



INTRODUCTION TO CONSERVATION HORIZONS

Address by Darla Guenzler

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By now, most of you have heard something about CCLT's **Conservation Horizons** project and are probably wondering what the heck we are up to now. Time for a little reveal.

Believe it or not, the genesis of **Conservation Horizons** is all of you. For some years, I have found myself in numerous conversations with land trust folks voicing an increasing level of concern and anxiety about the future. Not so much in the formal discussions at board meetings or at regional conferences or at other events. But instead, in the less guarded, one-on-one conversations we have had, before and after those formal events. In leaning my ear, it has been clear that most of you have begun to individually recognize the changing times within which we find ourselves, and the general impacts those changes may have on our work. And pretty universally, you have identified the same set of concerns that keep you up at night: organizational sustainability, leadership transitions, board recruitment and engagement, stewardship challenges, funding constraints, age and diversity of supporters, climate change impacts, to name a few. And pretty universally, you see few answers.

Most of you know me pretty well by now, so you know there is no way that I can just listen to these same conversations repeat and frustrations expressed without trying to do something to address the concerns you raise. And that's how we got to the design and launch of the **Conservation Horizons** project and its committee.

Now, what is the Horizons Committee? Put simply, the Horizons Committee is a diverse group of land trust leaders, conservation funders, and other partners who have come together to figure out the best way to frame a discussion about our future – the next age of land conservation – between now and 2050. Unlike many other industries, ours is one of the grassroots, with so many entities, small and large, serving so many communities. This makes



the discussion that much more challenging as the goal of the Committee is to anticipate the trends we're sure to face and then devise strategies for addressing them proactively and not reactively, so we can ensure the continued vitality of our land trusts and partner institutions, our coalitions of supporters, our funding sources, and most importantly, our conservation work.

The Committee began meeting in the summer. Our first task was to pour through tons of data, select those facts and trends key for our future through 2050, and bring it here today to launch a statewide conversation. We have organized the facts and trends into five topic areas: population, culture and attitude, land and resources, funding and land trusts. We want your ideas and active discussion in the coming months, and I will be knocking on your doors to get it. We will feed your thoughts and ideas back to the committee.

So, let's get to the facts and trends. If you have any doubt about the need for this project, these facts should dispel them. You have the infographics in front of you but I am going to touch on a few key takeaways ones in each category. Then I will offer a few directional observations for your consideration.

Population

This month, Latinos will surpass whites to be the largest majority of the population in California with 39% of the population. The demographics continue to change with Latinos and Asians growing by double digits and African Americans and white populations remaining nearly static. Today, more than half of our children are Latino and 43% of all residents over six years of age speak a language other than English at home.

California will add another metropolitan LA, mostly concentrated in twelve southern and southern Central Valley counties. Already, 95% of us live in urban areas and urban clusters.

In addition, nearly a quarter of us will be over 65 years old, and nearly half of us will be obese. The strong income disparity is expected to continue with a quarter of us – or more – living in poverty.

Culture and Attitudes

We need to recognize that people use and interact with outdoor areas differently. When we look at parks, generally speaking, white prefer passive uses like hiking, Latinos use parks for multi-generational social gatherings, blacks for active recreation while Asians have low levels of use. Access to parks varies dramatically. Poorer areas have far fewer parks and

outdoor areas – and residents have less mobility and disposable income to reach those few that exist.

The Millennials will figure prominently in our future. These are the folks currently ages 14-35. They have larger numbers than baby boomers, they have a greater spending power than any previous generation, and they will decide the next six presidential elections. They are optimistic, technologically savvy, less religious, racially diverse and color-blind. In 2050, they will be 50-70 years old, so they are going to be very dominant as parents, voters and leaders for the next 36 years. Every industry is currently chasing their attention.

We can't leave this subject without touching on the topic of kids' attitudes toward the out-of-doors. For a variety of reasons, children are not spending time outside. Most troubling is that large numbers of kids 6-17 years cite "lack of interest" as the top reason.

Land and Resource Trends

This is the topic area you know most about. The elephant in the room is climate change, of course. I think of climate impacts as basically falling into the category of "bigger and worse". Fires will be more frequent and severe, like last year's Rim Fire. Water quality will worsen in the aftermath of fires. Coastal and inland storms will increase in frequency and severity causing erosion and flooding. Our water supply will swing wildly due to changes in precipitation and snow pack.

Sadly, of course, habitat losses will continue. Farm and grazing lands losses will continue to increase.

Funding

The \$15 billion voters have approved since 2000 has fueled a growth of land trusts and public agencies. The 1.5 million acres conserved with this money has created further stewardship challenges. We must now secure new sources of funding to align with our future conservation needs.

Younger generations have different concerns and priorities which are revealed in their choice of activities, at the voting booth and in their charitable giving. This has implications for support of land conservation.

Land Trusts

Land trusts hold more than 1.7 million acres in both fee and easement, and have contributed further acres to the public land base. Acquisition by land trusts has been an important change in the last generation.

