

A D E C A D E O F
P R E S E R V A T I O N





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A Message

In 1990, through the foresight of community leaders and citizen volunteers, voters approved the creation of the Sonoma County Agricultural Preservation and Open Space District and a funding source for land acquisition. A little over a decade later, the District has established itself as one of the leading farmland and open space preservation programs in the nation. Our mission is diverse and reflects the importance of preserving the best of Sonoma County's unique agricultural and natural resources.

While we are proud of our accomplishments, our most important measures of success are yet to come. As we embark on our second decade of land preservation, we face a future of unprecedented challenges — population growth, escalating land values, and increasing pressure on farmland, open space, and wildlife habitat. We must address the perpetual stewardship of our growing portfolio of protected lands. And we must work creatively with our public agency and nonprofit partners to respond to the public's increasing need for parks, preserves, and trails.

Land conservation touches the lives of all of Sonoma County's citizens. Every acre we preserve is an investment in Sonoma County's future. By preserving land today, we protect the air we breathe, the water we drink, and the food we eat. We protect pristine habitat for our wildlife to thrive, and we preserve places for people to recreate and rejuvenate. With the support of Sonoma County's residents, we are well on our way to fulfilling our mission.

Andrea Mackenzie, General Manager



Mission Statement

The Sonoma County Agricultural Preservation and Open Space District permanently preserves the diverse agricultural, natural resource, and scenic open space lands of Sonoma County for future generations. To this end, the District conserves greenbelts between cities, farmland, biological resources, wildlife habitat, and land for public recreation.

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Conserved Sonoma County Agricultural Preservation and Open Space District land through September 2002



The District

Sonoma County encompasses more than one million acres of land, from the Pacific Ocean to inland valleys and mountain ranges. Since its first project in 1992, the Sonoma County Agricultural Preservation and Open Space District has protected 108 open space properties in Sonoma County, totaling 56,200 acres. These preserved lands — ranging from less than an acre in size to several thousand acres — reflect the diversity of the county’s landscape: agricultural grasslands and working farmlands, scenic and coastal lands, riparian corridors, greenbelts, forests, and parks.

In November 1990, with the passage of Measures A and C, Sonoma County voters created the Sonoma County Agricultural Preservation and Open Space District and authorized a 1/4 percent sales tax over a 20-year period to fund acquisition of agricultural land and open space. The Board of Supervisors, who serve as the District Board of Directors, created the Sonoma County Open Space Authority to levy the sales tax. The tax currently provides approximately \$17 million annually for the District’s land conservation program. A Citizens’ Advisory Committee appointed by the District Board of Directors provides advice on policy matters and makes recommendations on acquisitions.

The District acquires conservation easements through voluntary transactions with landowners. A conservation easement is a legal agreement between the seller and the District that limits land use activities in order to preserve the land and its resources. The easement is granted in perpetuity and future owners are bound to its provisions. The District also purchases land outright from willing sellers, typically for parks, recreation, or other open space purposes.

In July of 2000 the District adopted *Acquisition Plan 2000*. To prepare this plan, the District used a computerized mapping system to set priorities for protecting agricultural, greenbelt, natural resource, and recreational lands. The District allocated a minimum of \$10 million for each acquisition category over a three-year period. Since the plan’s adoption, the District has preserved an additional 29,000 acres of agricultural and open space land.

**Accomplishments
through September 2002**

Open Space Projects Completed:	108
Number of Acres Protected:	56,200
Appraised Value of Land Protected:	\$121 million
Monies Spent on Land Protection:	\$94 million
Total Savings:	\$27 million



Matching Grants

Under its competitive matching grant program, the District provides funding to cities, nonprofits, and other public agencies for open space projects that protect natural resources or agricultural land, restore rivers or streams, or provide recreational opportunities. These urban open space and park projects are high priorities for the local communities.

Small Farms


In 2001 the District initiated the Small Farms Program to support agricultural diversity and small farms. Through this pilot program, the District leases its land in community greenbelts to small-scale farmers at affordable rates. The District works with farmers who use good neighbor practices and are involved with the local community. The program helps educate people about farming, promotes crop diversity, and encourages the cultivation of vegetables near outdoor markets and local grocers.

