



Early Autumn

Steven Taylor

Pathways for Conservation

The Northcoast Regional Land Trust (NRLT) has more active conservation projects than ever before and we continue to hear from people interested in conserving their land. This is great news for wild and working lands in northwestern California! We thought it could be helpful to get back to basics and talk through the ways properties can be conserved. While NRLT specializes in conserving relatively large tracts of land, we are always happy to talk about strategies to protect a particular property regardless of its size.

The most common way our Land Trust conserves land is by working with property owners to develop a conservation easement. To date, NRLT has completed 22 conser-

vation easements on properties ranging from less than 20 acres to over 15,000 acres, with an average size of 2,700 acres. A conservation easement is a voluntary, legal agreement that permanently protects the property's agricultural land, wildlife habitat, forests, and other conservation values by restricting uses of the land, such as subdivision or development. Each easement's terms are tailored to the property, landowner, and funding agency needs.

Once the easement is completed, the property remains in private ownership and can be sold, leased, or passed on to heirs. The conservation easement is held by a land trust or other qualified entity who ensures that the easement terms are

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From the Board President

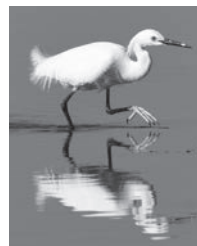
As we watch one season transform to another, this autumn brings the spirit of gratitude to mind. I'd like to highlight some of the blessings I'm counting with NRLT:

- **Our landowner partners** are dedicated to protecting the natural values of their properties for generations to come. Earlier this year, I enjoyed attending the Wagner Family celebration of their conservation easement. Five generations have contributed to this enduring legacy, symbolized by their "Trees Forever" emblem – which struck me as an embodiment of NRLT's mission, too.
- **Our staff**, who I prefer to think of as a team, work cohesively to monitor existing conservation easements, develop new projects, and educate the public and student groups about the natural world and our role as stewards. Our organization would not be as successful without them and the strengths each of them bring to the table.
- **Our board of directors** are a remarkable group of people of which I am fortunate to be a member. Their knowledge and experience are integral to our organization's operations and I am truly appreciative of each of their contributions.
- **Our board of advisors** represents an even broader spectrum of intelligence and wisdom and provides invaluable support to NRLT in numerous ways.
- Finally, **our strong and supportive community**, who come together with a common goal of ensuring wild and working lands remain intact for future generations. Together, we keep land in production and retain open spaces. In doing so, we safeguard a rural lifestyle for our children and grandchildren to experience as well.

It is ultimately the people who make, shape, and maintain this organization. Many of you have heard that our Operations and Development Director of six years, Beth Bray, has accepted a job with the Humboldt Senior Resource Center. While we miss her, we are excited by what the future holds as we build up our team and move forward all the amazing conservation work underway at NRLT. Thank you for supporting this important work now and forever. Wishing everyone a wonderful holiday season ahead!

Warmest Regards,

Susan Moranda
Susan Moranda



GET OUTSIDE!

Winter Birding: As trees lose their leaves, it becomes easier to spot the many feathered visitors at Freshwater Farms Reserve. Record your sightings of golden-crowned kinglets, Aleutian geese, great egrets, bushtits, and more on ebird.org. The 0.75-mile nature trail is open to the public every day from 9am to 6pm (or dusk). Dress for the weather and please leave dogs at home.

King Tides: *January 11th, 12th, and February 9th*; Coastal communities, including Freshwater Farms Reserve. Witness the power of water that shapes our coastal lands and visualize what future sea levels may look like at Freshwater Farms Reserve and other tidally influenced lands in our region. Find resources and maps at coastal.ca.gov/kingtides.

Stay tuned for scheduled interpretive walks and stewardship events with NRLT and partners in 2024! Dates will be announced on our website, ncrlt.org/events, social media pages, and through email. Please email info@ncrlt.org to sign up for our email list.

Correction to Spring 2023 Newsletter: NRLT regrets an error in the first paragraph of, "Partnerships Restore Oak Woodlands" (NRLT Newsletter, Spring 2023). The article incorrectly lists "white-tailed deer" as a wildlife species that benefits from oak woodlands in our region. White-tailed deer (*Odocoileus virginianus*) do not occur in northwestern California. The article should have instead named the Columbian black-tailed deer (*Odocoileus hemionus columbianus*), a subspecies of mule deer which is native to the Pacific Coast.

