

NORTHCOAST REGIONAL LAND TRUST



Forest Home Heifers

acrylic by Jimmie Fay Beal Mattila

Protecting Northcoast Landscapes

by Annette Holland

What unites everyone involved with the NRLT is our love for the unique beauty and vitality of the Northcoast: for its people, its landscapes, its ways of life, its rivers and wildlife, its farms, ranches and forests. We also recognize how quickly change could transform this region, and how quickly the qualities we value could be lost.

As more people move away from congested areas where the California dream has lost its luster, pressures for development on the Northcoast will intensify. Growth may be inevitable, but we can learn from mistakes made other places, and channel development away from areas that are essential to the fabric of our communities and the natural balance of life in our region. When ranches are converted into subdivisions, when wetland or prime farmland is paved over, or when roads are extended into a wilderness area, the loss is permanent.

Not long ago, the vast majority of Americans lived in rural areas. Now, the majority live in cities, suburbs and towns. But

humans seem to have some yearning for connection with the open fields and forests. Up here, we are fortunate to be able to see our food grown locally, to enjoy a walk in clean air, to observe the wildlife of our region. We have the chance to maintain forests where trees can either be harvested in a sustainable way, or – in important areas – be protected as habitat or for recreation.

Recent research into the public health effects of land-use patterns demonstrates that land use decisions have a tremendous impact on our health. The conditions we live in are as much a key to good health as what we eat. As the environment deteriorates in terms of air and water quality, as congestion, traffic, noise, and stress increase, our physical and mental health decline in measurable ways.

Since the end of World War II, California's astonishing growth has spread urban and suburban development through former grasslands, orchards, woodlands and farms. For a while,

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Newsletter design by Tempra Board & Carrie Grant

Letter from the Executive Director



During a recent trip to the Bay Area, I found myself in the throngs of daily commuters fighting their way back home after the work day. As I emerged from the Oakland Hills, the

San Francisco Bay shimmered through the smog and traffic. I wondered what the Bay Area looked like in 1850 before eight lanes of traffic and millions of residents.

The next time you are driving along Highway 101 or 299, imagine: what would the area look like paved with city streets, subdivisions and strip malls? You may think, "That would never happen here." But think again. Many people in places like Stockton, Santa Rosa, and Gilroy probably thought the same thing thirty years ago.

Despite the dramatic population growth and urban sprawl ubiquitous in much of the state, the Northcoast is still an island filled with large expanses of farms, forestlands and beautiful open spaces that support our community and abundant native plants, fish and wildlife.

Strong community values and a deep connection with our landscape are two integral characteristics of the Northcoast. We are protecting our unique community through conservation of both working

landscapes and natural landscapes. Through land conservation tools such as conservation easements, providing the community with creative ways of preserving private lands, and supporting other local land trusts, we can work together to thwart the rapid development rampant throughout Central and Southern California.

To date, the NRLT workshops designed to teach landowners about land conservation tools have inspired dozens of landowners – from cattle ranchers to conservationists – to investigate conservation easements as a way of

We welcome the opportunity to help you find ways of protecting your cherished land for many years to come.

protecting their lands. We welcome the opportunity to help you find ways of protecting your cherished land for many years to come.

I am thrilled to be part of the Northcoast Regional Land Trust, an organization that aims to preserve our way of life throughout Humboldt, Del Norte and Trinity Counties, and I hope each of you will join me to help protect this beautiful landscape.

-Maya Conrad

NRLT Mission

The Northcoast Regional Land Trust is dedicated to the protection of working landscapes, farms, forests and grazing lands, and to the preservation and protection of land for its natural, educational, scenic and historic values.

We work with landowners on a voluntary basis to promote stewardship of Northern California's healthy and productive resource base, natural systems and quality of life.

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PLANNING FOR THE FUTURE

Developing a Regional Conservation Plan

by Shayne Green

What will the Northcoast regional landscape look like in 20 years? 50 years? 150 years? How will it function to sustain humans and other critters as global economic forces exert ever greater development pressures? Such questions reflect a common concern for all who value the kind of life that our Northcoast landscape now provides.

In creating the NRLT, founding board members solidified a shared commitment to protect and preserve landscapes that sustain regional economies, support a rich and distinctive flora and fauna, and elevate overall quality of life by maintaining natural, educational, scenic, and historic values. Yet developing regional land conservation strategies that address a wide variety of open space interests, ranging from working lands to wildlands, poses a unique challenge requiring open minds, attention to existing opportunities and unfolding threats, and an expansive vision of what is possible over time.

