My Word

We're striving to conserve our wild and working places

By Mike Cipra and Rees Hughes

How fortunate we are to live surrounded by soaring forests and woodlands, crystal-clear rivers and shaded streams, verdant coastal mountains, and picturesque coastline. We are blessed with a richness of locally produced food and fiber, working forestlands, and productive farms and ranchlands. Maintaining a balance between production and preservation is of critical importance to all of us. But, determining this balance has all too often been framed as a winner-take-all struggle.

The Northcoast Regional Land Trust is dedicated to promoting a very different kind of narrative. Every day we work with private landowners to establish conservation agreements that keep our region's working farms, ranches, and forestlands intact. This approach protects wildlife habitat while supporting agricultural production. This is the story about land that we all win. We're lucky that such opportunities exist.

We can't take this for granted. A 2010 survey of agricultural landowners in Humboldt County found that 65 percent have no succession plan in place for conveying land to the next generation. These landowners represent 130,000 acres of intact agricultural land that produce food and fiber for our families and prime habitat for wildlife. And, the average age of respondents in this survey was over 60. Combine this demographic shift with the extremely high demand for 40-acre parcels on the North Coast, and you can see that there is the potential for a lot of the land that makes our area special to be cut up and damaged over the next 20 years. That is not the kind of story about land that we want to tell our children.

The Northcoast Regional Land Trust believes that by working across perceived boundaries, we can protect the land we love and bolster the economy that keeps us fed, clothed, and housed. We believe that finding this balance is possible because we have helped it happen — Northcoast Regional Land Trust has worked with courageous and visionary landowners to protect more than 25,000 acres of working farms, ranches, and forests since 2000. And we're not stopping now, because we know there's a huge job ahead of us.

If this kind of collaborative work sounds exciting to you, we'd like you to join us for our Annual Celebration. This event, which is happening on Saturday, Oct. 11 at the River Lodge in Fortuna, celebrates the bountiful wild and working lands in Humboldt, Trinity and Del Norte counties, as well as the diverse people who work together to keep our land productive, our water and wildlife healthy, and our economy vital.

The community calls this celebration “Boots and Birkenstocks” because it brings out the full spectrum of people we work with. We could not do the work of protecting thousands of acres of productive land and water without such broad community support. People from widely different backgrounds, walks of life, and political perspectives break bread together — a full dinner of locally-produced beef, lamb, seafood, vegetables, and fruit, all from North Coast producers. If you're feeling jaded about the gridlock of polarizing politics, this night will provide the antidote: one look around the room and you'll see the diversity the Land Trust brings together, you'll take part in engaging conversations, you'll laugh, you'll share a drink with someone you never imagined you could, and you'll be reminded of the hope that exists in our collaborative effort to protect what is most important to us — the land.

Our sponsors for the event highlights the diversity of stakeholders we invite to our work: the North Coast Co-op, Pierson Building Center, Humboldt Redwood Company/Mendocino Redwood Company, American Ag Credit, Emerald City Laundry, Humboldt Grasped Beef, Pacific Watershed Associates, The Land Man, The Shaw Group, Zwedling, Bragg, and Mainzer, Humboldt Land Title Company, Alexander Family EcoDairy Farms, Cledenhen's Cider Works, Ferndale Farms, and Los Bagels.

To learn more about the Northcoast Regional Land Trust or to purchase tickets for our annual celebration, go to www.nclt.org or call 707-822-2242. We look forward to seeing you on Oct. 11 and hearing your story of the land.

Northcoast Regional Land Trust Executive Director Mike Cipra resides in Bayside. Rees Hughes is a Northcoast Regional Land Trust board member and Arcata resident.