

2008 Working Group

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North Coast Dialogues

For the next 100 years...



Creating a shared vision for our future

What are the North Coast Dialogues?

The Dialogues began as a series of multi-stakeholder conversations about the desired future of our region. The Dialogues were initiated by the Northcoast Regional Land Trust to establish a collaborative vision and actions to shape the region’s landscapes, communities, and economies over the next 100 years.

The first phase of the project focused on the future of working lands in Humboldt County. A group of ranchers, planners, timber company representatives, environmental activists, realtors, natural resource managers, economic development specialists, and other community members met on several occasions to share personal stories about their relationship to the land, to establish a collective vision for the future, and to determine the best way to maintain working lands in Humboldt County. This brochure summarizes the outcomes of that conversation.

Why the North Coast Dialogues?

The world is changing and, with it, the rural way of life that has historically defined our region and its communities. How can we respond to these changes in ways that maintain what we value most about the North Coast, that strengthen our communities, improve the quality of our lives, and retain opportunities for future generations? To answer these questions we need forums that are conducive to open and honest discussion on difficult topics. Forums that lead to a shared understanding of the relevant issues and complex challenges facing us, and that result in new partnerships committed to building a better future. We need a vehicle for building collaborative efforts that would not otherwise be possible. The Dialogues is filling this need.



How did the process work?

The first phase of the project employed the Collaborative Change Approach (CCA), a process for assisting diverse and often conflicting parties to reach agreement for desired change. CCA is a value-based process that supports people as they make effective transitions so that the changes they implement together can be sustained. A 30-member Working Group was assembled by the project Steering Committee to develop a collective vision for the future of working lands, to define issues and challenges to attaining that vision, and to explore approaches for overcoming those challenges. An online survey was conducted beforehand and themes were extracted from the data so as to ensure focused and productive discussions. The Working Group eventually developed vision statements using a consensus-based process.

“We, as people, who live here have not really focused on how we want things to be in the next 100 years in a way that accommodates a larger group. We have taken a very short-term view of how we want life to be.”

--From Dialogues discussions, 2008

Our Shared Vision

For the next 100 years...

- Locally-based agriculture, forestry, and fisheries are integral to and positively contribute to Humboldt County's economy, natural landscapes, and rural way of life and are supported by our entire community.
- Agriculture, forestry, and fisheries are economically and environmentally viable and sustainable.
- People are living and working on resource lands, using traditional and evolving knowledge of stewardship and management, providing opportunities for future generations.
- Resource lands, in addition to their economic value, provide fish and wildlife habitat, open space, and are recognized as essential to Humboldt County.

Defining the Issues

The working group identified the following priority issues and challenges to maintaining productive working lands in Humboldt County:

- ◆ **Regulations**
 - High cost of compliance
 - Uncertainty/instability of regulatory system
 - Lack of an objective, scientific basis
- ◆ **Economic Factors**
 - Poor market conditions
 - Maintaining/increasing infrastructure
 - High transportation costs
 - Need to diversify resource land uses
- ◆ **Conversion and Development Pressure**
 - High real estate values compared to resource production values
 - Large lot rural residential eroding the resource land base
 - Impacts of the marijuana industry
 - Local planning and public policy issues
 - Balancing private property rights and the public good
 - Government acquisition of land
- ◆ **Succession of Ownership**
- ◆ **Community Polarization/Poor Communication/Lack of Trust**



Realizing the Shared Vision

After developing vision statements for the county's working lands, action ideas were developed by participants to address key themes of the conversation.

Action Themes:

- ◆ State and federal regulatory reform
- ◆ Local planning policy—subdivision/development/enforcement
- ◆ Education—linking landowners and the public
- ◆ Objective research
- ◆ Conservation financing and stewardship incentives
- ◆ Business, estate, and succession planning
- ◆ Address impacts of the marijuana industry
- ◆ Economic strategies—value-added and diversification
- ◆ Retain infrastructure
- ◆ Collaborative communication, visioning, and problem-solving

“By bringing our hearts and minds together around shared values, we are creating solutions to challenges that might otherwise prove insurmountable.”

--From *Dialogues discussions, 2008*

“The way we're going to solve the problems in this county is to come together as a unified group.”

--From *Dialogues discussions, 2008*



Next Steps

During the next phase of the project we will translate the qualitative outcomes of the last year into a plan of action for the future. Working group members are assisting NRTL staff in developing a series of resource and land use goals for farmland, forestland, rangeland, fisheries, and the associated infrastructure we think are needed to maintain healthy resource-based economies, vibrant rural communities, and the natural beauty of the region. Next, we will identify or create strategies needed to support these goals. The emerging plan is intended to be farsighted, collaborative, fair, strategic, innovative, balanced, timely and action-oriented, reflecting the basic principles that guide us. Finally, we will go to work turning our vision into reality.