



**CONSERVATION HORIZONS**  
KEEPING CONSERVATION AND  
LAND TRUSTS VITAL FOR THE NEXT AGE

*A California Council of Land Trusts' Initiative*



*Conservation Horizons* is an initiative of the California Council of Land Trusts.

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# A Letter from the Conservation Horizons Committee

## TO CALIFORNIA LAND TRUSTS, AGENCIES, AND PARTNERS:

We came together as the *Conservation Horizons* Committee because we care about conservation, and we are concerned about the future for our land trusts that have so effectively worked to protect California's important natural systems.

Our work over the past 18 months made vivid the changing faces and needs of California. While none of what we discovered was singularly surprising, the sum total of our findings was imminently compelling. In fact, it is almost impossible to find a business, agency, or organization in California today, including land trusts, that is not talking about how these changes impact them and how they need to adapt in order to deliver new and relevant goods and services, grow market share, retain public support, or simply stay in business. Those that do not change with California run the risk of demise, while those that do will thrive.

Our recommendations seek to set forth practical first steps for recalibrating our priorities, methods, structures, systems, funding, programs, and projects so land trusts will continue to thrive. We urge all of us to tackle these challenges together by taking these essential first steps to ensure our conserved lands stay protected and our conservation work connects with the lives of all Californians.

With all best wishes for conservation's continuing success,

**Alina Bokde**, *Los Angeles Neighborhood Land Trust*

**Ron Brown**, *Save Mount Diablo*

**Michele Clark**, *Yolo Land Trust*

**Gail Egenes**, *Riverside Land Conservancy*

**Dave Holland**, *San Mateo County (retired)*

**Hop Hopkins**, *Panther Ridge Farm and Outdoor School*

**Gary Knoblock**, *S.D. Bechtel, Jr. Foundation*

**Bill Leahy**, *Bill Leahy Consulting Group*

**Sam Livermore**, *Yosemite Conservancy and Save the Redwoods League*

**Walter Moore**, *Peninsula Open Space Trust*

**Curt Riffle**, *The David and Lucile Packard Foundation*

**Charles Thomas**, *National Park Service*

**Julie Turrini**, *Resources Legacy Fund*

**Nita Vail**, *California Rangeland Trust*



Courtesy of San Joaquin River Parkway and Conservation Trust, photo by Sharon Weaver; Opposite page: Courtesy of Feather River Land Trust, photo by Michael Hofmayer



# Executive Summary

**DURING THE PAST THIRTY YEARS,** California land trusts have worked with public agencies, supporters, and funders to conserve the state’s most important natural systems. We marshalled financial and public support to preserve over two million acres of remote wildlands, regional open space, working lands, and parks. We proved ourselves effective, versatile, and creative, growing our organizations and building our expertise. We contributed significantly to building the state’s world-class system of protected lands that provide a multitude of benefits to our people, communities, and state. Our success far exceeds what anyone might have first imagined.

Our work has always been about addressing threats and facing challenges. It has been about making sure that together we are part of larger statewide discussions and solutions on how to protect our natural systems, while working individually in our communities to deliver on-the-ground conservation wins. Today is no different. In fact, this is what brought the California Council of Land Trusts (CCLT) to launch *Conservation Horizons*, which seeks to ensure conservation’s future is as successful as its past.

*The Conservation Horizons* Committee, comprised of land trust leaders, conservation funders, and community supporters, spent the last 18 months tackling the future. We took a comprehensive look at accomplishments to date, as well as the breadth and depth of the challenges and opportunities ahead. This scan led to an organizing framework to guide our future work together with a practical plan for how to embark on that work immediately. The over-arching goal of the Committee’s work was to ensure land trusts remain an integral part in protecting the state’s important natural systems and connecting all Californians and their communities to them. This is the imperative for keeping land trusts vital and sustainable.

Today’s California is increasingly urban and ethnically diverse. For example, today, 95 percent of Californians live in urban areas or urban clusters. Latinos are the largest ethnic group in California today, and by 2050, two-thirds of the residents in four of California’s six regions are projected to be non-Caucasian. “Millennials” (generally recognized as the generation born between 1980 and 2000) will be the dominant decision-makers for the next 35 years. People are losing connection with the outdoors, while the threats of climate change and development pressure continue to challenge protection of our natural systems. As land trusts, we do not reflect the demographic make-up of California. Our protected lands are not readily accessible to most Californians, nor do they provide the range of outdoor experiences many Californians seek. These are just a few of the many facts and trends summarized in our report that provide the frame for our recommendations forward, challenging us to refocus our efforts



toward protecting our conservation lands and connecting them to all Californians. We hope you review this carefully as we found the future needs and challenges sobering, but the wins to be had encouraging and inspiring.

As in the past, our work should continue to focus on land, communities, people, and partners. Regardless of where and how we work individually, or what our individual mission and goals are, these principles should continue to guide our conservation work ahead, but in ways that reflect current realities and future needs. We must:

**LAND – Preserve, protect, and restore our most important natural resources, working lands, and recreational spaces.**

Our broader collective conservation vision is of an integrated system of expertly-managed, protected lands across the state – from neighborhood parks to working lands to remote wilderness areas – for people to use and enjoy and for

important natural systems to thrive. This will require an equitable focus and investment on conserving high priority conservation and working lands outside metropolitan areas and in creating and improving parks and open space that serve our urban and other underserved communities.