Trail User Voices – Clarene Stephens

In 2019, I left behind the familiar landscapes of my home in upstate New York, and came west to be near my son in Humboldt County. I grew up on the Finger Lakes, where rolling farmlands, diverse woodlands, and freshwater dominate the land. I found a familiar landscape at Freshwater Farms Reserve (FWFR) and it has become my sanctuary.

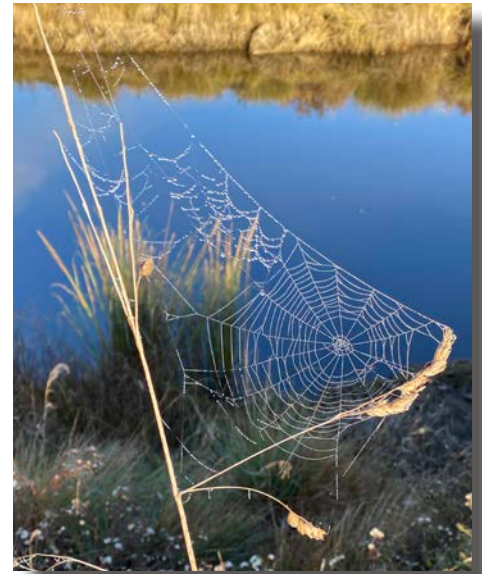
The more I came out to FWFR, the more attached I became to the land, and now it is a regular part of my life. Over four years of walking here, sometimes as often as twice a day, I've built my own connection to it all.

One vivid memory is of a mother otter patiently teaching her baby how to fish. She had three of them with her, and I watched,

captivated for some time. Eventually, she came up to me, tiny fish in hand, completely at ease with my presence. It's these moments where I feel like I belong here.

I started developing relationships with the trees, too. I've nurtured struggling saplings and watch them grow. I can't save them all, but the ones I do become sentimental markers for me along the trail.

People sometimes ask me why I come to the same place again and again, but I say it's different every time. Through the years, I've come to know the subtle shifts in the day's rhythm. Mornings are vibrant with activity, and then it gets quiet around midday. That changes again as evening comes, and with the seasons, too.



Signs of wildlife abound at Freshwater Farms Reserve – including this spiderweb captured by Clarene.



Clarene on a summer walk along the Nature Trail at Freshwater Farms Reserve.

It's a place to breathe, a giving place, and a reminder of the beauty that surrounds us right in town. So many others come out here, too – walkers, birders, families. Many people come here just to shake off the day or embrace a new one.

For me, it's more than a place to visit; it's a space I've grown to steward and cherish. I may not own it, but it's undeniably a part of me. While I will always miss upstate New York, FWFR grounded me in this new home and for that, I am deeply grateful.

Clarene Stephens is a devoted trail user, and supporter of NRLT.

Spanish Language EdVenture Quest and Family Walk at Freshwater Farms Reserve

Visitors to Freshwater Farms Reserve can now complete the EdVenture Quest in Spanish (*available online or at our office, 901 Samoa Blvd. Arcata*), thanks to funding from the WHALE TAIL® grants program of the California Coastal Commission. To launch the new translation this September, NRLT hosted a Spanish-language Family Walk in collaboration with Cal Poly Humboldt ¡Échale Ganas! y Camino al Rancho, and Friends of the Dunes. Families enjoyed interactive experiences on the land and a special performance by Ballet Folclórico Infantil de Arcata.



Pathways for Conservation

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honored by present and future landowners. Completing a conservation easement is a way to leave a legacy of land conservation by ensuring a property stays whole, forever.

Landowners can choose to either donate or sell a conservation easement on their property. If a conservation easement is voluntarily donated and has clear public benefit, it may qualify as a charitable tax deduction. This can even apply to transactions where only a portion of the value is donated. Regardless of possible tax benefits, donated easements are an excellent way to conserve properties of all sizes.

For landowners interested in selling a conservation easement on their property, there are numerous funding partners NRLT works with, including state and federal agencies and private foundations. To be eligible for funding, a property needs to encompass the values each funding partner is interested in protecting and NRLT will work to identify the best fit for each project.



Conserving properties of any size ensure wildlife, like this buckeye butterfly at Charles Mountain Ranch, have healthy habitats now and forever.

Land can also be conserved by donating property to an organization such as NRLT. Gifts of land can happen as a donation during the property owner's lifetime or as a bequest to the organization upon their passing. If a landowner is interested in ensuring their land is conserved, they can enter into an agreement with the Land Trust detailing the terms of the property's stewardship should it continue to be owned by NRLT, or the terms of a conservation easement that NRLT will complete if the property is ever sold (*see page 5 to read how Dr. Louise Watson did this to conserve her Trinidad property before her passing*). In cases where a previously donated property is sold by NRLT,

whether it has a conservation easement on it or not, the proceeds from the sale provide critical support in completing other land conservation projects.

