

SPRING 2004

NORTHCOAST REGIONAL LAND TRUST



Springtime, North Bank Road

acrylic on paper by Eric Fidjeland

NRLT Co-sponsors North Coast Conservation Planning Effort

by **Shayne Green**

Recognizing the important link between ecological processes, socio-economic values and the North Coast's unique quality of life, the Northcoast Regional Land Trust (NRLT), The Nature Conservancy (TNC) and Save-the-Redwoods League (SRL) are partnering to develop an integrated, region-wide conservation plan for Humboldt and Del Norte counties. This planning partnership prioritizes the protection of conservation targets ranging from native oak woodlands to ranchlands, freshwater wetlands to dairies, and production forests to old-growth conifer stands. The overarching goal of the conservation plan is to identify conservation alternatives and foster strategic actions that balance local economic interests and natural resource conservation.

The Nature Conservancy's Efroymson Fellowship Program is providing both the funding and the planning framework for this

effort. The Efroymson program's rapid planning approach has been used in 190 landscapes around the globe and 49 states within the U.S. The Efroymson Fellowship Program includes the following important elements: (1) determine conservation targets and assess their viability; (2) determine the most critical threats to conservation targets; (3) develop effective, high-impact strategies to abate critical threats and enhance the health of the conservation targets; (4) develop a baseline set of conservation measures of success; and (5) assess the key capacity factors for achieving lasting conservation results.

The planning process is including input from individuals representing conservation organizations and public agencies, agricultural landowners, resource management professionals, and local scientists. The expected release of TNC's draft conservation plan is in early 2005.

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Letter from the Executive Director



What does supporting the local economy have to do with operating a land trust? In my mind, everything. NRLT was developed to preserve the North Coast quality of life by protecting natural lands and our resource base. Our fertile lands and mild climate have sustained North Coast inhabitants for thousands of years and can continue to do so.

Recently, Ben Morehead, NRLT Projects Manager and HSU graduate student, completed a survey of Humboldt County agriculture. He found that more than 90% of agricultural producers and general public survey respondents agree that private agricultural lands provide both public and wildlife benefits, such as scenic open space and diverse habitats. These lands also support our community with timber, dairy, beef, fruits, vegetables, and flower production. We live in a rare place where we have the resources to feed and house our own population.

In a recent interview for the Eureka Times-Standard, I stressed the importance of supporting local businesses. My interviewer, playing the devil's advocate said, "that's easy for some people, but what about those people who can only afford to shop at big box stores where the prices are often much lower than at locally owned stores." Yes, it's true that you might save \$10.00 on a bag of groceries or lumber from a nationally or internationally owned "big box" business, but the benefits are short term. Tens of

thousands of local businesses in rural areas and small towns have closed due to a handful of big box retailers over the last decade. America has lost the majority of its apparel manufacturing sector to overseas suppliers. And, the introduction of new big box stores often has a net decrease in economic growth because they simply displace economic activity from our towns and create an increased tax burden on rural towns. Throughout the United States, we now have a "doughnut effect" of empty retail stores within our urban centers surrounded by a glut of shopping centers that have converted nearby open space and agricultural lands.

When we buy local, we're using our dollar as our vote for long term economic health, living wages, and the rural

When we buy local, we're using our dollar as our vote for long term economic health...

community-oriented feeling we treasure here on the North Coast. We're also protecting our invaluable open spaces and unique community centers from sprawling supercenters that pave over and replace our productive and scenic landscape with massive parking lots. Although it might seem like we're paying a little more for some products at the market, our purchases help ensure the viability of the scenic open spaces and forestlands that surround our communities and create the North Coast quality of life that resonates so strongly within us.

If you would like to learn more about supporting local economies and opposing big box retail, visit the following websites: newrules.org; smartgrowthamerica.com; sprawl-busters.com; smartgrowth.org

Spring 2004 Newsletter

The Northcoast Regional Land Trust newsletter is published bi-annually. P.O. Box 398, Bayside, CA, 95524 • (707) 822-2242 • info@nrlt.org. **Cover Art:** Eric Fidjeland grew up on a Humboldt County potato farm and has been painting professionally for ten years. His work is currently on exhibit at the Piante Gallery in Eureka during the month of May. eric@ericfidjeland.com

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NRLT Board of Directors - Top row, left to right: Jack Limmer, Laura Mayo, Wes Anderson, Blake Alexandre, David McMurray, John LaBoyteaux. Bottom row: Ruth Blyther, Melissa Bukosky, Annette Holland, Shayne Green (staff), Ben Morehead. Not pictured: Kim Browning and Michael Smith. Photo: Diana Pachmayer.

How to Contact Your Local Land Trusts

The Buckeye Conservancy
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www.buckeyeconservancy.org

Friends of the Dunes Land Trust
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Lisa Hoover, Land Trust Chair
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www.friendsofthedunes.org

Humboldt Northcoast Land Trust
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McKinleyville Land Trust
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Letter from the President



The Northcoast Regional Land Trust is now in its fourth year and we are projecting that we will complete our first easements this year. The national average is seven years from beginning to end for a new land trust to complete its first easement, so we feel pretty good about our progress.

