LAND TRUST PROPERTIES**
346,000

2023-2027 STRATEGIC PLAN UPDATE



STRATEGIC PRIORITY 1:

Protect habitat for biodiversity & steward high-value, at risk lands

PROTECTED!

Rocks Ranch – 2,600 acres

Nyland Ranch – 500 acres

Estrada Ranch - 1,205 acres

weelili onyenmak – 144 acres

Acorn Ridge Preserve - 111 acres

Trabing Road and Little Glen – 17.5 acres

STRATEGIC PRIORITY 2:

Protect and manage working lands to address climate change & promote environmental sustainability

PROTECTED!

Beach Ranch – 247 acres



STRATEGIC PRIORITY 3:

Create access to nature for all, especially under-resourced communities

RECENT WINS!

State & federal permitting on track for Watsonville Slough Farm

New ADA All Access trail at Antonelli Pond

STRATEGIC PRIORITY 4:

Increase public investment and capacity for conservation lands management in Santa Cruz County.



IN THE WORKS AND ONGOING

- 2,500 more acres to reach goal
- Reducing fuels and enhancing habitat for endangered species
- Enhancing wildlife habitat and permeability within linkages
- HWY 101 wildlife crossing construction ready in 2030
- Two crossings on HWY 1 in planning

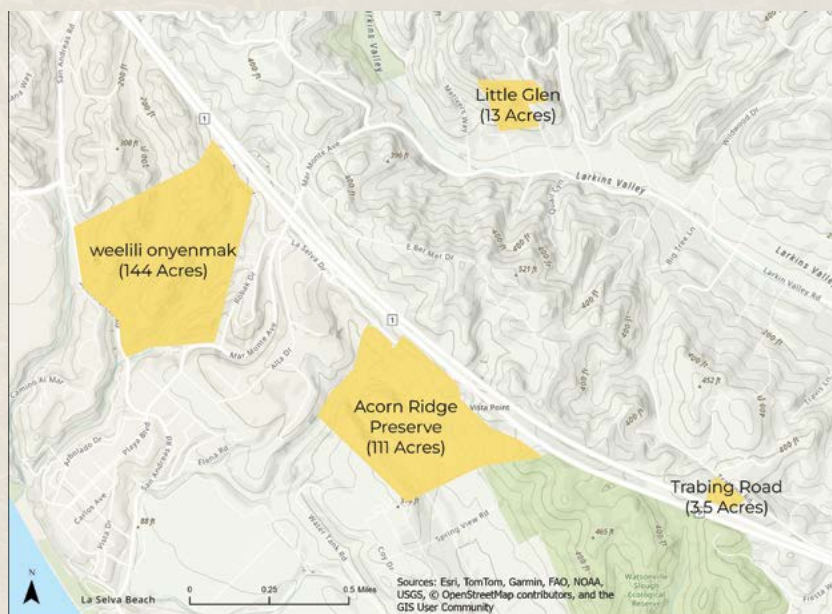
- 234 acres to reach goal
- Planning underway to restore 40 acres to estuarine habitat
- Conservation grazing on Rocks Ranch and Glenwood Open Space Preserve
- Local partnerships to provide enrichment experiences at WSF
- Assisting City of Watsonville in completing 1.5-mile all-access Lee Road Trail connecting neighborhoods to Watsonville Slough Farm
- Feasibility assessment of trail connecting Watsonville to the sea
- Audio trail at Antonelli Pond
- Stewarding 30 miles of trail throughout Santa Cruz County

- Measure Q, the Santa Cruz County Water and Wildfire Protection Initiative, passed at the ballot box in November 2024 with 60%+ support!

View the 2023-2027 Conservation Roadmap: <https://bit.ly/4mAc3Cj>



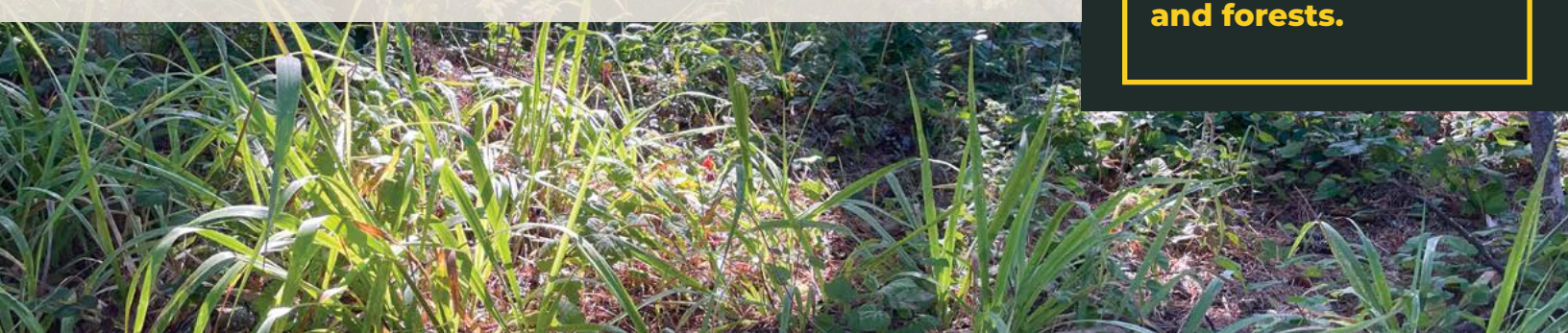
PRIME HABITAT PROTECTED FOR ENDANGERED SANTA CRUZ LONG-TOED SALAMANDER



With the recent acquisition of Acorn Ridge Preserve, the Land Trust now holds 273 acres of wildlife habitat to support the recovery of the state-listed and federally endangered Santa Cruz long-toed salamander (SCLTS). Ultimately, we aim to protect 350 acres and collaborate in the construction of a crossing spanning Highway 1. This stunning area and critical habitat have been eyed by developers for everything from a golf course to luxury homes. We believe that maintaining it in its natural state is a better outcome for the environment, wildlife, and community overall.