Regardless of the method used to conserve a property, ensuring that open spaces, working ranches and forestlands, and diverse habitats remain part of our community helps our region continue to be a special place to live, work, and play.

For more information about how to conserve your property, small or large, visit our website at nrlt.org/what-we-do/conservation-easements or give us a call anytime at (707) 822-2242 to talk over the options.



Retired surveyor, Jim Baker, shows NRLT Project Manager, Zach Wenderott, a blaze mark on an oak tree at a prospective conservation easement property.”



The conservation easement on Diamond D Ranch protects the land for the Dunn children and all generations to come.

Gifts of Land: A small property makes a big impact

The Dr. Watson Story

In 2009, Dr. Louise Watson passed away after 92 years of an active and fulfilling life. She was a professor at Cal Poly Humboldt who loved people, wildlife, and organizations that work to protect open space. Years before her passing, Louise worked with her attorney and close friends to formalize a planned gift of property in her will to NRLT. When asked why she decided to gift the property, she shared, “I don’t want the land being broken up into a bunch of lots and sold.” She found satisfaction in knowing that upon her death, her property would both be protected from development while also providing funding for the Land Trust to protect additional open spaces and wildlife habitat in the region.

Upon receiving the gift of property from Dr. Watson’s estate in 2010, NRLT began the process of developing the conservation easement consistent with her wishes. The 13-acre property was listed for sale and NRLT was fortunate to find the perfect fit in a prospective buyer, Lynne Zeleny, who purchased the property in 2011. The conservation easement was finalized immediately thereafter. More than a decade later, Lynne continues to love the property and cares for it as Dr. Watson would have loved to see.

Lynne’s Stewardship of the Property Today

When I first saw this property in 2011, I saw more than just a piece of land. It was a sanctuary from the hustle and bustle of city life. The decision to purchase it was easy, and when I learned about Louise’s wish to

conserve this place, it resonated deeply with me. The conservation easement attached to it felt like a promise of protection rather than a restriction.

I’ve poured my time and effort into caring for this land, partially because I know how ecologically important it is, but mostly because I love it. I have no intention of ever selling this land. We’re going to die here. We keep planting stuff as if we are going to live for 200 years. Every tree and plant here means something to me. I tend to it, knowing it will outlast me.

Explaining the concept of a conservation easement can be a challenge. People often focus on the restrictions, but for me, it’s about a shared goal. It’s about ensuring

this land thrives for generations, free from development threats. The responsibility is empowering, not constraining. I enjoy tending to the earth, hands deep in the soil, and seeing new life grow.

Looking ahead, I hope someone else will value this land as much as I do. Thanks to Dr. Louise Watson’s foresight and the conservation easement with NRLT, I’m confident this vision will carry on. It’s an honor to be a part of preserving this piece of nature.



Today, a forested trail carefully maintained by Lynne, creates a loop within the 13-acre Trinidad property.



Lynne stewarding the coastal bluff property by “reforesting the forest,” as she calls it.



NRLT Board Members visit a prospective easement property.

Appreciating the Board of Directors

While our focus is on the land, it’s the people who make the work at NRLT so special. From landowners to donors to agency partners, there are a lot of people that collaborate to move our conservation work forward. A group of thirteen dedicated volunteer board members lead the organization, devoting their time and expertise to further the mission of the Land Trust. The NRLT board works hard and plays hard – and has a great sense of humor.

This summer, board and staff gathered for a retreat at the Benbow KOA to take a deep dive into the strategic plan, do some team building, and tour a ranch in Southern Humboldt where a future conservation easement is in the works. Taking the time to get to know each other better, as well as spend time with our landowner partners, makes a stronger board and a stronger organization.

Views from Monitoring Season

NRLT monitors each of our completed conservation easements annually to ensure the protection of the properties' conservation values. NRLT staff, board members, and partners join these visits, which are typically accompanied by tours and an opportunity to connect with the property owners or managers. The following is an excerpt from "Reflections from a Monitoring Visit" about a visit to Chalk Mountain Ranch; the full essay is published on our website. Photos include a variety of properties monitored this year.

Chalk Mountain Ranch has been home to the Barnwell family for the past 125 years, and each generation has worked hard to conserve it for the next. The Barnwell family put the first conservation easement on part of their property in 2010, and another easement on an adjacent tract in 2012 – NRLT holds both and monitors them each year. Which is why we were there, on a Monday

Cattle graze in a late-summer pasture at Valley View Ranch.



morning in July, parked in that wide turnout waiting for Brandon and Lauri, the fifth-generation owners and managers of the ranch.