One of the more challenging areas for us is to figure out how we can be of most help and support to other land and open space protection groups around us. It's clear, after the short time we've been together, that the stronger the local land groups in Humboldt, Del Norte and Trinity Counties are, the more success we will all have. We've decided that one of

the best ways we can help is to find a unique relationship with each of these groups through joint projects, communication, trainings, and development of a regional voice in the state-wide land trust movement.

On May 11, NRLT sponsored an important meeting at the Humboldt Area Foundation Community Facility on the new state wide Land Trust Council, which addressed several important issues such as legal resources for land trusts. We hope to keep you informed on upcoming meetings and other information on state-wide issues. If you'd like more information, please contact the NRLT at (707) 822-2242.

David R. McMurray

Sustainable Economies & E

by Tempra Board

For the past several months the Northcoast Regional Land Trust (NRLT) has been collaborating on a project that addresses the threat of development and subdivision here on the North Coast. Six Rivers to the Sea is a landscape-scale conservation project that seeks to balance environmental stewardship with economic sustainability. The project will have enormous lasting benefits for North Coast wildlife habitat, water quality and sustainable ranching.

Totaling more than 17,000 acres, Six Rivers to the Sea consists of six tracts of ranchland all within Humboldt County. The landowners have voluntarily agreed to place conservation easements on their lands that will keep them in productivity and free from encroaching development (there are existing subdivisions within two miles of each tract), while maintaining wildlife and other conservation values. Subdivision would not only take the lands out of production, but would result in road and home construction, and water and other resource use, degrading the existing wildlife habitat and reducing the grazing and timber lands' capacity.

These lands include excellent examples of North Coast wildlife and scenic habitat, including 20.5 miles of productive salmonid spawning streams (including Yager Creek, Larabee Creek, and the North Fork of the Mattole), 37 additional miles of salmon rearing habitat, 14 miles of scenic public roads, old-growth and second growth redwood and Douglas fir forests, and habitat for northern spotted owls, coho salmon, Roosevelt elk, mountain lions, and many other species. In addition, one of the properties, the 175-acre Sunny Brae Forest, is an important public acquisition which would add to the Arcata Community Forest.

Six Rivers to the Sea brings multi-generations of ranchers and conservationists together toward these common goals:

- Protecting these lands from housing development
- Continuing and developing sustainable land use practices
- Maintaining economic viability for the landowners
- Protecting the fish and wildlife habitat and water quality of these lands.

The project's six tracts (the North Fork Ranch, Valley View Ranch, Price Creek Ranch, Jaqua Ranch, Chalk Mountain Ranch, and Sunny Brae Forest) are located in several key "agricultural districts," including the Mattole Valley, Lower Eel, Kneeland, Bridgeville/Blocksburg, and the Beith and Grotzman watersheds (which



North Fork Ranch

Photo by Steve Hackett

empty into Humboldt Bay).

A long-range goal of the project is to create a wildlife habitat corridor extending inland from the Bridgeville area to Petrolia on the coast. Many of the landowners adjacent to the included properties have also expressed interest in taking part in the project.

The success of this initial pilot can result in a domino effect that will eventually create a relatively uninterrupted corridor. In addition, many of these productive agricultural lands provide a buffer between urban areas and natural and protected lands.

Francis Sweet has owned the Valley View Ranch just north of the town of Petrolia since 1973. His goal is to keep the ranch together. "The

way things are now, a young person couldn't start out and make a living on this land, and we'd be forced to sell," says Sweet. "Now our kids have a chance." The Valley View ranch is adjacent to the North Fork Ranch, which is on the other side of the Mattole River. "It would be wonderful to see them both protected," Sweet adds.

"We believe in this. It's beautiful land and we'd hate to see it subdivided."

Francis Sweet,
Valley View Ranch

Ecology: Six Rivers to the Sea

“We believe in this – it’s beautiful land and we’d hate to see it subdivided.”

Some of the properties contain excellent examples of unique North Coast habitat and geology. The Iaquia Ranch, for example, is distinguished by an expansive, rich mosaic of native oak woodlands, bald hills prairies, rock outcrops, conifer and riparian forests, ponds and perennial streams. These streams support (among many species) steelhead, Chinook, and coho salmon. The North Fork of Yager Creek runs through the middle of Iaquia Ranch and is fed by nearly all of the property’s 4,800 acres. The draft easement for this property proposes stream corridor protections that would help to ensure the long-term ecological integrity of the Yager Creek aquatic system.

The landowners have agreed to significant bargain sales of estimated appraised values. Partial funding for the project will come from a \$2.8 million allocation of federal Forest Legacy funding. NRLT and its partners are seeking additional funding for the project from several state and private sources.

“Nobody knows what the future’s going to hold. To say that we’re living in uncertain times is an understatement,” says Francis



Yager Creek flowing through Iaquia Ranch

Photo by Steve Hackett

Carrington, owner of the Iaquia Ranch. “Conservation easements are a way we can permanently protect our open spaces.” We hope that you will join us in making this project a reality.

Small-Scale Conservation Opportunities

by Shayne Green

The Northcoast Regional Land Trust (NRLT) recently hired part-time staff to begin building a natural lands program that conserves significant ecological resources and wildland attributes across the regional landscape. Recognizing the unique attributes of many small-scale ownerships (less than 500 acres) and their collective contribution to a diverse and functional landscape, NRLT has been busy meeting with landowners to explore and initiate projects that would protect important features on their properties.

Many of these holdings involve significant ecological, cultural, educational, or recreational resources that are difficult to protect or promote on productive agricultural lands where economic output is a primary landowner objective. Examples of important small-scale attributes that a landowner may wish

to protect or promote include old-growth forest stands, wetlands, anadromous fish habitat, meadows, oak woodlands, alluvial terraces, archaeological sites, river access routes, natural history education opportunities, and others.

We have been encouraged by the diversity of local landowners approaching us and the range of important conservation values represented by their properties. Unfortunately, we currently lack sufficient resources to assist everyone and are selecting projects that hold the greatest conservation value. We plan to include a brief sampler of ongoing projects in our fall newsletter.

If you own land with important features that you want to preserve into the future, we invite you to call NRLT to discuss your options. We look forward to advancing ongoing projects and exploring new prospects during spring and summer 2004.

Understanding Humboldt County Land Use



An aerial photo of Loleta shows development concentrated around an urban center, surrounded by intact agricultural lands.

HSU graduate student Ellen Gibson was concerned about the landscape changes she had observed during the last 13 years she lived on the North Coast. Her recently completed land-use planning thesis focused on conversion of agricultural lands to other uses in Humboldt County. Important factors considered in her study included the history of the county's settlement, land-use regulations in the county's General Plan, and cultural trends such as single-use zoning and reliance on private cars.

Gibson's thesis study site focused specifically on the Eel River Delta, Loleta, Ferndale, Fortuna and Hydesville. This cross-section of the county reflects a number of issues that influence the conversion of agricultural lands, including flood hazard zoning, urban containment, and agricultural productivity. Determining local jurisdiction - which government entity that has the authority to impose land-use restrictions on private property - is another issue. Four jurisdictions—city of Fortuna, city of Ferndale, county of Humboldt, and state of California (coastal zone)—were represented in the study area.

Aerial photographs were taken throughout Humboldt County to provide a visual framework and answer the following questions: What settlement patterns can be identified on the Humboldt County landscape? What do these patterns reveal about variations in land-use policies between jurisdictions and how they affect farmland conversion?

As Humboldt County embarks upon its General Plan Update, these questions are especially relevant. The General Plan is a long-range planning document that contains the policies upon which land-use decisions are made. Policies made now will determine how growth in the county is managed and where it is directed over the next 20 years.

The photographs show a clear relationship between jurisdiction and patterns of development on the landscape. Aerial photographs of Loleta and Hydesville exhibit a strong contrast. Development in historic Loleta, which was established prior to

the advent of automobiles, is pedestrian-friendly and surrounded by agricultural lands. In Hydesville, exurban growth, consisting of several five- to ten-acre parcels, has fragmented agricultural lands and promotes private vehicular travel.

Under the jurisdiction of the county of Humboldt, Hydesville has been designated as a Community Planning Area (CPA). The present system of CPAs has not created a clear separation between developed and resource lands. Landowners wanted to downzone prime agricultural lands from agricultural exclusive (AE) to agricultural residential (AR), thereby creating an opportunity for intensively-managed market gardens. Yet, current trends have brought an increase in conversion of prime agricultural lands to exurban housing because the county had no mechanism to ensure that land would remain in agricultural production once it was divided into smaller lots.

Land-use within Loleta is governed by a Local Coastal Plan, due to its location within the state-designated Coastal Zone. Local Coastal Plans are adopted with oversight by the state, and there is a clear statewide vision for coastal areas as a result of the



Land-use policies in Hydesville have favored conversion of agricultural lands to ranchette-type development.

1976 Coastal Act. Policies in coastal areas limit development of resource lands, protecting agricultural lands and viewsheds. Agricultural lands within the Coastal Zone are further protected by flood hazard zoning and a profitable dairy industry.

Keeping the agricultural landscapes of Humboldt County free from sprawling development will take cooperation and imaginative thinking among the entire population. The General Plan Update provides the opportunity—and the challenge—to put policies in place that truly reflect the views of Humboldt County citizens.

For information about the General Plan Update process and how to become involved, go to www.planupdate.org or www.humboldt1.com/friends/index.html.

Information provided by Ellen Gibson and edited by Maya Conrad.

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