A grant from the Wildlife Conservation Board funded the purchase; eventually the title will be transferred to the California Department of Fish and Wildlife to incorporate into the Watsonville Slough Ecological Reserve for long term management. This latest acquisition supports connectivity of upland and dispersal habitat between several SCLTS metapopulations and will contribute significant acreage to the existing contiguous area of undisturbed and unfragmented high-quality habitat at the Watsonville Slough Ecological Reserve located immediately to the east. It will also provide protection of other wildlife that utilize and live in oak woodland habitat.

The SCLTS exists only in an approximately 50-square mile area of coastal habitat in southern Santa Cruz and northern Monterey counties, preferring to inhabit areas with coastal scrub, maritime chaparral, woodlands, and forests.





WHY I GIVE

"As a working student at Cabrillo, I don't have a lot outside of what I need to get by. But the Land Trust is creating and maintaining free public trails across the county that are available to dog walkers, hikers, bikers, and pedestrians—even equestrian trails in some areas. Having increased, free public access to areas that make Santa Cruz an amazing place to live means a lot. Plus, a donation of any amount makes you a member, which opens up things like the annual campout at Rocks Ranch or specialist walks at some of their new projects. That's why I donate—and will continue to as I can."

- Caedyn Nelson, Legacy Member

The core of the Land Trust's work is funded by member donations, revenue from the working lands we own, and foundation and government grants that leverage the gifts we receive from members. Your support is critical to ensuring the Land Trust of Santa Cruz County can continue conserving open space, protecting working lands, and creating access for all.

The Land Trust is a 501 (c) (3) nonprofit under the Internal Revenue Service Code (tax ID # 94-2431856) and is governed by a Board of Trustees.

YOUR DONATION IS HAVING A HUGE IMPACT

**FOR EVERY
MEMBER \$1 DONATED**



**WE RAISE \$10 IN STATE
AND FEDERAL
GRANTS**

OUR WORK IS FUNDED BY DONATIONS FROM INDIVIDUALS, REVENUES FROM THE WORKING LANDS WE OWN, AND FOUNDATION AND GOVERNMENT GRANTS, WHICH MULTIPLY THE IMPACT OF YOUR INDIVIDUAL GIFTS.

A GIFT FOR THE FUTURE: Step into the Legacy Circle

What will you leave for future generations? Legacy donors leave a lasting impact by dedicating a portion of their estate to protect the diverse landscapes that define and connect us to the Santa Cruz County region. Their generosity helps ensure these lands are cared for and preserved for future generations.

We celebrate our Legacy Circle members as soon as they join and during their lifetime through invitations to Legacy and Conservation Circle member-only events, special updates, recognition in Land Trust publications, and on our Byrne-Milliron Legacy Wall. You can give anonymously as well.

All that is needed to join is a few sentences in your will or trust. To include the Land Trust as a beneficiary of your will or trust, please use the following language:

"The Land Trust of Santa Cruz County, a California non-profit corporation, with Business address of 911 Center Street, Santa Cruz, CA 95060. Our taxpayer identification number is 94-2431856.

To learn more about how to include the Land Trust in your will or estate plans or to notify us of your planned gift, please contact our Engagement Director, Laura Dannehl-Schickman at (831) 588-8209 / email laura.schickman@landtrustsantacruz.org or visit: www.landtrust.org/legacy-circle to learn more.

OUR MISSION

We protect, care for, and connect all people to the vibrant natural and working lands that are essential for our community and nature to thrive together for generations to come.

OUR IMPACT

For over four decades, the Land Trust has worked to protect and preserve agricultural, watershed, wildlife habitat, open space, and outdoor recreation land in and around Santa Cruz County. This includes redwood forests, rare Sandhills habitats, wetlands at the Watsonville Sloughs, farmland in Pajaro Valley, and oak woodlands in the Pajaro Hills.

OUR VALUES

Scalable Innovation:

We take science-based risks to advance conservation and create lasting impact beyond our own work.

Commitment to Reliability:

Our words and actions are aligned, and we act with integrity.

Service to Community:

We serve all of Santa Cruz County—in all its diversity.

In Service to Nature:

We work to protect plants, animals, water, and soil, as integral to a healthy community.

Responsive Adaptability:

We keep abreast of changing conditions and community needs and stay nimble acting quickly when needed.

Shared Purpose:

We are united in our common goals and approach our work with the joy it deserves.

Partnering for Common Good:

We are grateful to our private and public supporters and partners who are pivotal in achieving lasting conservation.

Visit our website for videos, podcasts, and more to see our values in action: www.landtrustsantacruz.org



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