

SPRING 2008

# NORTHCOAST REGIONAL LAND TRUST

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*Coastal Barn Revisited (Pastel on canvas)*

Victoria Ryan

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## Valley View Ranch Forever Protected

Valley View Ranch in Humboldt County, California is now forever preserved, safeguarding open space, productive working forest and grazing lands, wildlife habitat and, a very important rural way of life.

Here is a pastoral scene: slopes and gullies are filled with Douglas-fir trees; dense cottonwood and willow thickets embrace the North Fork Mattole; and, on the nutrient-rich floodplains, sheep, cattle, and wildlife share perennial pastures, unbroken and smooth except by several parallel watercourses shaded by woody vegetation.

Valley View Ranch is visible along a four-mile stretch when traveling on the county's North Fork Road and forms a visual, scenic backdrop to the town of Petrolia in southern Humboldt County. Several deep forested ravines drain water from high on the property (one-thousand feet above sea level)

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## From the Executive Director

As with the changing of the seasons, the Northcoast Regional Land Trust has experienced some attrition as well as renewal over the past few months. The Board, staff, and other colleagues were saddened to see Erik Wilson take leave to pursue a position with the Jefferson Land Trust and be closer to family in Washington State. Erik's outgoing personality and ability to build partnerships will be sorely missed at NRLT. He has included successful projects such as the upcoming Freshwater Farms restoration to well-trained staff that worked closely with him in his remaining months.

In February we also said goodbye to Mary Claire Kier, a critically important person who held down the office and kept things running smoothly over the past 18 months. Although we were all disappointed to see her leave, we were also very excited for her new career opportunity with the Department of Fish and Game. Mary Claire, known for her healthy cynicism and wit, provided the backbone of NRLT operations and made the office a fun place for all. She will be missed.

Also, Maya Conrad, whose involvement with NRLT dates back to 2003 as the Executive Director, has transitioned her role from the Interim ED to a member of NRLT Board of Directors.

With the passing of fall and winter, we transition into spring, a time of renewal here on the North Coast as well as at NRLT. Joining our veteran staff are now three new faces in the office, Ryan Wells, Projects Manager; Lindsay Magnuson, Education and Outreach Coordinator; and myself, as the new Executive Director.

Ryan, previously an NRLT intern for four months, is now our Project Manager. He is tasked with managing our Freshwater Farms Reserve Estuary Restoration Project, regional conservation planning, and conservation easement support. Overseeing the Freshwater project alone involves the coordination of seven different funding sources and multiple permit requirements. With Ryan's background and expertise and with assistance from the Redwood Community Action Agency, Freshwater Farms is in good hands.

Lindsay Magnuson recently joined NRLT staff as our Education and Outreach Coordinator. Lindsay, a native of Fieldbrook, comes to us from a diverse background that includes working in Africa on wildlife conservation efforts to most recently teaching biology at College of the Redwoods. She is now very excited to be back home working on local land conservation projects with NRLT. Lindsay's main projects include K-12 education program development centered at Freshwater Farms, coordinating our North Coast Dialogues effort with Shayne Green, and leading outreach events such as Canoe the Slough and interpretive walks.

As for my own role here at NRLT, one of my main goals in the coming year is to develop more regional efforts throughout our organization's tri-county focus area. Living in Del Norte County for the past five years, after my eleven years in Humboldt County, I've witnessed a wide array of conservation efforts and the different challenges that face our communities. Likewise, Trinity County has its own unique set of conservation challenges. My hope is that through regional coordination and dialogue, our efforts on the North Coast can be greater than the sum of its parts.



*A glimpse of the Pacific Ocean from Valley View Ranch. Photo by Erik Kingfisher*



NRLT's new staff members: (left to right) Ryan Wells, Lindsay Magnuson and Kevin McKernan.  
Photo by L. Serrano

## North Coast Dialogues Update

Late last year NRLT launched an ambitious new multi-year initiative to engage diverse stakeholders in creating a 100 year vision for the North Coast's landscapes, communities, and economies. The primary goal of the first phase of the project is to help our community determine the best way to maintain productive working lands in Humboldt County. The Steering Committee has planned a series of focused conversations that will take place this spring. Individuals representing agriculture, timber, environmental, recreation,

religious, business, and Native American interests (among others) have been invited to be part of a group of thirty people who will participate in this unique forum. We intend for the project to ultimately engage the broader community and to inform other planning and decision-making processes affecting our region.

For more information on the project, please contact Lindsay Magnuson or Shayne Green at the NRLT office, 707-822-2242.

