



Highlights from

A Conservation Blueprint

An Assessment and Recommendations from the Land Trust of Santa Cruz County



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This summary highlights key points of the Land Trust's Conservation Blueprint. You can view the full 200 page report and order printed copies online at www.LandTrustSantaCruz.org

Foreword to the Conservation Blueprint from the Steering Committee

This Conservation Blueprint is a practical, innovative and strategic approach to protecting our way of life in Santa Cruz County—a next-generation, integrated approach to conservation. In the Blueprint we:

- Recommend conservation priorities, recognizing that financial resources are limited;
- Provide practical suggestions to address water overdraft and sustain local farming;
- Offer new ideas on protecting the health of the forests that make up two-thirds of our county;
- Propose means of sustaining a resource-rich environment for today’s residents, as well as future generations.

The Conservation Blueprint captures our best thinking, and is built upon the best thinking of many others, and the successes of past and current efforts. We believe the Blueprint offers real-world solutions to the complex 21st century challenges we face. The Blueprint conservation assessment and recommendations are the result of two years of intense work, drawing on the expertise of hundreds of technical and community participants. As a team, we reviewed all the known studies of Santa Cruz County and commissioned new research to gain a comprehensive understanding of the health of our environment. During the document development process we consulted over 110 experts, including scientists and planners, farmers and foresters. We held four community forums to solicit the invaluable input of our diverse community. The breadth and depth of involvement in the development of the Blueprint is testimony to the commitment and passion of the Santa Cruz County community.

Conservation Blueprint goals, strategies, and actions will guide the work of the Land Trust for the next 25 years. We expect they will also inform and guide the work of all of us who are devoted to the beauty, natural richness and way of life that make Santa Cruz County so special. The Blueprint’s conservation vision and goals do not fall on the shoulders of a single organization. Collaboration—among conservation partners, nonprofit organizations, landowners, community members and other Santa Cruz County stakeholders—is integral to the Blueprint’s success. Together we can sustain our rich natural legacy for future generations. We urge our fellow citizens to study this Conservation Blueprint and we hope it will inspire you to take action, as it inspires us. There is still much work to be done.

Karen Christensen, Executive Director,
Resource Conservation District of Santa Cruz County

Betsy Herbert, Watershed Analyst,
San Lorenzo Valley Water District and
Sempervirens Fund Board Member

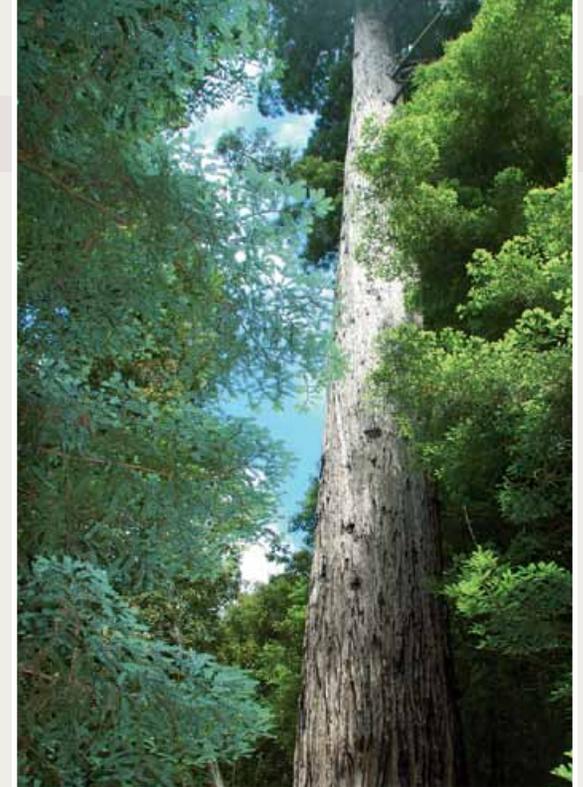
Jim Rider, Apple Grower, Bruce Rider & Sons and
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My Top Three Take-Aways

People are always asking me what my top three take-aways are from the Conservation Blueprint. It's a challenging question. The Blueprint is 200 pages long and makes scores of recommendations. It is built on the work of over 100 experts. And you want my top three take-aways? Okay, here they are.

The Blueprint reminds me that Santa Cruz County is a refuge!

I've lived in Santa Cruz County most of my adult life and I know it's an amazing place. But learning, in detail, about the natural richness of our county has deepened my understanding of why it is so special. I have come to see Santa Cruz County as a natural refuge – for plants, wildlife, and for people -- from the urban world that increasingly surrounds us. That's why I live here and it's why so many people visit us. It's why the fate of Santa Cruz County matters – because it is one of the last natural places so close to so many people.

The Blueprint shows us the unseen threats to our county.

Santa Cruz County certainly doesn't look threatened. It is mostly undeveloped and we have a proud history of protecting it. But the pretty streams are often polluted and our water supply threatened. Under current zoning 17,000 more housing units could be built, many of them in rural areas, breaking up the natural habitat. Explosive growth in our four neighboring counties will soon surround us with four million people. We are not immune from the impacts of the growth all around us.

The Blueprint offers real-world solutions to protect our county for future generations.

We recognize that financial resources, like natural ones, are limited and that we cannot protect everything we might want to protect. The Blueprint identifies eight areas of the county where we can protect water resources, wildlife habitat, working lands, and recreational opportunities. We estimate that by protecting 50,000 acres of land in these areas, we can help ensure that Santa Cruz County remains a refuge for future generations.

The Blueprint recommends that acquisition not be the dominant way we protect land in the future – that we place more emphasis on protection through innovative tools like conservation easements and stewardship incentives. The use of these tools is less expensive than buying the land, thus allowing us to protect more for less. These tools also keep land in private hands and on the tax rolls, which supports our economy, keeps working lands producing goods, and retains the tax base for public services.

The Blueprint will certainly guide the Land Trust's work for the next 25 years, but we also hope that it will be a guide and a resource for everyone working to protect Santa Cruz County. The Blueprint is about what we can do together over the next 25 years to protect our county for future generations. It's about our kids and grand-kids and the world we are going to leave them. I think our community is ready to meet this challenge.

Terry Corwin

Terry Corwin

Executive Director, Land Trust of Santa Cruz County



What's at Stake

Santa Cruz County is a small, mostly rural and largely undeveloped county, just minutes away from the nation's fourth largest metropolitan area. For over a hundred years, its citizens have worked hard to protect the county from the inevitable impacts of that proximity. California's first state park, Big Basin, was created to protect the majestic redwoods from being turned into Bay Area buildings. In the midst of the Great Depression the protection of the county's glorious coast began with Natural Bridges State Park. In the 1970s the people of Santa Cruz County voted for one of the first and strongest growth control measures in the state – in response to explosive growth like that which had destroyed so many cherished California landscapes. More recently Watsonville voters placed limits on their city's growth to protect the rich farmland of the Pajaro Valley. The protection of the county's natural landscape is part of our history and testimony to our values.

And what a landscape it is! The rugged mountains and deep forests feed the rivers and streams that flow into the Monterey Bay, a place so rich in marine life that it has been declared a national marine sanctuary. These forests are home to an amazingly diverse variety of plant and wildlife – and a source of renewable building materials. Miles of beaches stretch out below steep cliffs topped by fields and grasslands. Our local farmers' markets overflow with an abundance of fruits and vegetables and local farmers sell their bounty all over the world.