Stewardship

Through its stewardship program, the District effectively monitors the uses and conditions of its many easement-protected and fee-owned properties. The District regularly visits privately owned easement properties to ensure that the conservation values of the land are maintained, and fee-owned properties are inspected every few weeks for potential safety problems. Volunteer land stewards play a vital role in the District's stewardship program; since 1992 these volunteers have donated hundreds of hours by assisting staff with land management and easement monitoring. A stewardship plan is currently being developed that will guide long-term protection of the District's conserved lands.

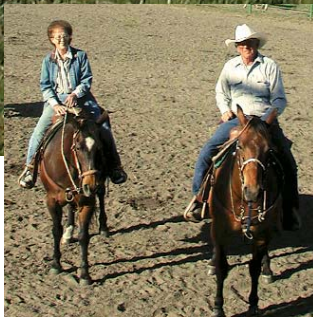
Public Outings and Education

Through LandPaths, the District's local nonprofit conservation partner, public tours and educational opportunities are offered on the District's protected properties. In 1999 LandPaths established its public outings program, as well as its school program called "In Our Own Backyard." Several times a year, over 500 primary and secondary school children from schools throughout the county visit District-protected properties. Each participating school adopts a property within its watershed.



"Through the outings program, the public can explore District-protected properties by foot, bicycle, kayak, wheelchair, or horseback. Outing participants say that standing atop a ridge while hearing about the county's history and today's ranching life gives them a much greater appreciation for Sonoma County's land and people."

— CRAIG ANDERSON
Executive Director, LandPaths



Rose and Leo Ielmorini

“Dairy farms need to be large enough so cows have enough room to graze. By selling a conservation easement to the District, we were able to purchase the neighboring land we had been leasing for decades. Now we own the entire 1,563-acre ranch. Conservation easements not only keep land in agriculture, but they preserve open space, so everybody benefits.”

— LEO IELMORINI, LANDOWNER

Sonoma County's farms, dairies, and ranches are essential not only to a strong and diverse economy, but to a local way of life. The preservation of farm and ranch lands helps maintain the viability of agriculture in Sonoma County and protects the scenic landscape. With a focus on preserving agriculture in coastal areas, greenbelts, and the county's numerous valleys, the District has protected more than 30,000 acres of agricultural land.

In the county's coastal areas, highly productive grasslands and large ranches sustain economically viable agriculture. In southwest Sonoma County more than a dozen dairy and livestock ranches — totaling more than 8,700 acres — have been protected. The Ielmorini Ranch, one of the largest dairies on the North Coast, has open, rolling pastures with expansive views. Over the past 47 years the Ielmorini family has used the ranch for grazing, silage production, and heifer replacement. The sale of a conservation easement allowed the family to purchase a portion of the dairy they had been leasing for decades. Conservation easements on the Mazzetta, Camozzi, and Mickelsen Ranches northwest of Petaluma preserve three contiguous ranches comprising 1,155 acres.

Greenbelt agricultural lands provide separation between and around the county's nine cities. With highly productive soils, the lands are often suitable for small-scale agricultural operations; several of the District's greenbelt properties are leased out to small farmers. Protected greenbelt lands that provide for continued agricultural production include the Morrison Brothers Dairy, Stony Point Ranch, and the Knudtsen and Aggio properties along the Highway 101 corridor, as well as the Silacci Dairy, Cloudy Bend, and Sleepy Hollow properties south of Petaluma.

The District protects land in other important agricultural areas, including the Alexander, Knights, Dry Creek, Sonoma, and Russian River Valleys. One of the District's largest conservation easements protects the 7,877-acre Santa Angelina Ranch in Knights Valley. The property's five perennial creeks feed into Maacama Creek, a key tributary to the Russian River, and provide habitat for Coho salmon and steelhead trout. Cattle graze on the District-protected Hafey property, located along the scenic Highway 128 gateway to Sonoma County. In the Russian River Valley, a District conservation easement protects 36-year-old apple orchards and vineyards on the Dutton Ranch.



Agricultural Project Areas

The District preserves agricultural land in several geographic areas: the coastal areas extending from Bodega Bay to the Marin County line, and east to Highways 116 and 101; the greenbelts adjacent to cities that are in active agriculture, have highly productive soils, or are suitable for community agricultural operations; and the Alexander Valley, Knights Valley, Dry Creek Valley, Sonoma Valley, and Russian River Valley.



Dean Marty and volunteer
Howard Moes

“I was happy to be the first landowner to sell an easement to the District. It’s reassuring that these rolling hills will always be available for grazing and won’t be covered with housing, especially since the land is so visible. I’m glad the public has the opportunity to appreciate the land’s beauty.”

— DEAN MARTY, LANDOWNER

Greenbelts are the open spaces and visual backdrops surrounding the county's urban areas. They include agricultural, scenic, recreational, and natural resource lands. The loss of open space to urban sprawl fueled the creation of the District, so protecting land close to cities is a primary focus. By preserving greenbelts, the District helps maintain separate, identifiable cities and communities. Priority areas for protection are scenic lands surrounding incorporated cities that contribute to the open space character of the region, and scenic corridors along highways that are gateways to the county.

Many of the District's preserved greenbelt lands are along the Highway 101 and 12 corridors. The District's first project was a conservation easement acquisition over the highly visible Marty property, located along Highway 101 between Petaluma and Cotati. A conservation easement on the Yee property near the Sonoma/Marin County gateway preserves its scenic qualities and protects critical habitat in Petaluma Marsh. Other protected lands within the Highway 101 viewshed include the White and Alba Lane properties between Santa Rosa and Windsor, the De Loach property north of Windsor, and the Cotati Highlands property near Cotati. Conservation easements over the Laguna de Santa Rosa Farms and Carinalli properties maintain the scenic greenbelt along Highway 12 between Sebastopol and Santa Rosa.

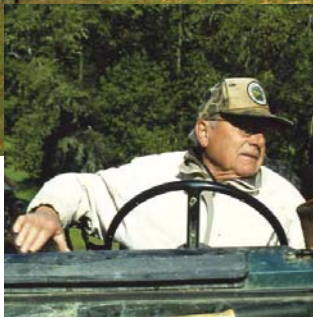
The District has protected many properties on Sonoma Mountain and in the scenic Sonoma Valley. A conservation easement over the Cook property on Sonoma Mountain preserves its rolling hills, oak woodland, creek corridors, and scenic ridges. Oak woodland, mixed evergreen forest, and the prominent slopes of Bennett Peak are preserved on the Geary property, adjacent to Annadel State Park. At the historic Glen Oaks Ranch, an easement protects the scenic views along Highway 12 near Glen Ellen and adds to conserved lands in the vicinity of Sonoma Valley Regional Park, Bouverie Audubon Wildflower Preserve, and Oak Hill Farms. The Nicholas property easement helps preserve the views along Napa Road, a gateway to Sonoma County.

Open grassland and oak-studded woodland characterize Taylor Mountain, one of the most dominant landscapes in the county. Protected lands in this viewshed include the Bath/Watt and Nunes properties on the northern slopes and the Dashiell and Matteri lands along Petaluma Hill Road.



Greenbelt Project Areas

The District has focused its preservation efforts on several greenbelt corridors and completed almost 30 projects in these areas: along the Highway 101 corridor — the Sonoma/Marin gateway, and lands between the communities of Rohnert Park, Santa Rosa, Windsor, and Healdsburg — Sonoma Valley, Sonoma Mountain, Highway 12 between Sebastopol and Santa Rosa, and Taylor Mountain.



Crawford Cooley

“Since 1910, four generations of the Cooley family have been associated with this ranch. Unlike most land in the county, the ranch has places that have not been altered since the settlers arrived. It is very important to my family to keep the ranch intact.”

— CRAWFORD COOLEY, LANDOWNER

Sonoma County has rich biological resources, from the coastal redwoods in the north, to the Mayacamas Range along the eastern boundary, to the Laguna de Santa Rosa and baylands in the south. These unique resources — oak woodlands, coast range forests, riparian and upland areas, wetlands, and critical habitat — are increasingly threatened by the impacts of land conversion. The District focuses on protecting large blocks of land with critical habitat, and areas that provide habitat linkages.

The vast 19,064-acre Cooley Ranch, one of the county's largest privately owned properties, spans the Sonoma/Mendocino County border. Its diverse plant and animal habitats — ranging from old-growth redwoods to miles of riparian corridors — and historical agricultural areas are preserved by a District easement. Five tributaries flow through the land and drain into Lake Sonoma, a drinking water reservoir for the county. The ranch and adjacent publicly owned Lake Sonoma comprise over 36,000 acres of protected open space that serve as refuge for wildlife.

The Mayacamas Mountains contain some of the finest examples of oak-savannah grassland and low-altitude conifer forest in the Northern California Coast Range. The District has preserved more than 12,600 acres of contiguous land in these mountains, including the 1,725-acre Modini Ranch, the Audubon Sanctuary, and the McCord properties.

On Sonoma Mountain, District easements on the Sonoma Developmental Center, Freiberg, McCrea, and Skiles properties protect mixed oak, bay and madrone forest. Conservation of these lands also provides habitat linkages with Jack London State Historic Park and Sonoma Valley Regional Park.

Inland from the Sonoma Coast, southwest of Bodega Bay, the District preserved the Dewar and Hepper properties in partnership with the Sonoma Land Trust and the Coastal Conservancy. Conservation easements over these lands, which comprise the Estero Americano Preserve, protect the scenic watershed and its sensitive wildlife habitat, while providing public access opportunities.

Situated in the broad, fertile Santa Rosa plain, the Laguna de Santa Rosa supports unique vernal pool habitat, valley oak savanna, and riparian forest on the channel. Preserved resource lands include the four Laguna de Santa Rosa Farms, totaling 1,440 acres, and the 173-acre Wright Preservation Bank.



Natural Resource Project Areas

The District seeks to protect natural resource properties that have significant ecological or watershed values, critical habitat, or rare natural communities or species. It has focused on preserving land in the following areas: North County, Mayacamas Mountains, Sonoma Coast, Sonoma Mountain, Laguna de Santa Rosa, and Mark West Creek.



Dave Nelson

“Not only has the District helped State Parks acquire exceptional parks such as the McCormick Ranch and the Sequeira property on Red Hill, but its conservation and trail easements on other properties link our state parks together.”

— DAVE NELSON, SUPERINTENDENT OF THE
CALIFORNIA STATE PARKS SILVERADO DISTRICT

The District acquires land for recreational purposes and works with local, regional, and state park agencies to develop and maintain these lands. It collaborates with agencies to set acquisition priorities, which are usually identified in adopted city, county, and state recreation plans. The District has conserved 28 properties for regional or state parks, open space preserves, urban parks, or community recreation areas.

The 110-mile-long Russian River meanders through Sonoma County to the Pacific Ocean, and offers exceptional recreational opportunities. Over the years the District helped expand the Cloverdale River Park by more than 40 acres to enhance access and recreation uses. The park is managed by the Sonoma County Regional Parks Department as a river access park, with planned amenities to include picnic areas, multi-use trails, boat launch facilities, and fishing access. In 1999 the District purchased the Mom's Beach property on the river and transferred it to the County Regional Parks Department for public recreation and river access. Together with California State Parks and Save-the-Redwoods League, the District helped preserve 92 acres of the Gray Creek watershed as an addition to Austin Creek State Recreation Area.

In 1996 the District acquired a greenbelt property between Santa Rosa and Larkfield and has since conveyed it to the County Regional Parks Department for active recreation. The county is developing a recreational facility — Tom Schopflin Fields — that features baseball and soccer fields. In addition, native vegetation will be planted throughout the site and wetlands will be restored.

The District acquired an easement on the 1,364-acre McCormick Ranch and purchased nearly 1,200 acres of the ranch as an addition to Sugarloaf Ridge State Park. Located in the Sonoma Valley, the land had been in the McCormick family for more than 150 years. This key property connects Sugarloaf Ridge State Park and Hood Mountain Regional Park, linking over 5,500 acres of open space. In 2000 the McCormick Sanctuary's multi-use trails opened to the public. LandPaths conducts guided tours and school programs on the property.



Recreation Projects

The District acquires land for recreational projects and partners with local, regional, and state park agencies to develop, operate, and manage park and recreation areas.



Matching Grant Program

Through its Matching Grant Program, the District provides funds to local agencies and organizations for recreation, public access, restoration, and other open space projects. Grants made under the program include:

- ❖ City of Petaluma, to protect and restore the 27-acre Alman Marsh and 10 acres of the McNear Peninsula, both on the Petaluma River. The properties provide opportunities for public access and habitat enhancement.
- ❖ City of Santa Rosa, for the Prince Memorial Greenway along Santa Rosa Creek. The District, the City, and the Sonoma County Water Agency created a partnership to restore and enhance the natural creek channel, create habitat improvements, and provide bicycle and pedestrian paths.
- ❖ City of Sebastopol, to preserve the 8-acre Sebastopol Forest property near the Laguna de Santa Rosa and along a multi-use trail.
- ❖ City of Sonoma, to assist in the acquisition of a property along Nathanson Creek. The creek preserve is owned and managed by the City of Sonoma for native plant enhancement and a bicycle/pedestrian path connection.
- ❖ Town of Windsor, for the acquisition of 3.3 acres of the town green in the historic downtown. The town restored and enhanced the site's native oaks, and created a unique space for a farmer's market, concerts, a play area, and an orchard.

Partnerships

Over the past decade, the District has forged numerous partnerships with state and local agencies, as well as private conservation organizations. These alliances have resulted in the protection of exceptional open space, primarily for recreational use and habitat preservation. Through partnerships, the District is able to preserve more land and leverage its funding.

Coastal Conservancy, California State Parks, Sonoma Land Trust

The spectacular 911-acre Red Hill property is adjacent to Highway 1, south of Jenner. The scenic property offers recreational opportunities and outstanding views of the dramatic coastline and mouth of the Russian River. The District purchased a conservation easement on the land and the Coastal Conservancy provided a grant to the Sonoma Land Trust for its acquisition. The property soon will be transferred to California State Parks, and will link state parklands along the Sonoma Coast.

Coastal Conservancy, Save-the Redwoods League, LandPaths

In 2001 the District acquired a forever wild easement over a 28-acre ridgetop property of magnificent 500-year-old redwoods. Near Occidental, the Grove of the Old Trees is now owned and managed by LandPaths for resource education and public access. The Coastal Conservancy and Save-the-Redwoods League also provided funding for the acquisition. The grove provides excellent habitat for bats, salamander, and owls, and the University of California at Berkeley uses the site to study the dynamics of small, intact redwood groves.

Wildlife Conservation Board, California Department of Fish and Game, LandPaths

The 173-acre Wright Preservation Bank, west of Santa Rosa, is one of the largest and least disturbed vernal pool habitats in the Santa Rosa Plain. The expanse of oaks and vernal pools supports several species of federal and state endangered species — Sebastopol meadowfoam, Burke's goldfield, and California tiger salamander. Acquired in 1998 in partnership with the state Wildlife Conservation Board, the land is managed by the California Department of Fish and Game as a mitigation bank for off-site wetlands loss. Sonoma State University students participate in restoration activities, and LandPaths leads public and school tours on the land.



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Douglas Hanford

Project Partners

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California State Coastal Conservancy
California State Parks
California State Parks Foundation
Laguna de Santa Rosa Foundation
LandPaths
Madrone Audubon Society
The Nature Conservancy
Save-the-Redwoods League
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Sonoma County Water Agency
Sonoma Ecology Center
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The Trust for Public Land
Wildlife Conservation Board

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In Memoriam

Joan Cochran, *Landowner*
Warren Dutton, *Landowner*
Chick Hafey, *Landowner*
Patricia Hilligoss, *Advisory Committee*
Pete Reclite, *Volunteer*
Tom Schopflin, *County Administrator*
Jim Teague, *Advisory Committee*

Photos

Craig Anderson—pages 1, 4 (bottom), 8 (inset); Dino Bonos—page 12; Elizabeth Byers—page 12 (inset); Steve Fiala—page 4 (upper left); Kathleen Brennan Hunter—page 4 (upper right); Stephen Joseph—cover, inside covers, page 10, first timeline & insert image; Stuart Martin—pages 2, 14; Marta Puente—pages 6, 8; District staff—timeline & insert except as noted





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