## North Coast Dialogues Steering Committee

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Alexandre Ecodairy Farms and Northcoast Regional Land Trust

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## Forward Movement on Freshwater Farms Reserve

In 2005, NRLT purchased a 54-acre parcel in Freshwater, named the Freshwater Farms Reserve (FWFR), for the purposes of estuary/wetland restoration and sustainable agricultural use. During the past three years, NRLT staff and local specialists have been developing a project design, using the best available science, which will provide habitat for salmon, waterfowl, and many other wetland-specific plants and animals. In addition, we have designated a 19-acre portion of the property to be leased to a local rancher for sustainable grazing. In this, we are promoting a harmonious relationship where habitat restoration and agriculture can exist side by side. We expect that this project will serve as a model for similar opportunities in the region.

The FWFR restoration project has undergone numerous changes over the years and our current design, scheduled to be implemented this August, contains multiple elements that will lead to a healthy, self-sustaining wetland. Removal of a 100-year-old tidegate, construction of a slough channel system, revegetation of a series of tidal hummocks (shallow hills located within the wetland) with native wetland plant species, and installation of in-stream fish habitat structures, will create a complex and inviting brackish marsh habitat for Humboldt Bay's native flora and fauna. In addition to holding educational activities at FWFR, we have plans to create an interpretive trail around the wetland by the end of 2009.



Wood Creek at Freshwater Farms Reserve.  
Photo by Erik Kingfisher

## What is a Conservation Easement?

A conservation easement is a legal agreement between a landowner and an entity such as a land trust that permanently protects special features of a property such as farming, ranching and forest production, open space, scenic vistas and wildlife habitat. Each conservation easement is tailored to the specific needs and desires of the landowner and the unique qualities of the property.

Conservation easements become part of the property title. The land trust ensures that the terms of the easements are honored by present and future landowners. The property remains in private ownership and can be sold, leased, or passed on to heirs. A conservation easement does not grant public access unless desired by the landowner. Conservation easements can provide the following benefits: Income taxes may be reduced by deducting the value of the conservation easement as a charitable gift; estate taxes may be reduced by lowering the appraised value of taxable land assets; property taxes may be reduced. In some cases conservation easements are purchased by land trusts and public agencies to ensure long-term public benefits and funds needed by landowners for their economic stabilization and security.

Please visit [http://www.ncrlt.org/conservation\\_easements/guide](http://www.ncrlt.org/conservation_easements/guide) or call the NRLT office 707/822.2242 for more information on conservation easements.

Valley View Ranch photos by Erik Kingfisher



(Continued from cover)

into the North Fork of the Mattole River and protect the headwaters of tributaries that feed Mill Creek.

The ranch's idyllic location, treasured open space, scenic vistas, and warm, sunny weather in the summer and early fall months made it especially appealing for conversion to vacation homes on small, dense tracts, or "boutique" industries such as vineyards. With a conservation easement now in place, Valley View Ranch is protected from subdivision and development.

Landowners Francis and Lorana Sweet decided to protect their land through a conservation easement. Assisted by the Northcoast Regional Land Trust, the transaction was finalized in early April, 2008. The conservation easement preserves Valley View's economic, cultural, natural, ecological, and open space values while maintaining pure aesthetic enjoyment for all. The property's forest (704 acres) and grazing lands (828 acres) are also important for the county's tax base and local economy by producing goods for use in the North Coast region.

Valley View Ranch boasts a plethora of wildlife, and their habitats are now permanently protected. The North Fork Mattole River and Mill Creek harbor native salmonid species, including Coho, steelhead and cutthroat trout, and winter Chinook, which spawn and rear in these watersheds. Other state or federally listed species also live here, including northern spotted owls, golden eagles, red and yellow-legged frogs, and red tree voles. Mountain lion, black bear, coyote, and blacktail deer also inhabit the property.

Completion of the Valley View Ranch project is another step forward in the conservation of contiguous private lands located in the productive belt of working agricultural and forest lands between the Six Rivers National Forest and the Pacific Ocean – an area under imminent threat of development. Aptly named the Six Rivers to the Sea Program, this large-scale land conservation initiative facilitates the development of conservation easements to protect and preserve the scenic and natural resources of Humboldt, Trinity and Del Norte counties while maintaining the region's culture and tradition of working, sustainable lands.

Recognizing the importance of these ranches to fish, wildlife, and productive resources, the