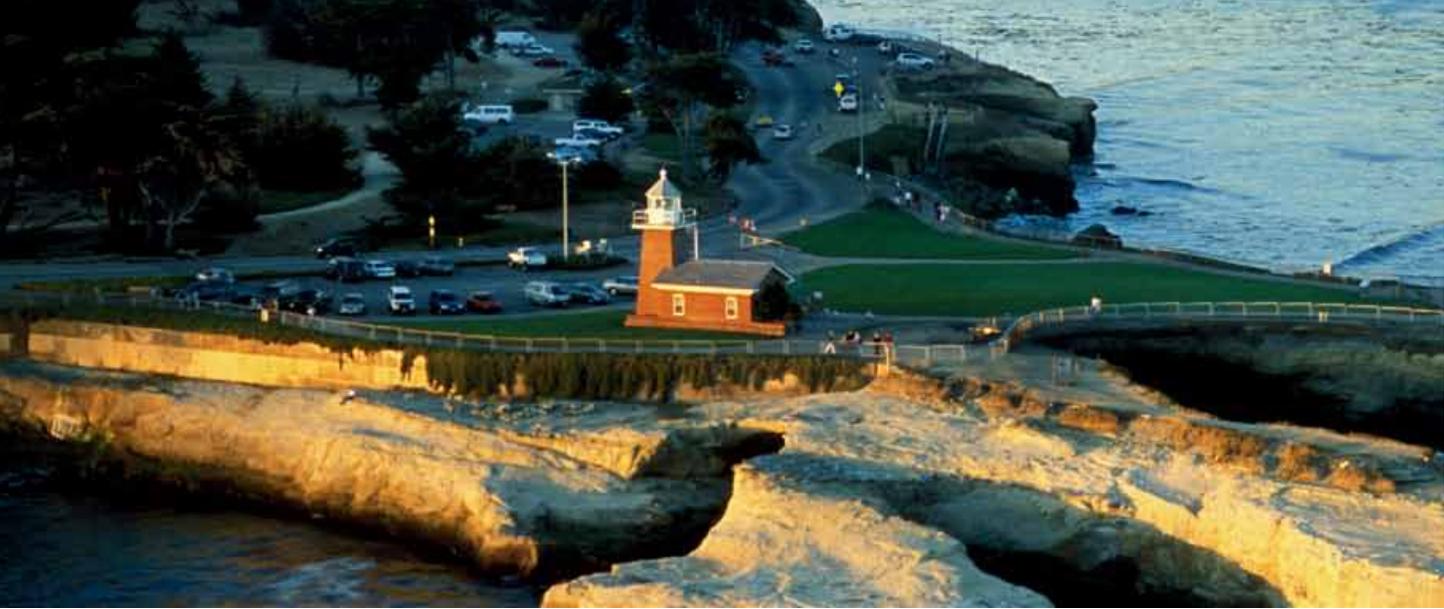


We live surrounded by a stunning natural wealth that nourishes us in ways measurable and immeasurable. It provides us with the water that is the basis of all life. We breathe clean air, play on the beaches, walk in the mountains, eat the food. Our local economy is built on farming and tourism. Our children grow up knowing magical places.

We have worked to protect all this for generations and this work is not done. All is not safe and sound in this magical place. There are threats seen and unseen – and there are things we can do to protect this special place for future generations, just as generations past protected what we enjoy today.

In Santa Cruz County

Number of major watersheds that drain into the Monterey Bay	18
Number of native plant species	1,200
Number of bird species	350
Acres of state parks	45,000
Miles of trails	231
Miles of rivers and streams	850
Percentage of county that is urban	11
Percentage of county that is farmed	14
Percentage of county covered by redwood forests	61



Unseen Threats

The beauty of what surrounds us can blind us to the problems and threats that face our natural world. The people of Santa Cruz County – along with many partners at the state and federal levels – are rightfully proud of what we have done to protect our county. The challenge is to follow in the footsteps of previous generations whose actions have protected the county we know today. It is now our turn to act to protect Santa Cruz County for future generations.

The Conservation Blueprint is built on an exhaustive analysis of available information about our county and extensive engagement with more than a hundred experts about the land and natural resources of the area. At the end of this 18-month process we have found that the health of Santa Cruz County’s plants, animals, habitats, and water are in decline – and are faced with threats that will accelerate that decline, unless we take action.

Population Growth

In the 1960s and 1970s Santa Cruz County was one of the fastest growing counties in the state, growing annually by an average of 4.6%. In response to this threat the voters approved Measure J, which placed limits on growth and sought to preserve agricultural lands and natural resources. Since that time the county’s annual growth rate has dropped to 1.3%, well below the state average – and well below that of surrounding counties.

Santa Cruz County’s growth rate is projected to remain where it is, but even that rate will see the addition of 35,000 people and 17,000 housing units over the next 25 years. And Santa Cruz County cannot escape the impact of far greater growth in surrounding counties. Roads, parks, jobs and housing in Santa Cruz County will be impacted by the projected addition of 146,000 people in the Monterey Bay Region. In the next generation the four counties surrounding us – Santa Clara, San Benito, San Mateo, and Monterey – will have a combined population of four million.

Resource Challenges

This population growth threatens the long-term viability of biodiversity as land is converted, wildlife habitats fragmented by roads and fences, and streams and rivers degraded by erosion and pollutants. The Conservation Blueprint has mapped development potential under the current County General Plan, including the building of second units on existing parcels in rural areas. Such rural development isn't as visually noticeable as suburban sprawl, but it can damage fragile natural areas and sever critical wildlife linkages.

The county's already impaired water resources will face major challenges in the next 25 years. Already 18 streams and rivers in the county fail to meet the standards of the federal Clean Water Act, and underground aquifers that supply 80% of the county's water are in overdraft – which means we are pumping more water than is replaced through groundwater recharge. These water challenges threaten the Monterey Bay Marine Sanctuary, the quality and supply of our drinking water, and the future of our agriculture industry.

Most of Santa Cruz County is productive working land – farm, timber, and range land. The Conservation Blueprint prioritizes the protection of these lands as both economic and natural resources. The viability of these lands is challenged in a variety of ways, including water shortages, climate change, regulatory demands, and development pressures.

Threat Index

Number of major underground aquifers that are overdrafted	3
Percentage of the county's water that comes from these aquifers	80
Number of streams and rivers that don't meet Clean Water Act standards	18
Number of rare plant and animal species in the county that are threatened or endangered	26
Number of new housing units projected to be built in the next 25 years	17,000
Current population of Santa Cruz County	272,000
Projected population growth in Santa Cruz County in the next 25 years	35,000
Projected population growth of Monterey Bay region in the next 25 years	146,000
Projected population of four counties surrounding Santa Cruz County in 2035	4 million



Climate Change

Perhaps the greatest conservation challenge facing us is global climate change. Over the next century, the region is forecast to experience a much hotter and drier climate, which will have cascading effects on water resources, plant and wildlife, and agriculture. Stream flows will be reduced, infiltration into aquifers will decline, flooding will increase, sea level will rise, and saltwater intrusion into aquifers will increase.

As alarming as these challenges are, we can take action now to address them. Already Santa Cruz County has an array of policies and programs in place to respond to these challenges. The Conservation Blueprint builds on work that has been done and programs underway – and offers additional practical, innovative, and strategic ways to respond to these threats.

Priority Conservation Areas

The undeveloped land in Santa Cruz County is part of the web of the natural world we depend on. In that sense there is no inconsequential land and probably very little land that doesn't deserve protection. The need to prioritize conservation efforts arises from the fact that financial resources are limited and we cannot do all that should be done or that we would like to do.

The Conservation Blueprint identifies priority areas that are most likely to provide a variety of benefits – to biodiversity, water resources, working lands, and recreation. The map on the facing page shows the priority areas identified by the Blueprint and briefly summarizes the multiple benefits that can be achieved through conservation projects in these areas.

These eight areas, plus key streams and rivers, total 112,000 acres, of which 22,000 acres are already protected. Of the remaining 90,000 acres, some lands may not contain critical conservation values or may not be deemed at risk of loss or conversion over the next several decades. The Blueprint estimates that approximately 50,000 acres merit protection through a variety of means over the next 25 years.