**COMMUNITIES – Connect all Californians with our protected lands in ways meaningful to them.**

Each land trust must more actively engage and connect its protected lands and conservation efforts with people in its community. Also, we must find ways as an industry to equitably connect our conservation work with all California communities, particularly residents in park-poor and income-poor communities that have been traditionally underserved by conservation.

**PEOPLE – Reflect the ethnic and socio-economic diversity of the public we serve in our land trust leaders, staff, and programs.** Land trusts must reflect the diversity of California by hiring diverse staff and leaders; investing in training and mentoring to retain diverse staff and leaders; recruiting more diverse board members; and engaging diverse members of communities in planning and implementing projects and programs.

**PARTNERSHIPS – Build collaborative cross-sector partnerships.** Building relationships with new nonprofit organizations, public agencies, companies, and funders will make possible a whole new generation of conservation projects that will broaden our reach into communities and our conservation impact.

Effecting change is never easy, and for our community, it will not happen overnight. Our plan identifies practical first steps that each land trust can take immediately to move in new directions that still honor its core mission and values, as well as additional steps for CCLT and its industry partners to take to grow resources and support for these new directions. The goal is to build momentum through multiple hubs



of new energy and innovative projects, sharing experiences, strategies, and developing new sets of tools and best practices. This is how we were successful in the past and how we will continue our success into the future.

**RECOMMENDATIONS FOR LAND TRUSTS** – Each land trust can immediately take action to:

- 1. Deepen – Don’t Change – Your Mission.** Land trusts should continue their work to protect high priority natural and working lands and waterways, as well as parks and open space that directly serve urban and traditionally underserved communities. In addition, we need to sharpen our focus on more effectively and efficiently managing our protected lands through coordinated regional stewardship arrangements with land trusts, public agencies, and community-based groups.
- 2. Know Your Community.** Land trusts need to develop a more comprehensive understanding of the human side of their communities in order to connect more broadly. This means taking a deep look at who lives and works in the region you serve and figuring out how land conservation can engage and enrich the totality of your community.
- 3. Advance One New Direction.** Each land trust can start by advancing one new direction that broadens the connection with people in its community in ways both meaningful to them and consistent with the land trust’s mission. The effort may consist of undertaking a new project or program, working with a new partner, engaging on new community policy issues, using a new conservation tool, or seeking a non-traditional funding source.
- 4. Diversify Your Board and Staff.** By diversifying boards and staff in age, ethnicity, and background, land trusts will broaden their capacity and credibility to authentically engage with local communities, connect with new partners, and grow broader constituencies. It will require land trusts to make an intentional commitment to inclusivity and diversity, to listen to new voices and act on new ideas, and to support the development and retention of diverse staff and leaders within organizations.

**ACTIONS FOR THE CALIFORNIA LAND TRUST SECTOR** – CCLT will work with conservation partners to deliver new strategies, tools, and resources to assist land trusts moving in new directions:

- 1. Develop Tools for Advancing Conservation Practice.** CCLT will work to identify, create, and deliver new tools to broaden land trusts’ conservation reach and effectiveness in the areas of policy and funding; metrics, evaluation and reporting; land trust operations; more effective and inclusive communications; and tools and data to understand our communities.
- 2. Provide Education, Training, and Mentoring.** Drawing upon the tools described above, CCLT will equip land trusts with the skills and expertise to meet our present and future challenges. In addition, CCLT will provide certain transition models and assistance to inactive land trusts, as well as facilitating conversations about right-sizing leadership, structure, function, resources, and efforts to advance these future conservation directions.



Photo courtesy of Palos Verdes Peninsula Land Conservancy

*“Urban river parkways can significantly advance public health and wellness by providing attractive places for residents to recreate and embrace more active lifestyles... river parkways counter sedentary behaviors and factors linked to obesity, diabetes, loss of muscle mass, and other life threatening chronic diseases” — from **Urban River Parkway: An Essential Tool for Public Health** by Richard J. Jackson et al.*



Photo courtesy of Sierra Foothill Conservancy

- 3. Catalyze New Partnerships and Pilot Projects.** CCLT will build relationships and engage with new sectors and partners, and catalyze pilot projects that increase and support greater connection between land and people. This will also allow us to experiment with new tools, develop best practices, and accumulate lessons learned.
- 4. Increase Visibility and Confidence in the Benefits of Conservation.** CCLT will assist land trusts to use accurate, inclusive language and communicate effectively with new and broader audiences about how conservation solves problems, enriches lives, and provides vital community assets. Increased visibility brings greater scrutiny as well. If the California land trust community is to succeed in an increasingly competitive environment with changing public attitudes and priorities, we need to better demonstrate our results, efficiency, transparency, accountability, and success.

No one dreamed that California land trusts would accomplish what we have today. Yet, we face significant challenges to meet the changes well underway in California and keep conservation and land trusts vital. The changes already occurring and those on the horizon call on all of us to align our resources, tools, capacity, and organizational structures to face them head on. Considerable work is before us to ensure land trusts will continue to play an important role in protecting our state’s critical natural systems in ways that connect with all Californians. *Conservation Horizons* offers land trusts a framework and practical steps to guide us into the future.



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