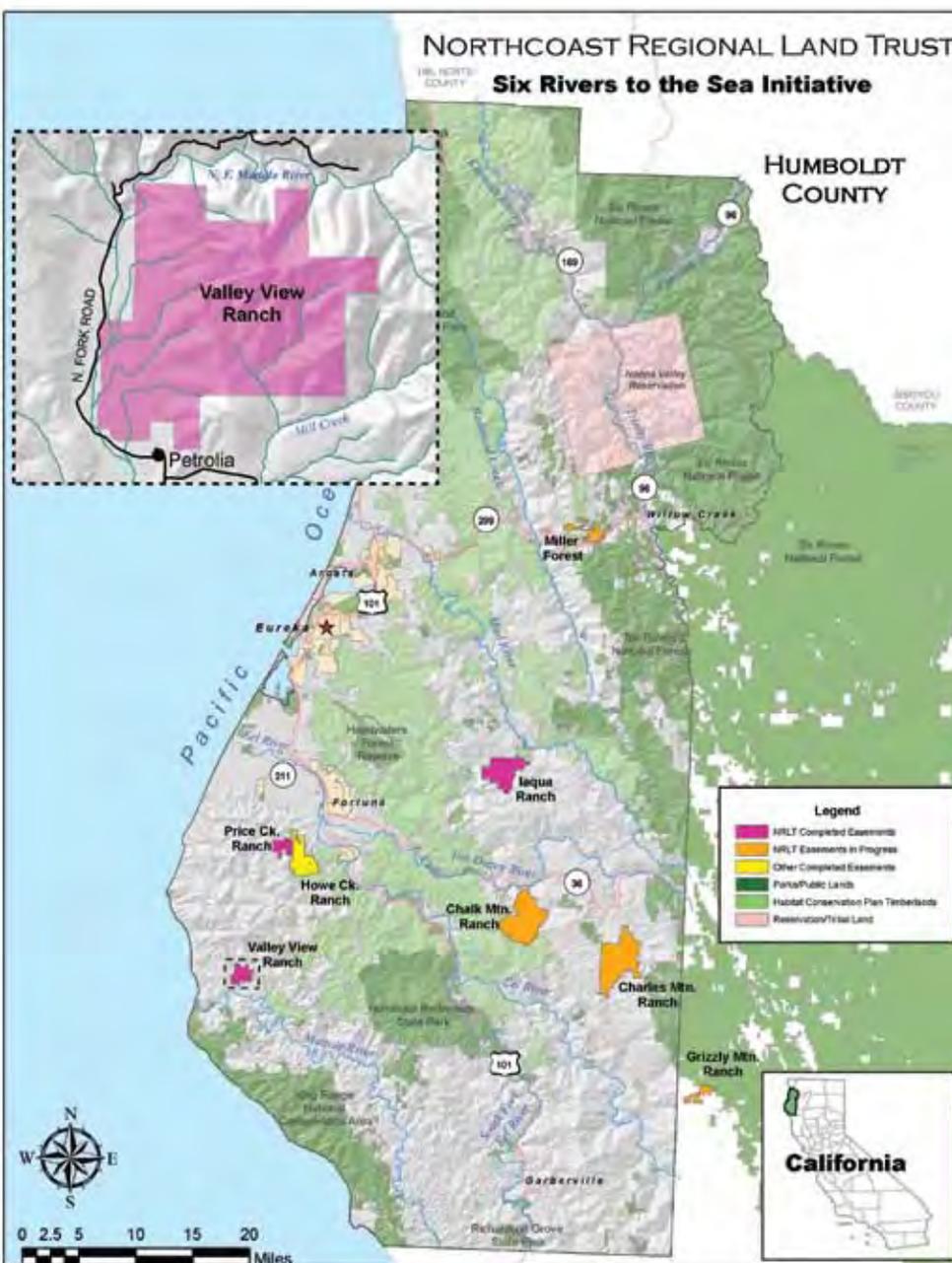
Northcoast Regional Land Trust is working with state, federal, and local agencies, non-profit organizations, and individuals to work with landowners on a voluntary basis to establish perpetual protections on numerous North Coast properties. Partners in the Valley View Ranch project included the California Wildlife Conservation Board, the State Coastal Conservancy, the federal Forest Legacy Program and U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service. These entities purchased the conservation easement on the entire property in perpetuity, including the subdivision and development rights and the monetary tradeoff of imposing stronger timber harvesting restrictions to protect river and wildlife habitat.

Support was also provided by the County of Humboldt and the landowners' representatives, Steve Hackett and Greg Hendrickson of Agland Engineering, Inc.

Finally, and more importantly, Lorana and Francis Sweet have voluntarily and graciously relinquished their rights to gain financial benefit through subdivision of their property, and are donating a significant portion of the appraised conservation easement value. The Sweets have also contributed a stewardship endowment so that the Northcoast Regional Land Trust can conduct long-term monitoring of the property, ensuring adherence to the easement's terms.

The Six Rivers to the Sea Initiative has now permanently protected more than 11,000 acres on four ranches: Howe Creek in 2002; Iaqua Ranch and Price Creek Ranches in 2006; and now in 2008, Valley View Ranch. NRLT and partners seek to conserve approximately 30,000 acres through Six Rivers to the Sea by 2010 (see map). We invite every reader to become an active participant in this ambitious endeavor!