Benefits

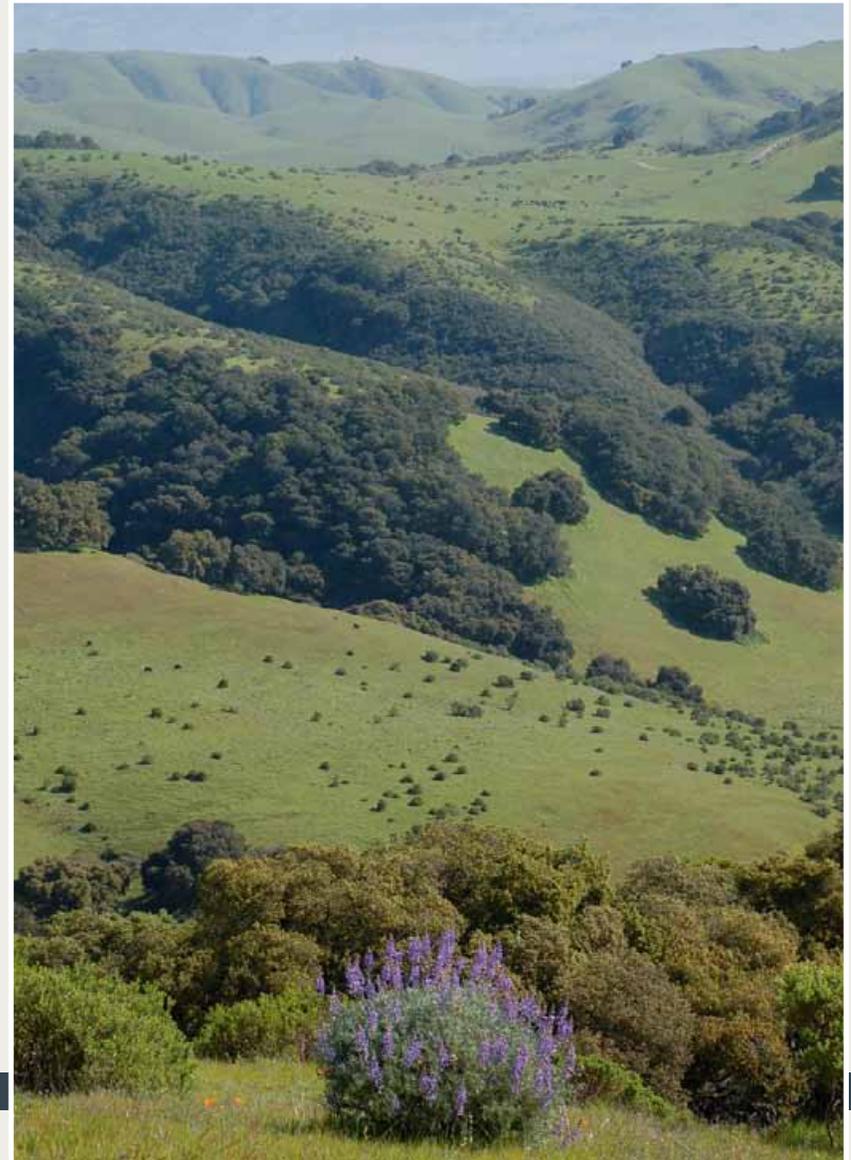
Conservation projects in each of these areas will provide a variety of benefits including the following:

Wildlife habitat and connectivity. The rich biodiversity of Santa Cruz County is dependent on maintaining its diverse habitats. Forests, grasslands, streams, and wetlands are critical for fish, birds, and other wildlife. Maintaining large intact patches of habitat and connections between them are critical for plants and wildlife, including large roaming mammals like mountain lions and badgers.

Water supply and quality. The county's water supply originates in the mountains and the health of streams and wetlands are the key to water quality. Groundwater recharge areas are critical to replenishing our overdrafted aquifers.

Working lands. Farm, timber, and ranch lands provide us with local food and building materials and are a cornerstone of our economy and tax base. Well managed working lands also support wildlife habitat and clean water.

Recreational and educational opportunities. Many of these priority areas provide opportunities for trail connections to other trails and parks – and a diverse array of settings for outdoor environmental education.





Important Areas for Multibenefit Conservation

Upper San Lorenzo 23,000 acres

Benefits: large intact wildlife habitat, old-growth redwoods, water supply, timber production, potential trail connections.

North Coast Watersheds 42,000 acres

Benefits: large intact wildlife habitat, old-growth redwoods, coastal grasslands, climate change resiliency, water supply, groundwater recharge, timber production, coast and ranch lands.

Watsonville Slough/Lower Pajaro River 5,500 acres

Benefits: wetland and riparian habitat, bird and amphibian habitat, potential groundwater recharge, water quality, potential overdraft reduction, farmland, trail system to Watsonville.

Upper Corralitos 12,500 acres

Benefits: steelhead habitat, old-growth redwoods, wildlife connectivity, water supply, groundwater recharge, timber production, potential trail connections.

Larkin Valley 9,500 acres

Benefits: Santa Cruz long-toed salamander habitat, maritime chaparral, groundwater recharge, water quality.

Interlaken 1,500 acres

Benefits: wetlands, riparian habitat, groundwater recharge, farmland, potential recreational access for underserved area.

Pajaro Hills 14,500 acres

Benefits: Coastal grasslands, wildlife connectivity to Gabilan and Diablo Ranges, groundwater recharge, rangeland, long-term recreational potential.

River and Riparian Systems 850 miles of streams

Benefits: salmon and steelhead habitat, amphibian habitat, wildlife corridors, bird habitat, groundwater recharge, water supply, water quality, potential trails.

Sandhills 6,000 acres

Benefits: endemic plant and animal habitat, groundwater recharge, water supply and water quality, habitat connectivity.



Conservation Tools

Buying land isn't the only way to protect it. The Conservation Blueprint recommends that acquisition not be the dominant form of land protection. We believe there are other tools that can provide protection and conservation benefits at substantially lower costs.

Past land protection activities in Santa Cruz County have focused on policy and purchase – and have achieved impressive results. Growth control and zoning have limited and directed development, sparing the county from the sprawl that characterizes so much development in the state. An impressive array of state, county, and city parks and lands provides residents and visitors with a wide range of recreational opportunities, while also protecting habitat and watersheds. These publicly owned lands now make up 27% of the county – well over double the amount of land that is built up and three times the amount of cultivated farmland.

The Blueprint recommends that the majority of future land protection efforts focus on tools that leave lands on the tax rolls and that continue to provide valuable products like food and wood. We also believe that conservation goals can be achieved on more land at less cost through the use of non-acquisition tools like conservation easements and stewardship incentives.

Tools for Conservation

Policy, regulation, and zoning. Examples include County and City general plans and voter-approved policies like Measure J, the County growth control measure passed in 1978, and Measure U, which established Watsonville's urban growth boundary.

Purchase of land. Examples include the acquisition of state, county and city parks and greenbelts and the Land Trust's acquisition of Sandhills and Watsonville Slough lands.

Conservation easements. Examples of these voluntary agreements between landowners and conservation organizations include the Land Trust's protection of more than 2,000 acres of farm and ranch lands in the Pajaro Valley.

Stewardship incentives. These include a range of tools that reward private landowners for the management of their land to achieve public benefits like clean water and wildlife habitat. Local examples include water quality projects coordinated by the Resource Conservation District of Santa Cruz County on farm land.





Conservation Easements

Conservation easements are voluntary legal agreements between a landowner and a conservation organization or public agency, that typically place permanent limits on the use of the land in order to protect its conservation values. Private landowners retain ownership and the property remains on the tax rolls. Easements are appropriate tools when the land need not be taken out of private ownership to achieve conservation goals. Easements can be purchased from landowners or they can be donated, in which case they may qualify for a tax deduction. A combination of sale and donation is also possible. The best local examples of these easements are those between the Land Trust of Santa Cruz County and Pajaro Valley landowners, which permanently restrict the development of farmland.

Stewardship Incentives

Stewardship incentives include an array of current and emerging tools that compensate landowners for managing their lands in a way that increases conservation values beyond what is required by existing regulations. The Natural Resource Conservation Service and the Resource Conservation District of Santa Cruz County administer numerous voluntary incentive programs to protect, restore, and manage land in order to improve soil, water quality, and wildlife habitat.

Payments for Ecosystem Services

Ecosystem services include clean air, water supply and water quality, fish and wildlife habitat, crop pollination, soil fertility, food, flood control, public health benefits, nature-based recreational and educational opportunities, carbon sequestration, and resiliency to climate change. At present, these benefits are often undervalued or not valued at all in the marketplace. Innovative programs are emerging that attach an economic value to nature's benefits and provide incentive payments to protect or enhance these benefits.

An emerging tool is Payment for Ecosystem Services (PES), which provides financial incentives to landowners in exchange for managing land in a way that protects one or more ecological values or services. Innovative examples of such approaches include New York City's payments to private landowners in the watersheds of the Catskill Mountains to improve farm management to maintain water quality. The City spent \$1.5 billion on these payments, instead of \$6-8 billion for a new water treatment plant.

The Conservation Blueprint recommends that an economic valuation of the County's ecosystem services be completed and that pilot projects be undertaken with resource agencies, conservation organizations, and owners of working lands. The Blueprint recommends, if these tools are proven to be effective, that a substantial portion of the 50,000 acres of priority multi-benefit lands be protected through their use.

More on Biodiversity

Santa Cruz County's unique and diverse natural systems are not only essential to California's abundant biodiversity, they are also the foundation of our community's well-being. The natural world supports our physical, emotional, and economic health by providing a wealth of goods and services. The Conservation Blueprint evaluated terrestrial and aquatic habitats and species of the county, habitat connectivity, and climate change issues.

Creating a Conservation Lands Network

A key objective of the Conservation Blueprint is to identify a network of conservation lands that could safeguard the county's biodiversity. The Conservation Lands Network (CLN) is designed to protect rare and unique vegetation and the species that depend on them, as well as to include significant portions of more widespread vegetation types. The accompanying chart shows the 17 vegetation types that cover these natural lands and the extent to which they are currently protected.

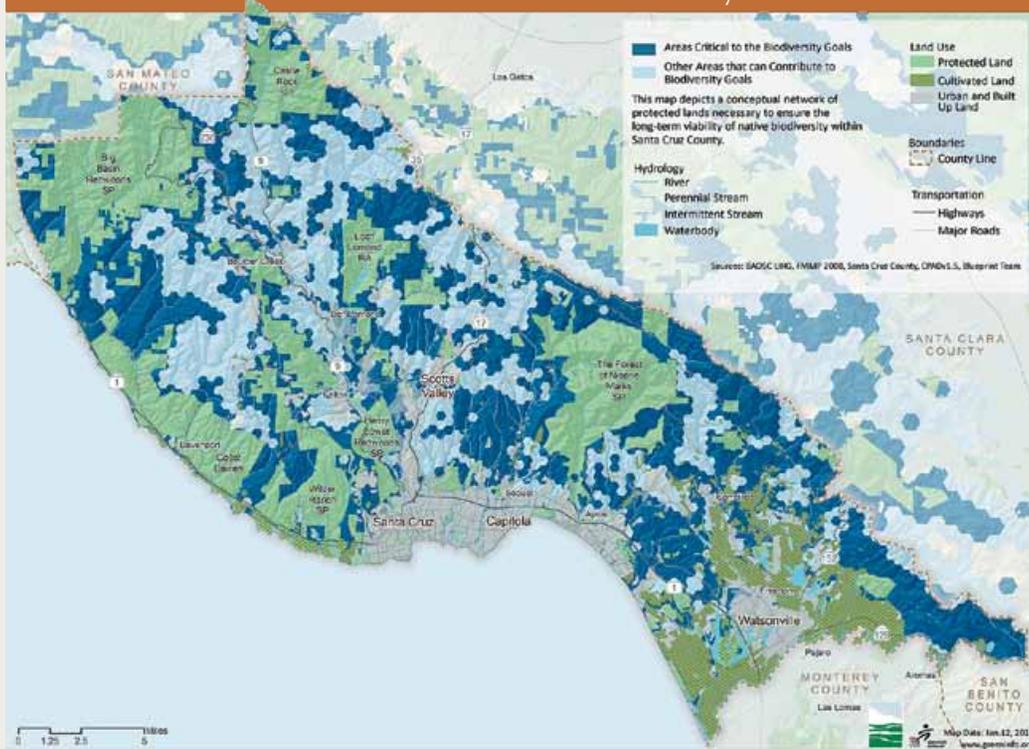
Natural Wealth

Number of native plant species in the county	1,200
Number of rare plant species	72
Number of plant species found nowhere else	17
Species of birds in the county	350
Number of rare or locally unique animal species	81
Number of animal species found nowhere else	18
Acres of wetlands	1,500
Acres of large intact wildlife patches	130,000
Percentage of these large patches currently protected	41%

Vegetation: the key to biodiversity

Category & Protection Goals	Native Vegetation Type	Acres	% Currently Protected
Globally or locally rare or highly significant 90% protection goal	Grasslands	15,177	35%
	Dunes	317	51%
	Wetlands	207	46%
	Maritime chaparral	8,115	27%
	Sandhills chaparral	5,665	31%
	Riparian	1,596	40%
	Sand parkland	226	48%
	Monterey pine	707	38%
	Santa Cruz cypress	209	47%
Locally uncommon 75% protection goal	Chamise	2,053	36%
	Coastal scrub	13,155	49%
	Knobcone pine	6,142	51%
Locally common 50% protection goal	Coast live oak woodland	19,892	19%
	Coastal mixed hardwood	5,947	18%
	Pacific Douglas fir	7,365	29%
	Redwood-Douglas fir	12,066	26%
Locally abundant 33% protection goal	Redwood	123,410	35%
	Total Native Vegetation	222,181	32%

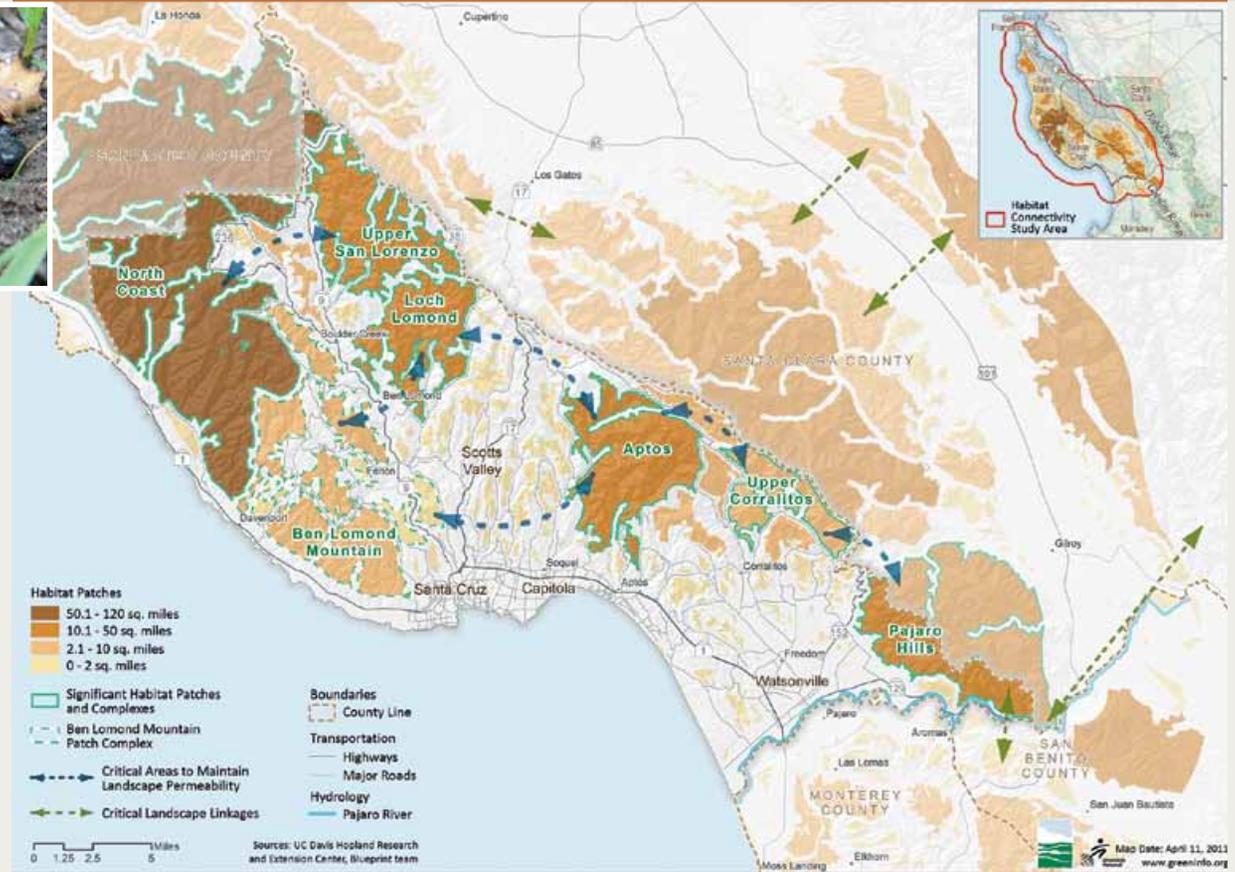
Conservation Lands Network for Santa Cruz County



Large maps online at www.landtrustsantacruz.org

Habitat Connectivity

The Conservation Lands Network includes public and private lands, including ranch and timber lands where biological conservation values are protected. The CLN would include 177,000 acres of land, 80,000 acres of which is already protected and 50,000 acres of which is within the priority multi-benefit areas. A large portion of the currently unprotected land is within working ranches and forests, which can be managed to protect many of the conservation values while remaining productive. The Blueprint sets the following targets for protection based on four categories: globally or locally rare or highly significant, 90%; locally uncommon, 75%; locally common 50%; locally abundant, 33%. See chart on facing page.



Large maps online at www.landtrustsantacruz.org

Habitat Connectivity

The long-term viability of wide-ranging species like the mountain lion requires linkages between large natural patches of habitat both within the Santa Cruz Mountains and between the Santa Cruz Mountains and the neighboring Diablo and Gabilan ranges. The Blueprint finds that 20% of the county's habitat has already been fragmented by development, agriculture, and mining. It also notes that rural development in the hills and mountains creates barriers to wildlife movement, including fencing, roads, and the presence of people and dogs. The Blueprint identifies potential linkages between these mountain ranges and recommends detailed steps for making our region's landscape accessible for wildlife.

Climate Change

By the end of the century the average annual temperature in California is predicted to increase by up to 8 degrees and sea levels may rise by more than 4.5 feet. Santa Cruz County will be hotter and drier, putting still more strain on already overburdened water supplies for people, animals and plants.

The Blueprint recommends a series of strategies to increase the ability of natural systems to function in the face of climate change. The protection of a diverse range of lands can help plants and animals adapt by serving as climate change refuges. Particular attention should be paid to wetlands and north-facing slopes, as well as areas where elevation change provides opportunities for species movement to cooler microclimates.



More on Water

More than 850 miles of waterways – creeks, streams, and rivers – thread their way through Santa Cruz County, the way blood vessels lace our body. Water is a life force. We drink it, bathe in it, and play in it – and it nourishes all the life around us. Redwoods, oaks, wildflowers, birds, coyotes, crops, the starfish clinging to shore rocks – every living thing in our county is nourished by water. Unlike many California counties, Santa Cruz County imports virtually no water from beyond its borders. Our water destiny – our problems and solutions – is entirely in our hands.

Problems

The county's mountainous geology provides the setting for an abundance of streams and rivers that drain into the Bay or into the county's three major underground aquifers. These aquifers provide 80% of the water used in the county and all of them are overdrafted – more water is taken out each year than is being replenished. The county's surface water supplies are often insufficient during droughts and in the late summer to meet demand for drinking water and to support fish. As demand grows over the next 25 years, surface water shortages are projected to become the norm even during average rainfall years. The Blueprint recommends numerous actions to help address this growing gap between water supply and water demand.

The quality of our water supply is also threatened. Saltwater intrusion in the Pajaro Valley threatens the county's agriculture economy. Virtually every stream in the county suffers to some degree from degraded water quality. Thirty-two water bodies in the county are currently listed or proposed for listing as failing to meet state water quality standards. All of this polluted water flows into the Monterey Bay, a place so rich in marine life that it has been declared a national marine sanctuary.

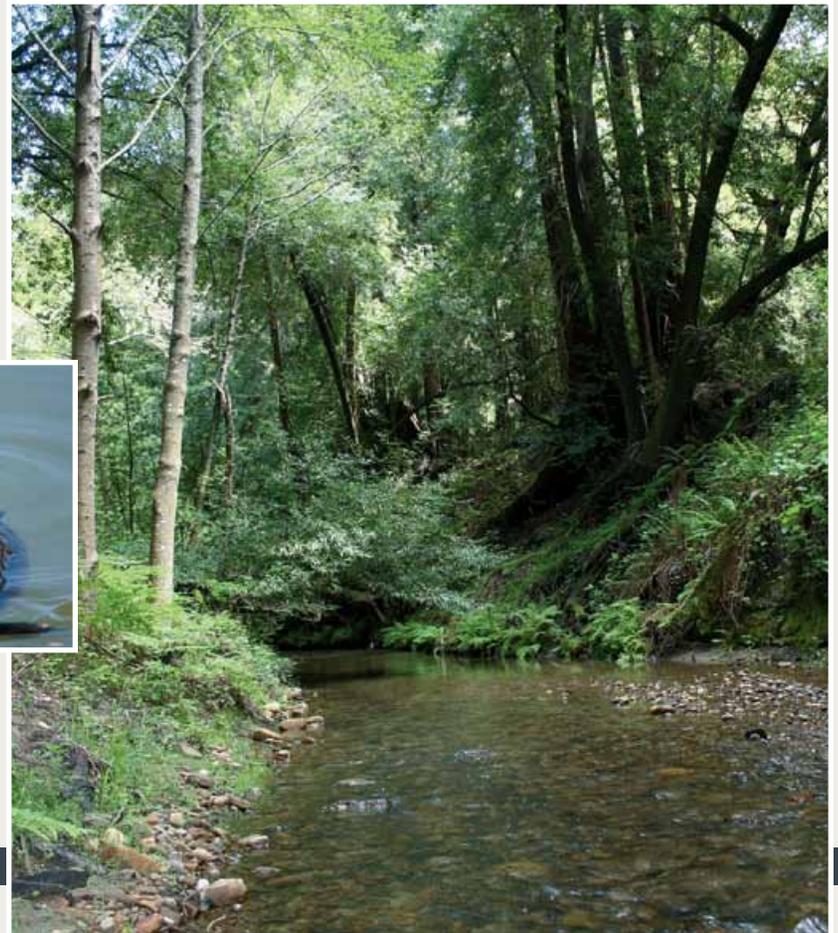
Water Quality and Otters

There is a direct connection between water quality in the county's lakes, rivers, and streams and the health of the Monterey Bay. Polluted urban and agricultural runoff degrades bay water quality during winter storms and can do great harm to marine life. High nutrient loads attributed to nitrate runoff from fertilizer use can result in harmful algal blooms that were linked to the death of at least 21 sea otters in 2010.



Water Measurements

Number of major watersheds in Santa Cruz County	18
Number of streams and waterbodies with water quality problems	32
Percentage of the county's streams and rivers that drain into Monterey Bay	99%
Percentage of the county's water use that comes from underground aquifers	80%
Percentage of the county's water use that goes to agriculture	60%
Number of major underground aquifers in the county	3
Number of major underground aquifers that are overdrafted	3
Number of septic systems in the county	22,000
Number of septic systems in the San Lorenzo River watershed	13,000



Land Conservation Tools and Water

Numerous federal, state, and local agencies share responsibility for maintaining water supply and water quality in the county. The Blueprint surveys the extensive work of these agencies and focuses its recommendations on how land conservation can help protect water supplies and water quality. Its recommendations include:

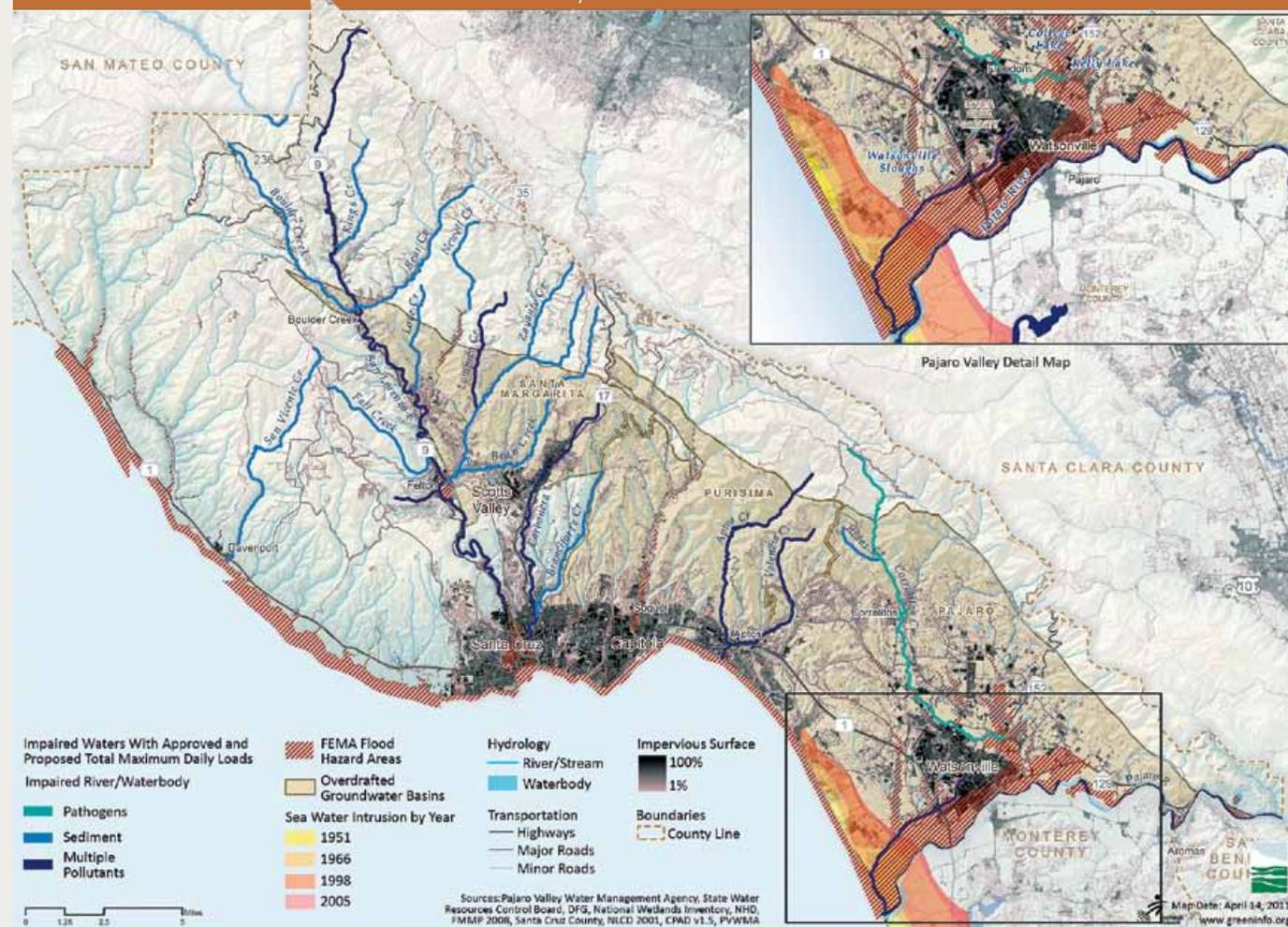
- Protect water supply and water quality through acquisition, easements, or stewardship incentives on critical watershed lands, streams, wetlands and natural recharge areas.
- Secure locations for Managed Aquifer Recharge projects through acquisition or easements.
- Use stewardship incentives to encourage landowners to reduce agriculture water use and improve water quality.
- Utilize the Land Trust's Watsonville Slough Farms to demonstrate techniques to protect water quality, reduce water use, and increase aquifer recharge.



Managed Aquifer Recharge

Managed Aquifer Recharge (MAR) projects capture surplus winter water and convey it into the aquifer through managed percolation ponds. The Recharge Initiative program at UCSC (led by Dr. Andy Fisher) estimates that a widely distributed network of MAR projects could reduce overdraft by as much as 20%. Land conservation can help secure new MAR sites through conservation easements and stewardship incentives. The Land Trust is exploring the use of its Watsonville Slough Farms for a MAR project.

Water Resource Issues of Santa Cruz County



Large maps online at www.landtrustsantacruz.org

More on Working Lands Farm, Range and Timberland

Most of Santa Cruz County is working land – farms, range, and timber lands. The Conservation Blueprint recommends that most land conservation take place on these lands through easements and incentives that will keep them working and increase their contribution to ecosystem health. These lands provide valuable food and building products and are major contributors to the economy of the county. They also provide valuable ecosystem services including wildlife habitat, clean water, and clean air. To protect these working lands, the Blueprint recommends strategies to improve how working lands are cared for and to ensure their economic viability.