"There's been more elk lately," Lauri has her eyes on every corner of this expansive ranch, from regular excursions to the cattle barns to a network of game cameras only she can find. Brandon can tell you about the falcon nests that have been on Chalk Rock since at least his grandmother's diary notes of the 1920s. They know this place, they love this place, they are this place.

It's no easy feat managing a property of this size – feeding cows, managing timber, repairing roads, stewarding grasslands, and taking care of the many people who live and work on the land alongside them – but they do it with a sense of duty. Keeping the property whole and productive is hard work, but the rewards for their family and the land that sustains them make it all worthwhile.

Read the full essay at nrlt.org/news-announcements.



The oak woodlands at Chalk Mountain Ranch are carefully stewarded by 5th generation landowner, Brandon Barnwell, for both conservation and recreational values.



An old barn in a pasture on the more than 4,700 acre Iaqua Ranch.



Longtime ranch hand and timber operator, Tony Sauers, brings his companions for a tour of Grizzly Creek Forest in July.

Boots & Birkenstocks Celebrates Conservation of Wild & Working Lands

This year's Boots & Birkenstocks Annual Celebration at the Fortuna River Lodge on October 7th was a chance for our community to break bread together as we celebrated our shared love of the land. The evening included live music by All Wheel Drive, a live auction led by Lee Mora and Natalie Arroyo, and a delicious dinner prepared by Dorris and Daughter Catering and Pete Bussman, and a crew of volunteers tending the grills. The live and silent auctions were filled with items and experiences thoughtfully donated by our community.

With a room full of many generous individuals and businesses, the event brought in \$60,000 to support NRLT's conservation projects and programs. Many thanks to the farmers, producers, landowners, businesses, board members, advisors, staff, and volunteers who made this event possible.

A special thanks to our event sponsors:

Points West Surveying Company, Green Diamond Resource Company, Hunter, Hunter, & Hunt, Wildberries Marketplace, Mendocino and Humboldt Redwood Companies, North Fork Lumber Company, American AgCredit, Hubbard's German Auto, Humboldt Grassfed Beef, Harbers Insurance, Planwest Partners, Stillwater Sciences, North Point Consulting Group, Lone Star Ranch, Ramone's Bakery and Café, Coast Central Credit Union, Redwood Capital Bank, Umpqua Bank, and Erin Kelly.



Board members Julia Cavalli, an environmental analyst, and Joseph Alexandre, a local dairy farmer, spoke about the importance of NRLT's work and the meaning it contributes to their lives.



◀ A young generation of land stewards, Callie and Christian Alexandre (Alexandre Family Farm) and Zach Johnson and Lizzie Conti (Wagner Ranch) enjoyed the festivities.



The Mora family of Humboldt Auction Yard and Humboldt Grassfed Beef celebrating together. Sarah, Lee, and Eileen Mora are longtime supporters of NRLT. Lee (center) expertly leads the Annual Celebration auction each year.



Travis May, Thomas Dunklin, and Duncan McNeil grill locally caught tuna.

Thank you for a beautiful Summer Celebration!



The 5th Summer Celebration at Freshwater Farms Reserve was a joyous success! This year's event on August 5th was bigger than ever and included a raffle and new family activities. But the long-standing stars of the evening shone the brightest – big thank you to Huckleberry Flint for continuing to captivate our conservation community year after year!

We would also like to thank the opening band, Elderberry Rust String Band; our many flavorful vendors; the delectable cake bakers; and the many volunteers and supporters who came out. Additionally, enormous thanks to the sponsors of the event: North Fork Lumber Company, Wildberries Marketplace, Humboldt and Mendocino Redwood Companies, LACO Associates, and North Coast Co-op.

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**Featured Artist –
Steven Taylor**

As a child, Steven Taylor had a natural knack for drawing. Practicality led him into a career in carpentry, but his artistic journey later evolved into a passion for realistic oil painting. In retirement he has revisited fine arts as a lens for appreciating our local landscapes.

Through plein air painting, Steven aims to capture the beauty of our region. He finds potential compositions in almost every view and often pauses to capture reference photos or simply take in the scene. He continues to hone his craft and engage with the local artist community. Steven is an active member of the Redwood Art Association and the Humboldt Arts Council. You can find more of his work at steventaylorart.com.



Road to Mattole



American AgCredit

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