## Valley View Ranch Landowners Lorana and Francis Sweet

As Francis puts it, “Ranching and the land has been my way of life, it’s what I believe in. I have been ranching on a small scale my whole life, and I actually worked on this property as a young man when it was rented to the Connick Livestock Company. At that time [Valley View Ranch] belonged to my aunt, Bertha Russ, who established the Bertha Russ Lytel Foundation and conserved all that good timberland along the Wildcat and down to Ferndale. Then the property became available to me and I jumped at the opportunity because it was what I wanted all my life. I feel like I have an obligation to this land and to her (Aunt Bertha) for giving me the chance. The main reason for doing a conservation easement is to keep the land intact as a working ranch and forest and to ensure my family unit.”

If Lorana could live or work on a ranch anywhere in the world, she would choose Valley View. “Living in the Petrolia area was always a dream. Francis worked here when he was 17 years old. The ranch was left to him by his Great Aunt. He really wants it to stay intact – to respect what her wishes would have been too.”

Lorana and Francis Sweet’s family has been on the Valley View Ranch since 1940. Before that the Russ Family, of whom Francis is related through marriage, owned the land since 1888.

Despite financial hardships over the years, the couple is committed to the conservation and preservation of their land and have diligently avoided subdividing or changing the historic (agricultural and forestry) uses of the property.



## Education & Outreach

The Northcoast Regional Land Trust's "Land Use and Environment Seminar" is well underway. This education and outreach program includes interpretive activities for the public as well as a hands-on science program for high school students at our Freshwater Farms Reserve. NRLT has partnered with Shannon Morago at Six Rivers Charter School to offer a field-based educational program to 10th grade biology students. Our goal is to provide students with an opportunity to actively participate in a restoration project in their own backyard. Students will participate in actual data collection regarding the flora, fauna, hydrology and soils of Freshwater Farms Reserve. Data collected by students this May will provide an exciting comparison to data collected next year by the same students when they are enrolled in chemistry.

Students will be involved over multiple years and will have the unique experience of observing the naturalization of the Freshwater Farms site after the restoration plan has been implemented in late 2008. We hope to expand our educational program in 2009 to include other schools, a broader age range of students and additional programs such as water quality testing and salmonid monitoring in Freshwater and Wood Creek.



*Paddling Humboldt Bay.* Photo by Hawk Martin

The Northcoast Regional Land Trust is committed to providing the public with opportunities to experience our unique and threatened tidal wetlands. These ecosystems are among the most productive and biologically diverse on the planet and are disappearing at an alarming rate. We offer interpretive walks and Canoe-the-Slough kayaking trips on Freshwater Slough and Humboldt Bay. Our first event this year was a moonlight paddle on March 21st through Eureka and Freshwater Sloughs. We are planning other events this spring. If you'd like to get out and enjoy our tidal wetlands while learning about the natural history of the bay, please join us on an interpretive walk or canoe trip. Hope to see you there!

For questions about education and outreach activities, please contact Lindsay Magnuson at [l.magnuson@ncrlt.org](mailto:l.magnuson@ncrlt.org).

*The mixed pasture and forest land of Valley View Ranch.* Photo by Erik Kingfisher



## Please consider becoming a business partner with the Northcoast Regional Land Trust.

As an NRLT business partner, you join select a group of businesses working for healthy and sustainable landscapes and communities on the North Coast.

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- Would you like to protect your property from being converted to non-traditional uses?
- Are estate taxes a threat to keeping your farm, forest, or ranch in the family when you pass on?
- Could you benefit from significant income and estate tax deductions?
- Do you want to protect the natural or ecological benefits your land provides?
- Do you want the scenic and historic values of your land to remain intact for future generations to enjoy?

If you answered yes to any or all of these questions, a conservation easement may be right for you. Please give us a call **707.822.2242** and we can provide more information and guidance; you can also browse our website at [www.nrlt.org](http://www.nrlt.org)

### **NRLT Mission:**

*The Northcoast Regional Land Trust is dedicated to the protection and enhancement of farms, forests, rangelands, and wild areas in perpetuity. Our vision for the future includes vibrant communities, sustainable economies and healthy landscapes.*



## COVER ART VICTORIA RYAN

A native Californian, Victoria Ryan has called Humboldt County her home since 2002. A professional fine artist for 25 years, Victoria works primarily in soft pastel to create vivid, dreamlike landscapes of the local terrain and from her travels. Layers of rich pigmented color are applied to various substrates to create eloquent and vibrant perspectives. Her work can be found in private, corporate and public collections world wide and can be viewed at [www.victoriaryan.com](http://www.victoriaryan.com). A series of new original pastel landscapes will be on view at Humboldt Baykeeper, 217 E St., Eureka, CA, during the months of April and May, 2008. The cover painting, "Coastal Barn Revisited", an original pastel, is inspired from Southport Landing, a previously busy port on Humboldt Bay in the Tablebluff area near Loleta. It now houses an historic bed and breakfast inn.

THANKS TO:

