



Land Trust of Santa Cruz County
2015-2020 Strategic Plan
Adopted by the Board of Trustees, 4/24/15

Summary

Introduction

This five-year strategic plan is – by far – the most ambitious in the Land Trust’s 37-year history. It calls for large-scale increases in access to the lands that make our county special. It commits the Land Trust to support the Coastal Rail Trail, complete construction of the Highway 17 Wildlife Crossing, and build more than forty miles of new trails – while continuing the protection and care of working lands and wildlands that have defined our work for almost four decades.

The Land Trust Board of Trustees has approved more than twenty projects and programs as part of this plan, and recognizes that during the next five years still more opportunities will arise to protect land and provide access. This fall, the Land Trust will launch a major fundraising campaign to begin work on these approved projects, and provide the funds to seize these opportunities. Our success will depend, as it should, on community support for this vision.

Coastal Rail Trail – a transformative road without cars

The Land Trust will take the lead in raising private funds to accelerate the building of the 32-mile Coastal Rail Trail. This trail system will provide an easy and safe way to connect people to 44 schools and 92 parks – and transform the way locals and visitors get around our county. The Land Trust’s support will serve as a catalyst by providing matches for grants, funding design and engineering, or funding specific sections of the trail.

Specific Projects

- ✓ We will provide \$3 million to match \$6 million in grant funds to build five miles of the trail from Wilder Ranch State Park to the south end of Coast Dairies.
- ✓ We will provide \$2.5 million to match up to \$10 million in potential grants to build the trail through Live Oak.

At a glance
2015-2020

20 PROJECTS

Coastal Rail Trail

Highway 17
Wildlife Crossing

San Vicente Bike
and Hike Trails

Watsonville
Slough Trails

Farmland
Protection

Open Space
District

&
MORE

- ✓ We will provide \$335,000 to match \$1.3 million in grants to build the Rail Trail in Watsonville.
- ✓ We will seize other opportunities to build the Rail Trail as they arise and as funding permits.



Wildlife and Wildlands -- connecting wildlife to wildlands

The Land Trust will protect wildlife and wildlands, focusing on key indicator species, such as mountain lions, whose survival signals the broader health of wildlands. By protecting these wildlands the Land Trust also protects water supplies and water quality, increases the ability of wildlife to adapt to climate change, and preserves the rural character of the county as an oasis in the midst of expanding development.

Specific Projects

- ✓ We will acquire an easement on 190-acres west of Highway 17 as part of the Wildlife Corridor protection project.
- ✓ We will raise funds for the construction of a wildlife tunnel under Highway 17.
- ✓ We will acquire an easement on 900 acres in Pajaro Hills, a key region for wildlife connectivity between the Santa Cruz Mountains and the Gabilan Range.
- ✓ We will seize other opportunities to protect wildlife and wildlands as they arise and as funding permits.

Wildland Trails – 40+ miles of new trails

The Land Trust will build trails on its lands, providing access to mountain bikers, hikers, equestrians, dog-walkers, and the handicapped.

Specific Projects

- ✓ We will build and maintain a 5-mile trail system through the 180-acre nonfarm part of our Watsonville Slough Farm.
- ✓ We will build and maintain a 38-mile trail system through the 8,500-acre San Vicente Redwoods, including separate biking and hiking/horseback trails.

- ✓ We will build and maintain trails at the Glenwood Open Space Preserve.
- ✓ We will maintain and improve existing trails on Byrne-Milliron Forest, Antonelli Pond, Star Creek Ranch and at the Davenport Bluffs.
- ✓ We will build and maintain other trails as opportunities arise and as funding permits,

Local Farmland – Sustaining local agriculture

The Land Trust will protect and support the economic viability and long-term sustainability of the farmlands, wetlands and water resources of the Pajaro Valley and the county.

Specific Projects

- ✓ We will acquire easements on three Pajaro Valley farms totaling 210 acres.
- ✓ We will examine the restoration of Watsonville’s College Lake wetlands to provide recharge for the aquifer and freshwater habitat.
- ✓ We will pursue potential easements on other agricultural lands totaling more than 2,000 acres.



Stewardship – Caring for 13,000 acres of land

The Land Trust will provide quality stewardship and monitoring of all lands under its care, implementing best-management practices on each property.

Specific Programs

- ✓ We will implement best-management practices on the 12 properties we own.
- ✓ We will meet Land Trust Alliance standards of easement monitoring on the 28 easements we hold.
- ✓ We will implement the Watsonville Slough Farm Management Plan, which focuses on practices that advance ecological and economic sustainability.

Conservation policy and public funding – the big picture

The Land Trust will advance conservation policy and public funding for conservation.

Specific Programs

- ✓ We will work with a wide variety of partners to establish an Open Space District for Santa Cruz County.
- ✓ We will advocate for working lands as a conservation tool.
- ✓ We will advocate for state and federal funding for conservation that serves our county.
- ✓ We will support local public funding for construction of the Coastal Rail Trail.

Community engagement and private fundraising – Santa Cruz’s local land trust

The Land Trust will engage the community through a wide variety of means and raise the private funds necessary to implement the Strategic Plan.

Specific Programs

- ✓ We will build our visibility as the local land trust through community events, a robust online presence, and press coverage of our work.
- ✓ We will build and maintain strong partnerships with the more than 60 partners identified in the plan.
- ✓ We will annually raise the funds necessary to support the stewardship and operating costs of the Land Trust.
- ✓ We will launch, in the fall of 2015, a major capital campaign to fund the commitments of this plan.

Organizational Capacity – being the best land trust we can be

The Land Trust will develop and maintain the organizational capacity necessary to carry out the work of this plan.

Approved Programs

- ✓ We will build and retain a professional, highly-skilled staff.
- ✓ The Board of Trustees will ensure its capacity to carry out its leadership responsibilities, including setting the strategic direction for the organization, monitoring its financial health, and playing a leadership role in fundraising.
- ✓ We will review progress toward meeting the plan’s goals on a quarterly basis.

www.LandTrustSantaCruz.org

