

A WORKING LANDS VISION FOR HUMBOLDT COUNTY, CALIFORNIA



A NORTH COAST DIALOGUES PROJECT

April 2011

**Produced by the Northcoast Regional Land Trust
In collaboration with local partners**

TABLE OF CONTENTS

FOREWORD	2
THE PURPOSE AND INTENDED USE OF THE WORKING LANDS VISION	2
INTRODUCTION: The North Coast Dialogues and the Working Lands Vision	3
BACKGROUND	3
OUR VISION	3
OPERATING PRINCIPLES AND GUIDELINES	4
ORGANIZATION AND DEVELOPMENT OF THE WORKING LANDS VISION DOCUMENT	5
A WORKING LANDS VISION	6
FORESTRY	6
AGRICULTURE	7
OUR COLLABORATIVE ACTION AGENDA	8
APPENDIX A	9
DEFINITIONS OF TERMS AS USED IN THIS DOCUMENT	9
APPENDIX B	11
INDICATORS	11
PRELIMINARY BASELINE STATISTICS FOR RANGELANDS AND FORESTLANDS	13
APPENDIX C	16
STEERING COMMITTEE AND AUTHORS	16
SPECIAL ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	16

FOREWORD

THE PURPOSE AND INTENDED USE OF THE WORKING LANDS VISION

The primary purpose of the *Working Lands Vision* is to **establish widely supported community priorities for maintaining working lands** in Humboldt County. It is a call for collaboration, creativity, and the efficient use of limited resources towards this end. The document should not be taken as a request for more bureaucracy, government spending, or the diversion of resources away from existing public programs and services. If anything, the Vision suggests a need for increased cooperation between the public and private sectors in meeting broadly held economic, ecological, and social goals.

When we refer to “we” in this document it refers to those individuals and organizations that endorse this Vision. As such, the document is intended to serve as a sign of community support for the approaches, goals and outcomes it describes.

Many people who support this Vision have also invested considerable time and energy weighing in on pending Humboldt County General Plan Update (GPU) policy decisions. In order to avoid confusion on the part of decision-makers or others, ***this document should not be taken as an attempt to influence GPU policy decisions one way or the other, and its endorsement by individuals and organizations should not be taken as a sign of their support for any particular action or decision related to the current GPU.*** Rather, this document takes the long-view in charting a 100-year course that is intended to serve our community in unique ways long-after the General Plan Update has been completed.

This document is based (in part) on the premise that there are significant public benefits to having privately-owned, productive working lands in Humboldt County. These benefits are numerous but include a stable tax base, employment, the availability of services associated with secondary industries, clean air, water, locally-produced food and fiber, wildlife habitat and scenic vistas. It follows that both the public and private sectors stand to benefit from collaborative efforts to maintain the county’s working lands.

INTRODUCTION: The North Coast Dialogues and the Working Lands Vision

BACKGROUND

The world is changing and, with it, the rural way of life that has historically defined the North Coast and its communities. Many are wondering how our community can respond to these changes in ways that maintain what we value most about our region, that strengthen our communities, improve the quality of our lives, and retain economic opportunities for future generations.

With the future of working lands and waters as an organizing theme, a group of farmers, ranchers, planners, foresters, environmental advocates, business owners, realtors, community development specialists and others began meeting in 2008 to address these questions. The conversations that ensued became the foundation of the North Coast Dialogues project and this Working Lands Vision.

OUR VISION

Our long-term vision for working lands in the county, developed by participants in a consensus-based process and vetted with community members, is as follows:

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.

OPERATING PRINCIPLES AND GUIDELINES

The North Coast Dialogues has evolved into an alliance to support viable agricultural enterprise (including forestry) into the future using methods that simultaneously benefit and enhance natural resources. This “**Working Lands Initiative**” represents a cooperative approach that creates both the economic and environmental outcomes most people in Humboldt County want.

The Dialogues project seeks **to help our community collectively determine how to maintain privately-owned productive working lands in Humboldt County** by creating a forum that:

- informs decision-making
- establishes a collaborative atmosphere
- achieves a shared understanding of the issues and effects on all stakeholders
- encourages open communication
- respects diverse perspectives
- engages a broader community
- addresses the tension between public and private interests, and
- informs other processes

This informal alliance is distinguished by what it does and the way it operates, which can be summarized as follows:

- We build stronger links between communities, resource producers, and the public in order to advance our shared interests.
- We seek points of agreement and act on them to create lasting solutions.
- We base decisions on shared values, a common vision, the best available science and the intimate knowledge of people who live and work on the land.
- We recognize that change brings both gains and losses. We ask “who stands to lose what” and address losses in a meaningful way.
- We build trust by keeping agreements and by being transparent about our positions and interests.

- When we work together, we:
 - Speak our truth without blame or judgment.
 - Strive for group understanding and agreement, not to be right.
 - Accept that not everyone will agree on all things all the time.
 - Focus on what is needed to move the group forward.

Guidelines for developing and implementing strategies to attain our goals include:

- Emphasize the use of non-regulatory and market-based mechanisms in attaining desired ends.
- Employ outcome-based performance standards.
- Maintain productivity at current levels or greater.
- Evaluate alternatives by asking “what is the benefit and what is the cost?” of each.
- Provide positive incentives that engender desired behaviors.
- Create a healthy balance between rights and responsibilities.
- Provide fair compensation where significant value is being transferred or extinguished.
- Empower individuals and communities to create their own solutions, sometimes in partnership with local, state, and federal governments.
- Link information, education and action as a complete process directed at shared goals.

ORGANIZATION AND DEVELOPMENT OF THE WORKING LANDS VISION DOCUMENT

The following document articulates a vision and identifies benchmarks, indicators, goals and collaborative actions for maintaining forestry, agriculture, and watershed health in our region (see Appendix A for definitions of terms used in this document).

The content of each section draws heavily on seventeen resource and land use goals that reflect themes from the Dialogues and other planning efforts (including the county’s economic development strategy Prosperity!). These goals were then vetted with the Dialogues Working Group and other community participants through a combination of meetings and online surveys. Each of the goals received strong support (70-100%) among respondents. Thus, we have sought to develop a framework that is based on established community priorities and that reflects diverse community interests.

A WORKING LANDS VISION

FORESTRY

OUR VISION: A large, productive and diverse forest land base supporting a strong and resilient forest resource economy while maintaining healthy watersheds.

OUR BENCHMARK: Incentives exist that result in over eighty percent of the county's privately-owned forestlands¹ being managed for the long-term production of marketable goods and services with active stewardship of natural resources.

OUR INDICATORS: Statistical values to be tracked regularly (at least every five years)² for the purpose of evaluating the changing status of forest resource lands, forest resource production, the health of watersheds and whether or not the benchmark is being attained:

Key indicators (see Appendix B for a detailed description of statistics to be tracked):

- Forestland acreage
- Production levels, including revenue
- Land prices
- Ecological services, including water quality

OUR GOALS:

- Increase the economic viability of forest resource production, with an emphasis on reducing the costs of regulatory compliance.
- Help private forestland owners capitalize on a broad range of sustainable resource markets, including carbon sequestration, biomass, and biofuels.
- Maintain the infrastructure and technical services to support a strong forest resource economy.
- Maintain and enhance the ecological functions of forestlands by providing high-quality habitat for native wildlife and by restoring the hydrologic functions of our forested watersheds.
- Foster responsible and skilled forest stewardship based on science and the intimate knowledge of people who live and work on the land.
- Provide opportunities for people to recreate on local forestlands of willing landowners, particularly near urban settings.

¹ An estimate of actual acreage will be made during the development of a baseline data report.

² The Northcoast Regional Land Trust intends to develop a statistical report to quantify indicators in 2011. Statistics presented in the report will serve as reference points for future comparison.

AGRICULTURE

OUR VISION: A large, productive and diverse agricultural landscape supporting a strong agrarian economy and healthy watersheds.

OUR BENCHMARK: Incentives exist that result in over eighty percent of the county's agricultural lands³ being managed for the long-term production of marketable goods and services with active stewardship of natural resources.

OUR INDICATORS: Statistical values to be tracked regularly (at least every five years)⁴ for the purpose of evaluating the changing status of agricultural lands, agricultural production, the health of watersheds and whether or not the benchmark is being attained:

Key indicators (see Appendix B for a detailed description of statistics to be tracked):

- Agricultural land acreage
- Production levels, including revenue
- Land prices
- Ecological services, including water quality

OUR GOALS:

- Maintain agricultural productivity at current levels or greater.
- Maintain a large⁵ number of family-owned and operated dairies, farms, and ranches as the foundation of local agriculture.
- Maintain or enhance ecosystem services provided by agricultural land.
- Increase the viability of dairies, farms and ranches by improving marketing, transport systems, infrastructure and technical services; by developing a stable and productive workforce; and by reducing the costs of regulatory compliance.
- Increase economic, ecological, and cultural connections between local producers and the broader community.

³ An estimate of actual acreage will be made during the development of a baseline data report.

⁴ The Northcoast Regional Land Trust intends to develop a statistical report to quantify indicators in 2011. Statistics presented in the report will serve as reference points for future comparison.

⁵ Large is defined here as four hundred or more. According to the USDA Agricultural Census, there were approximately 697 operations in Humboldt County in 1997, 583 in 2002, and 509 in 2007.

OUR COLLABORATIVE ACTION AGENDA

1. Develop a process for regularly (at least every five years) and publicly evaluating the changing status of forest and agricultural lands, resource production, and watershed health in the county. The process will emphasize the use of objective information, and integrate this objective information into a “State of Working Lands” forum. The purpose of the forum is to build and maintain a shared community understanding of the status of working lands in Humboldt County. The forum will examine trends and issues affecting the economic viability of working lands and the conservation of natural resources.
2. Work to reduce costs associated with regulatory compliance.
3. Develop a coordinated regional approach to the development of agricultural and forest resource markets.
4. Develop a robust and accessible system of support services capable of meeting the diverse needs of agricultural producers and non-industrial forestland (NIPF) owners. This includes addressing infrastructure, marketing, transport, technical service, and workforce needs.
5. Provide financial and technical support for landowners to conserve and steward natural resources on their land.
6. Increase educational opportunities for private landowners and the general public, linking information, education and action around shared goals.
7. Find ways for public funds and public lands to better support our Vision for working lands in the county.
8. Acknowledge the influence of the marijuana industry and work to mitigate its impacts on resource lands.
9. Maintain county services, policies and processes that value and support timber producers and timber production on lands zoned Timber. Do the same for lands zoned Agriculture.
10. Develop a system for documenting what is being done, and by whom, related to Recommendations 1-9 above.

APPENDIX A

DEFINITIONS OF TERMS AS USED IN THIS DOCUMENT

Action—An act or deed.

Active—Engaged in activity; participating.

Agrarian—Having to do with the land and its ownership, cultivation and tenure.

Agricultural Land—Land that currently supports or that historically supported viable agricultural operations.

Agriculture—The science, art, and business of cultivating the soil, producing crops, and raising livestock.

Benchmark—The minimum value (in terms of acres) among a range of values generally indicating consistency with our Vision.

Collaborative—Working together.

Diverse—Varied.

Ecological—Having to do with the relationship between living organisms and their environment.

Economically viable— Revenue is sufficient to fund the cost of producing goods sold, normal profit and the overhead associated with running a business operation.

Ecosystem—A biological community and its physical environment.

Ecosystem services--Ecological functions, processes, and resources that benefit people, such as clean air and water, wildlife habitat, mitigation of drought and flood, generation and preservation of fertile soils, detoxification and decomposition of

wastes, cycling and movement of nutrients, etc.
(Ecological services)

Forestland— Land covered with forests or set aside for the cultivation of forests.

Forestry—The science and art of cultivating, maintaining, and developing forests, especially for the production of goods and services.

Goal—The purpose towards which an endeavor is directed. *What* we intend to do or accomplish.

Goods—Commodities or wares; articles of commerce.

Habitat—The environment in which an organism or population of organisms normally lives or occurs.

Healthy watershed—A watershed with a high capacity to provide ecological services relative to its natural or historic capacity.

Hydrological—Having to do with the properties, distribution and effects of water.

Indicator⁶—A statistical value that provides an indication of the stability of an economic or ecological system.

⁶ In this document, indicators are statistical values to be tracked regularly (at least every five years) for the purpose of evaluating the changing status of resource lands, resource production, and the health of watersheds and for evaluating whether or not our benchmarks are being attained (see Appendix B for details).

Infrastructure—The basic facilities, equipment and installations needed for the functioning of a business or industry.

Large (area)—An area that approximates the number of acres of existing forest or agricultural lands, respectively.

Long-term—One hundred years or more.

Manage—To direct or control the use or function of land, water or living organisms.

Marketable—Able to be bought or sold.

Natural resources—Any part of nature that is of use or value to people.

Non-industrial private forestland (NIPF)—Forestlands owned by individuals, families or corporations who do not possess processing facilities to utilize their timber production, so that any timber grown must be sold to a processor⁷.

Produce — (1) To grow or manufacture goods or services for sale. (**Producer, Production**)

Productive—(1) Grows or manufactures goods or services for sale. (2) The capacity to capture energy, sustain life, and produce resources. (**Productivity**)

Regulatory compliance—Acting in accordance with public policies and the requests, wishes or demands of those charged with enforcing such policies.

Resource lands—Lands that are in a relatively natural state and that are used to produce goods and services.

Services⁸—(1) Work done for others as an occupation or business. (2); Functions, processes, or resources that benefit people.

Stewardship—The use and conservation of natural resources in a way that accounts for the interests (including watershed health) of society, the local community, future generations, and other species, in addition to private needs.

Sustainable—Capable of continuing in a similar manner over the long term.

Viable—Capable of continued effectiveness or success.

Vision—The future condition we desire.

Water quality—The chemical, physical, biological and other properties or characteristics of water that affect its use, including the ability to support life, good health, and natural ecosystems.

Watershed health—The capacity of a watershed to provide ecological services relative to its natural or historic capacity.

⁷ Note that a different definition was used to develop the statistics listed in Appendix C. Refer to the report at: <http://ncrlt.org/sites/ncrlt.org/files/Timber%20Harvesting%20in%20HumCo.pdf> for the definition used in that study.

⁸ See also “ecosystem services.”

APPENDIX B

INDICATORS

Statistical values to be tracked regularly (at least every five years) for the purpose of evaluating the changing status of agricultural and forestlands, agricultural and forest resource production, the health of watersheds in Humboldt County, and whether or not the benchmark is being attained.

The Northcoast Regional Land Trust intends to develop a baseline statistical report in 2011 that quantifies the indicators listed below. Statistics presented in the report will serve as reference points for future comparison.

FORESTRY

- Total private forestland acres
- Total private forestland acres by ownership size class
- Change in proportion of private ownership size classes each year
- Total value and volume of timber produced on private lands each year
- Total acres of timber harvested on private lands each year by ownership size class
- Total acres THP/NTO's filed on private lands per ownership size class per year
- Number of landowners and total acres in active programs to maintain or increase the productive capacity and/or ecosystem service value of their land (restoration, conservation, certification, alternative revenue streams, etc.)
- Total acres of public forestland
- Total acres of public forestland in production
- Price of private forestland relative to its forest resource income potential.

Additional, informative statistics that could be obtained with more difficulty and cost:

- Total sales of forest resource goods and services (including carbon sequestration, biomass, etc.) other than timber each year (including totals by ownership size class)
- Total acres of public forestland in active programs to maintain or increase the productive capacity and/or ecosystem services and values of those lands.
- Status and trend of relevant fisheries and water quality metrics for watersheds in the county

- Scope and magnitude at which Best Management Practices are being implemented to maintain water quality on forested landscapes
- Number and extent of aquatic habitat improvement projects

AGRICULTURE

- Total private acres of agricultural land
- Total private acres of agricultural land in production
- Total private acres in production per sector (dairy, beef, row crops, wool, etc.)
- Total public acres of grasslands/rangelands
- Total public acres of grasslands/rangelands in production
- Total gross agricultural revenues
- Total gross agricultural revenues by sector
- Pounds of food/fiber produced by sector (total and on a per acre basis)
- Number of landowners and total acres in active programs to maintain or increase the productive capacity and/or ecosystem service value of their land.
- Price of land relative to its agricultural income potential.
- Total number of agricultural operations.

Additional, informative statistics that could be obtained with more difficulty and cost:

- Total sales of non-traditional goods and services produced on agricultural lands each year (including totals by ownership size class)
- Total public acres in active programs to maintain or increase the productive capacity and/or ecosystem services and values of those lands.
- Status and trend of relevant water quality metrics for selected sites and watersheds
- Scope and magnitude at which Best Management Practices are being implemented to maintain water quality on agricultural landscapes
- Number and extent of aquatic habitat improvement projects

PRELIMINARY BASELINE STATISTICS FOR RANGELANDS AND FORESTLANDS

Below are some statistics that were part of forestry and agricultural analyses conducted in 2009 by the Northcoast Regional Land Trust and its partners. These statistics may provide useful points of reference when considering our benchmarks. The complete analyses, including methodologies and data sources are available from the Northcoast Regional Land Trust upon request. The Northcoast Regional Land Trust intends to develop a complete baseline statistical report in 2011 that quantifies a broader set of indicators as referenced in Appendix A above.

RANGELANDS:

Rangelands/Totals for Humboldt County⁹:

~487,000 acres

86% privately owned

14% publicly owned

Total estimated capacity=approx. 74,000 head cattle

Est. actual 10-year historic average=50,000 head cattle (67% of carrying capacity)

⁹ Rangeland statistics and estimates are based on an informal study conducted by the Northcoast Regional Land Trust. A summary can be viewed at: <http://ncrlt.org/sites/ncrlt.org/files/Rangelands%20Analysis%20Presentation.pdf>

Rangelands/Bottomlands:

~60,000 acres (12% of total)
92% privately owned
8% publicly owned
Carrying capacity=approx. 60,000 head
(81% of total carrying capacity)

Rangelands/Uplands:

~427,000 acres (88% total)
85% privately owned
15% publicly owned
Carrying capacity=approx. 14,000 head
19% of total carrying capacity

Agricultural land¹⁰:

Cropland:	33,867
Permanent pasture & rangeland:	347,988
Woodland:	191,647
(Pastured woodland:	99,232)
(Unpastured woodland:	92,415)
Other:	<u>23,975</u>
Total land in Farms:	597,477

¹⁰ Statistics taken from the USDA 2007 Agricultural census for Humboldt County.

FORESTLANDS:

Forestlands/Totals for Humboldt County:

1.9 million acres (80% of total land base)¹¹

64.5% privately owned

35.5% publicly owned (35.5% of total)

Privately-owned, merchantable¹² timberland:

779,000 acres (est.)

51% is industry owned

49% is NIPF owned

Of these privately-owned acres the following patterns were determined:

Forestlands/Douglas-fir:

60% of total acreage

21% industry owned

79% NIPF owned

Forestlands/Redwood:

40% of total acreage

79% industry owned

21% NIPF owned

Table 1. Percent of merchantable timberland and harvest intensity by ownership size class.

Ownership size class	Percent of merchantable timberland	Harvest intensity¹³
5-160 acres	12%	0.8%
160-640	9%	1.1%
640-2500	10%	1.7%
2500+ (excluding industry)	18%	2.8%
Industry	51%	3.8%

¹¹ Based on Forest Resources background report produced by the County of Humboldt for the General Plan Update.

¹² Dominated by trees that are six inches diameter at breast height or larger.

¹³ Percent of the acres in each size class filed for harvest during the study period 1997-2008. For details, see the report at: <http://ncrlt.org/sites/ncrlt.org/files/Timber%20Harvesting%20in%20HumCo.pdf>.

APPENDIX C

STEERING COMMITTEE AND AUTHORS

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We would like to extend a special thanks to the Dialogues Working Group members who repeatedly gathered to share ideas, information, and personal stories pertaining to working lands in Humboldt County. These individuals have been instrumental in visualizing possibilities, defining problems, and identifying approaches for maintaining working lands. Working Group members include: James Able, Blake Alexandre, Mike Atkins, Greg Blomstrom, Lisa Brown, Maya Conrad, Victoria Copeland, Richard Dorn, Ali Freedlund, Walt Giacomini, Steve Hackett, Madeline Holtcamp, Steve Horner, Gordon Leppig, Sungnome Madrone, Mark Lovelace, Claire McAdams, Tasha Mckee, Kevin Mckernan, Mike Miles, Dina Moore, Leland Mora, Kathleen Moxon, Denver Nelson, Butch Parton, John Rogers, Gary Rynearson, Jennifer Rice, Rondal Snodgrass, Sandra Spalding, Martha Spencer, Charlie Tripodi, and Yana Valachovic.

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