As you look at the data, a relatively small of land trusts hold the large majority of fee and easements held by land trusts. Specifically, thirteen land trusts hold 88% of the fee lands and ten land trusts hold 77% of the easements.

A few words about our internal demographics. Our board of directors are 62% male, 84% are over 50, and 95% Caucasian. While more evenly distributed among age and gender, our staff are 87% Caucasian.

DIRECTIONAL OBSERVATIONS

What do these facts and trends tell us? We are clearly at a reflection point that compels us to answer the following questions.

1. What additional lands do we need to acquire?
2. How do we take care of our protected lands?
3. What will we do on our protected lands?
4. How will our institutions deliver the necessary solutions?

This is what we want your engagement and help in tackling. These are the questions we want you to consider. You see the big charts on the wall. They are ready for your ideas and comments and we have put big post-it note pads on your tables for just this purpose. At the back of your packet, is a response form and there are stacks on your table as well. Please share your thoughts and drop the form off at the registration desks. I will be traveling around the state throughout the spring to talk with you and your boards about this information and to solicit your guidance.

To “prime this conversational pump”, we offer a few directional observations you might take from the facts and trends. Some of these apply to the individual organizational level, others are directed at the California industry level, and some have implications for both.

1. Millenials have great buying and political power. They are going to shape California in the next 40 years in huge ways. Only 4% rank environment as a cause they care about. This is a demographic to whose lives we must find ways to make conservation relevant.

2. Latinos are increasingly in leadership positions to drive policy outcomes in California. Parks and open space have enjoyed strong support from Latinos in past bond measures -- although, in the end, fairly small amounts of money went to the areas Latinos live or to support the kinds of projects they want. Amigos de Los Rios, Big Sur Land Trust, LandPaths, Los Angeles Neighborhood Land Trust, and Trust for Public Land have all directly engaged the Latino community and developed great projects serving Latino communities. But we have a long way to go to directly involve Latinos and support their conservation leadership.
3. Our work is not connecting with many Californians, especially in urban and underserved communities. What types of projects are we doing? Who does our choice of projects serve? How do we make conservation relevant to the underserved, the unrecognized, whether they live in Shasta, Plumas, Napa or Los Angeles counties?
4. We can all see the pressing public problems being created due to climate change. How will protecting additional acreage compete against problems like massive droughts, fires, large-scale flooding, infrastructure collapse or skyrocketing public health problems due to extreme heat and terrible air quality? Land conservation has a substantive contribution to make to these problems but we must be prepared to prove up and relate our work to broader priorities.
5. We must begin to find better ways to measure our impacts and communicate our results to broader audiences. Our long-term reliance on “bucks and acres” may be meaningful to us, but it does not adequately or systematically convey the value of our work to others.
6. The facts and trends raise serious questions for organizational make-up. Our future effectiveness may require us to have boards and staffs that better reflect the gender, age and ethnicities of the communities we serve.
7. What is the conservation job ahead of us? In our first age, the defining characteristic of land trusts has been to acquire land and to hold or flip it. Is the job bigger than that? What skills, capacities, partnerships do we need to add to our organizations? How do we build the industry needed for sustaining protected lands and broader community support in the future?
8. We have talked about it for years, but just how are we going to finally crack the stewardship nut? What is a business plan that will fund meaningful stewardship, not just keeping fences up? Added to stewardship is public use of the lands. Are we going to think about the



California's entire conservation portfolio – all our protected lands – regardless whether they are owned by a public agency or land trust? We have \$1.2 billion in deferred maintenance on state park lands and decades of dangerously overgrown federal forest lands before we even draw even.

I look forward to hearing your thoughts and ideas in the coming months.

In conclusion....

This point of reflection is an opportunity, a call to action.

How do we keep our conservation lands and land trusts vital?

How do we make conservation broadly relevant to Californians' lives?

How do we help solve our beloved California's pressing problems?

These trends compel consideration of new ideas, new partnerships, new directions.

The conversation gets real, sustained, today, here, in this room.

Look what we have done in the last forty years... what we have done since 2000.

Land trusts' great strength has always been that we are dynamic, creative.

We are pro-active.

We get ahead of curves.

Change is coming to our community.

And because California is leads the nation in so many dynamics, we will serve as a model for the nation.

Conservation Horizons is our opportunity to grasp the future and lead ourselves forward.

Thank you.

I would like to turn now to our panel who will explore some of these ideas in more detail.

- **Paul Hardy** is executive director of the Feather River Land Trust and **Alina Bokde** is Executive Director of the Los Angeles Neighborhood Land Trust. They will both share their work to make conservation relevant to the needs of their very different communities and solve pressing problems.



- **Jose Gonzalez** is the founding director of Latino Outdoors. He is going to talk with us about the importance of community engagement and cultivating ethnically-diverse leadership. He also did the fabulous artwork for *Conservation Horizons*.
- **John McCaull** is the Acquisitions Project manager of the Sonoma Land Trust. He will share with us a highly strategic wildlife project with diverse partners.
- **Matt Kagan**, Principle of Behr Communications, will talk about the role of communications as we look forward, including giving a peek at what he is learning working with us.