Working Lands

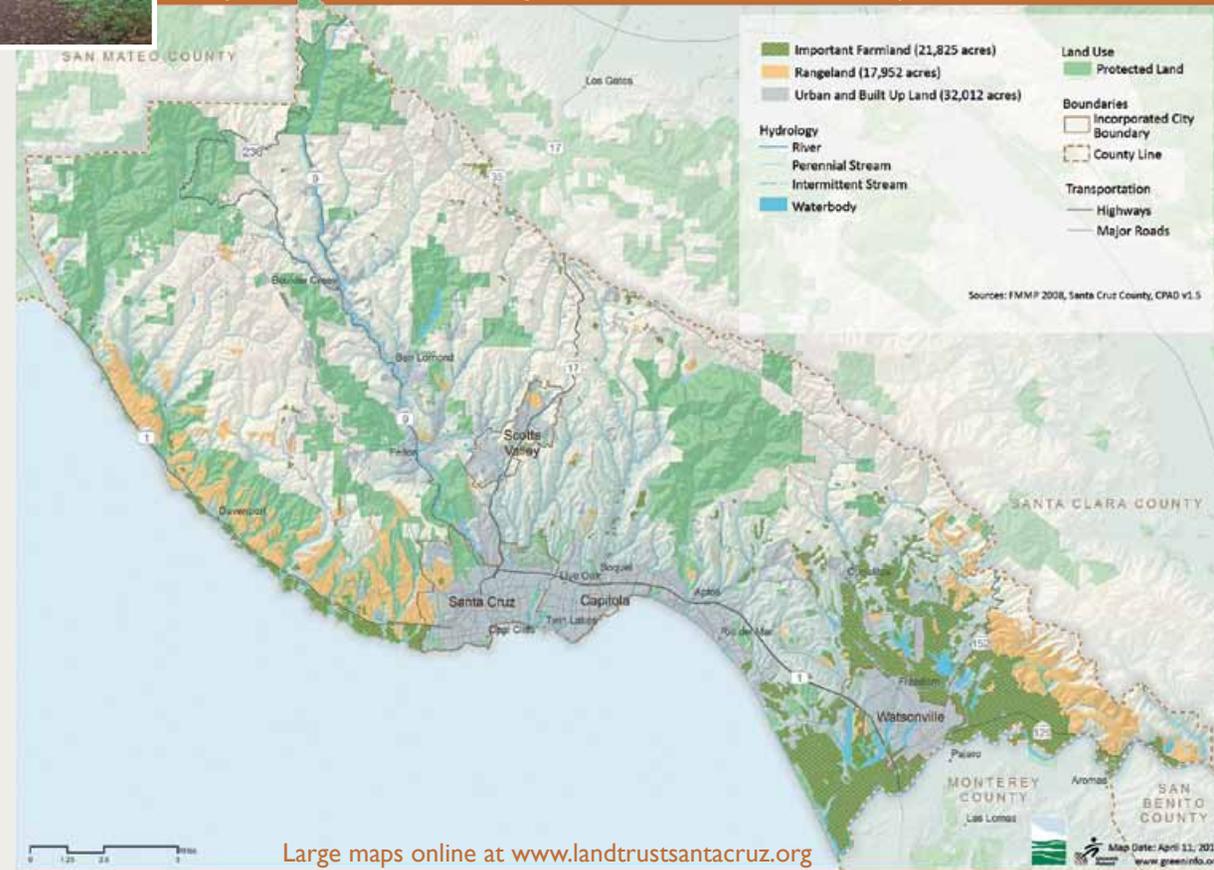
Acres of cultivated farm land in the county	21,827
Acres of range land suitable for grazing in the county	17,717
Acres of redwood and Douglas fir forests in the county	143,000
Acres of land where timber has been harvested over the last decade	31,200
Revenue generated from agriculture per year in the county	\$491 million
Number of people directly employed in agriculture	8,000
Acres of sustainably-certified forest land in the Santa Cruz Mountains	25,000
Acres of farmland converted to urban use from 2000 to 2008	634

Viability Challenges

Through extensive consultation with landowners, growers, and foresters the Blueprint team identified a host of challenges to the viability of working lands – challenges that must be addressed to provide a sustainable future for working lands. For farmers, water supply and water quality loom as perhaps the greatest challenges. Food safety regulations are also emerging as a challenge for those landowners and tenants who wish to protect habitat near cultivated areas – and to the Blueprint’s recommended use of stewardship incentives to encourage such actions.

Foresters say they are most concerned by a decreasing inventory of forest land available for harvest and by the long-term regulatory uncertainty they face. They are concerned that large intact forest lands will be purchased for parks. The county’s relatively small amount of grazing is limited by high costs and the lack of animal processing facilities.

Important Farm and Rangeland of Santa Cruz County



Large maps online at www.landtrustsantacruz.org

Grazing and Conservation

The county's 18,000 acres of grasslands play an important role in protecting water resources, biodiversity, native plants and wildlife habitat. Well-managed grazing can contribute to the health of these grasslands by controlling invasive species, improving water quality, and maintaining endangered habitat. Currently only a third of grasslands in the county are protected and less than a third are grazed – making them vulnerable to urban encroachment, planned development, and conversion to shrubland. The grasslands and hills east of Watsonville are a critical wildlife corridor linking the Santa Cruz Mountains to the Gabilan Range to the south and the Diablo Range to the east. The Blueprint recommends protecting 90% of the county's grasslands.

Strategies for Maintaining the Viability of Working Lands

None of these strategies for enhancing the conservation benefits of working lands will be effective in the long term if we do not maintain the viability of farms, ranches, and timber lands. This is less familiar territory for conservationists, but it must become familiar if working lands are to contribute to the health of our natural world.



The Blueprint recommends a variety of ways to address the viability challenges facing our working lands. In the water section we address ways to deal with the water supply problems that threaten the future of farming in the county. The Blueprint recommends active support for growth control measures and the use of easements to provide permanent protection against development. Conservationists need to become involved in shaping food safety regulations that threaten habitat protection on or near cultivated land. We need to work together to address the future of the local timber industry (see box right). The partnership between conservation and working lands must be a two-way street: conservationists must help maintain the viability of working lands so that those who work the lands can enhance the natural environment.

Timber Resources of Santa Cruz County



Large maps online at www.landtrustsantacruz.org

Conservation Forestry Partnership

One of the Blueprint's more ambitious recommendations is that a Conservation Forestry Partnership be formed to address the full array of issues confronting the Santa Cruz Mountain's forests. The goal of the partnership would be to identify, protect, and restore the most significant forest habitat while helping to ensure the viability of a sustainable timber industry. Partners could include willing forest landowners, state parks, conservation organizations, regulatory agencies, and county governments from Santa Cruz, San Mateo and Santa Clara counties. Just listing who would be involved and the issues they would have to address tells you how ambitious this undertaking would be. This effort could draw on the experiences of others who have formed equally challenging partnerships.



Recreation and Healthy Communities

We connect with nature every time we breathe or drink water or simply look at the beauty that surrounds us. In Santa Cruz County we have abundant opportunities to get out in nature, to experience its wonder and relax in its embrace. Over a quarter of the county’s protected landscape is open to public access, providing an array of opportunities for healthy recreation and environmental education . This wealth of natural recreation draws millions of visitors to the county each year, making tourism a critical part of our local economy.

Challenges

The Conservation Blueprint brought together leaders from the parks, recreation, and outdoor education communities to identify challenges they face as they maintain the county’s bounty of facilities and programs. Mostly they talked about the challenge of funding basic operating costs. In recent years facilities have been closed, hours shortened, and basic maintenance repeatedly cut. Looking ahead, these recreation and education leaders see growing demand as the county’s population increases.

In addition, the county’s wealth of recreational opportunities is not evenly distributed. The City of Santa Cruz has almost 6,000 acres of parks, greenbelt and watershed lands and is close to Wilder State Park and the UCSC Natural Reserve. Watsonville has less than 1,000 acres of parks and Capitola just 41 acres. All communities face challenges providing safe and convenient access between schools, neighborhoods, and parks – a key component of healthy lifestyles for children. And the county’s array of nature centers and educational programs struggle to meet the need to teach future generations about nature.

Natural Connections

Acres of land available for public enjoyment in the county	65,000
Acres of land in state parks in the county	45,548
Number of state parks in the county	12
Miles of trails in Santa Cruz County	231
Miles of trails in the Watsonville Slough system	7
Miles of trails proposed in Watsonville’s parks master plan	35
Dollars generated annually by tourists in Santa Cruz County	\$649 million
Acres of land in City of Santa Cruz parks	5,869
Acres of land in City of Watsonville parks	757
Acres of land in County parks	1,249
Acres of land in City of Scotts Valley parks	176
Acres of land in City of Capitola parks	41
Number of nature centers in Santa Cruz County	12

Healthy Children

The Trust for Public Land conducted a park equity analysis for the San Francisco Bay Area that links information about park locations with census data by race and income to map underserved areas (www.tpl.org). Their analysis shows that living in an underserved area more than one-quarter mile from safe and well-equipped parks or natural areas is a major contributing factor to the alarming rates of obesity and chronic disease that result from physical inactivity.

Nature Education

Santa Cruz County's rich and diverse natural habitats provide a wealth of recreational and educational opportunities. School children have a variety of opportunities to learn on the ground about the world around them. The Fitz Wetlands Center at Pajaro Valley High School, the San Lorenzo Watershed Academy, and Santa Cruz Museum of Natural History are three examples of such innovative programs. The Blueprint recommends increased support for such programs and the use of conserved lands as outdoor classrooms.

Watsonville Wetlands Watch already works on the Land Trust's Watsonville Slough Farms, involving the students of Pajaro Valley High School in stewardship and restoration projects. The Museum of Natural History in Santa Cruz has initiated an innovative educational program on the Land Trust's Morgan Sandhills Preserve.



Trails

Trails are one key way people get in touch with the natural world. The Blueprint broadly identifies opportunities to increase the county's trail system, including the following:

- The City of Watsonville's Parks Master Plan, which proposes adding 15 miles of trails within the city and nearly 20 miles outside the city.
- The Monterey Bay Sanctuary Scenic Trail would link existing trail segments into a continuous coastal trail around the Monterey Bay.
- The California Coastal Trail would span the coast of California. Seven miles of Santa Cruz County's 43 mile section of this trail has been completed.
- The Santa Cruz Branch Rail Line runs 32 miles from Davenport to Watsonville and is anticipated to include pedestrian and bicycle access.
- The Bay Area Ridge Trail is a 550-mile trail that will encircle the San Francisco Bay Area. Most of the trail is already open and there are opportunities for trail connections from Santa Cruz County.



Some landowners are concerned about trails on or near their property. The Blueprint does not identify any property-specific trails and supports potential trails only on public lands or where landowner permission has been secured.

Funding and Partnerships

Without a secure source of funding for ongoing operations and maintenance, most park managers and environmental educators believe there is no way to sustain existing facilities and programs. In the short term, conservation organizations must work to ensure that future state bond measures continue to include funding for protecting natural resources in Santa Cruz County. Park agencies and non-profit organizations also need to coordinate efforts to identify sustainable funding sources for long-term stewardship and maintenance of parks and protected lands.

The Purpose of the Blueprint

The Conservation Blueprint is a science-based and community-informed document that recommends priorities and strategies for the next generation of land conservation and resource stewardship in Santa Cruz County. The Blueprint will serve as a strategic tool to guide the work of the Land Trust of Santa Cruz County over the next 25 years – and it will serve as a resource for conservation partners, nonprofit organizations, landowners, and other community stakeholders as they work together to protect Santa Cruz County.

That is what the Blueprint is intended to be. It is also important to say what it is not. The Blueprint is not a regulatory document and it is not meant to replace adopted plans and policies. Nor does the Blueprint prescribe the use of any specific land protection tools for any specific projects. It is not an acquisition plan and does not identify specific properties for purchase or protection.



Blueprint Development Process

The Blueprint was developed by the Land Trust of Santa Cruz County over an 18-month period. This collaborative process involved hundreds of others in a variety of roles.

- We began by collecting and analyzing available land use, conservation and resource data for the county.
- We commissioned additional research on current land use and growth scenarios, land values and landscape connectivity.
- We solicited input on conservation goals and methods from more than 100 local and regional experts through a series of technical workshops and through additional meetings.
- We hosted four community forums around the county to hear what the citizens valued most about the county's environment.
- We met with a wide variety of community leaders, including elected officials and leaders from agricultural, business and environmental communities.
- In February 2011, we posted the draft Blueprint on the Land Trust's website for a final round of public input.

Throughout this process the work of the Blueprint team was guided by a seven-member Steering Committee and overseen by the Land Trust Board of Trustees. The Blueprint Planning Team and the Land Trust are deeply grateful to everyone involved in this process.

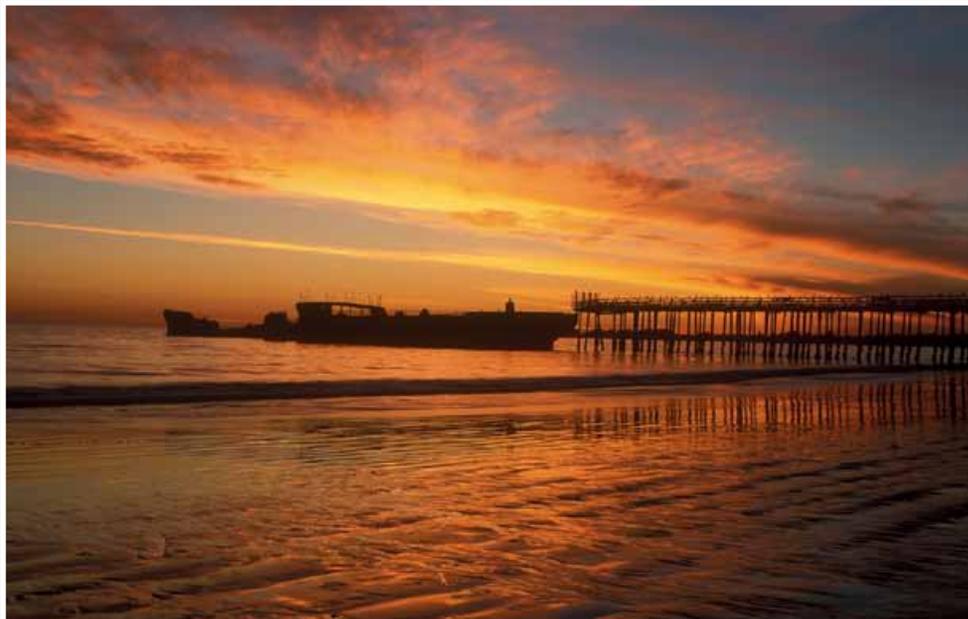
About the Land Trust



Our mission is to protect and care for the spectacular beauty and natural resources that make Santa Cruz County special. We protect working lands – farm, range, and timber land – and natural lands with high conservation value. By protecting these lands we protect water supplies, wildlife habitats, and open space.

We believe that a relatively small investment now can save what we love forever. We protect land through a variety of means. Sometimes we buy the land from willing landowners. Sometimes we reach preservation agreements with landowners. Always, we serve as good stewards of the land under our care. We work with a wide variety of conservation partners to accomplish our goals.

The Land Trust was founded in 1978 and has directly protected 3,200 acres of land and worked with others to protect another 10,000 acres. We have protected redwood forests, rare Sandhills habitat, wetlands at the heart of the Watsonville Sloughs, and 2,000 acres of farm and ranch land in the Pajaro Valley.



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Photos courtesy of Paul Zaresky, Jim Rider, Ron Hirsch, Bree Candiloro, Jodi McGraw, San Francisco Chronicle, Watsonville Wetlands Watch, and Land Trust staff.

What's Next?

The Conservation Blueprint contains 16 goals, 47 strategies to achieve them, and 143 specific recommended actions. We don't expect everyone to agree with all of them. Our hope is that everyone concerned with the future of Santa Cruz County will act on those recommendations they do agree with.

Successful implementation of the Conservation Blueprint will require the active collaboration of conservation organizations, community groups, cities, resource and recreation agencies, agricultural organizations, the County, landowners and individuals. The Blueprint does not task specific stakeholders with roles and responsibilities for implementing recommended strategies and actions. It emphasizes building on existing efforts and partnerships.



How you can help

If you are a community leader, consider how you can help implement the Blueprint. If you work for a conservation agency or organization, consider using the Blueprint to promote partnerships. If you are a concerned citizen, consider participating in the development of conservation policies and programs.

Consider taking these steps:

- Read the full Conservation Blueprint online. You'll find 24 full-color maps and extensive information in its 200 pages.
- Share this summary or the full Blueprint with others who might be interested. You can use the return envelope in this Summary Report to send us names and addresses of those you'd like to receive copies of this report.
- Support the implementation of the Blueprint by becoming a member of the Land Trust. Use the return envelope or join online.



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