The NRLT is currently developing a regional conservation plan to formulate our long-term land protection goals and programmatic strategies to attain them.

We will: 1) identify key program areas and outline comprehensive strategies for protecting various land types across the region; 2) develop criteria for evaluating prospective projects and their potential contribution to NRLT's conservation goals; and 3) establish time frames and criteria to measure our success and identify needed improvements in the plan.

By examining what other agencies, organizations, and individuals are doing to

protect working and wild landscapes, we can identify existing gaps in conservation coverage and new ways for NRLT to supplement efforts already underway.

The NRLT has identified several potential program areas that reflect our values and perceived land protection needs. These include biological resources,

farmlands, ranches & timberlands, recreational & scenic resources, and wildlands. While there is considerable overlap among these categories, each

represents a unique conservation challenge likely requiring a customized approach.

In developing a regional plan, we are encouraged to imagine the character of a regional landscape that will shape future

possibilities for local residents and communities. A compass and map of our own creation, the plan inspires us to step purposefully forward into the great mystery of the open country ahead.

Developing regional land conservation strategies requires an expansive vision of what is possible over time.

Calendar of Events

October 3: Conservation Tools for Estate Planning and Tax Laws seminar

October 16 – 19: Land Trust Alliance Rally in Sacramento (www.lta.org)

November 13: Land Trust and Board of Governors Roundtable

Contact the NRLT at 822-2242 for more information.

Protecting Northcoast Landscapes

Continued from Page One

the arrival of newcomers lured by the "California dream" helped fuel an economic and population boom in our state. Now, we are beginning to recognize the price of sprawl. According to a study conducted by the Bank of America, the California Resources Agency and others, "Ironically, unchecked sprawl has shifted from an engine of California's growth to a force that now threatens to inhibit growth and degrade the quality of our life."

We may not yet be experiencing the effects of major suburbanization on the Northcoast, but we are not protected from its ills. If we want this region to retain the qualities that make it such a wonderful place, we need to take action. It seems clear that we can't look to

government to provide the solutions. We need to act as individuals to protect what we value, close to home.

Land Trusts offer ways for private citizens to protect land, in perpetuity, for its values as open space, whether as agricultural land, working forest or wilderness. Conservation easements, through which a landowner may convey certain rights – like the right to subdivide and develop land – are one tool that can help a local community determine its own future.

Those of us who have joined the Board of Directors or Board of Governors of the Northcoast Regional Land Trust are working hard to try to keep the Northcoast as productive, healthy and beautiful as it is. We urge you to join us.

NORTHCOAST AGRICULTURE: OPEN

Introducing NRLT's Farmland Protection Program

by *Tempra Board*

The Northcoast is not only defined by the grandeur and mystery of its ancient redwood forests, but also by its lush bottomlands—the alluvial plains of our area's many rivers as they snake their way to the sea. It is these fertile, green pastures that sustain a lively agricultural industry—one that further defines the rural quality of the Northcoast.

Excluding timber production, more than 25% of the land in Humboldt County is in agricultural production, with dairy being the most prominent industry. Our area's productive soil, mild climate and ample rainfall result in excellent pastureland that allows our dairy farmers to run herds that are only 10 to 20% the size of many dairies in the Central Valley.

The Northcoast also supports a unique niche in floral nursery production, as well as livestock grazing, field and row crops, organic vegetables, orchards, vineyards, medicinal herbs, spinning wools, and more. Productive farmland on the Northcoast provides us with a host of benefits, including open space and expansive views, habitat for many species of migrating birds and other wildlife, and locally-grown produce.

But it may surprise you to learn that agriculture could go extinct on the Northcoast. Between 1992 and 1997, Humboldt County lost 13,228 acres of farmland and 82 farms. Developers from southern California and the Bay Area are purchasing and converting the most productive, valuable, and desirable bottomlands for residential development. This not only results in the loss of agricultural production, but fuels environmentally-destructive, sprawling development on the outskirts of Northcoast cities such as Eureka, Arcata, McKinleyville, Fortuna and Crescent City.

The Humboldt County Planning Department, as it updates the County's General Plan, is paying close attention to the loss of agricultural land, and has developed a set of recommendations to address this crisis. The California Department of Conservation is working to protect farmland across the state with its California



Eel Canyon Farm in Humboldt County.

Photo: Carrie Grant

Farmland Conservancy Program.

Here at the Northcoast Regional Land Trust, we've created a new program that could save thousands of acres of Northcoast farmland. The goal of our Northcoast Farmland Conservation Program is to protect Humboldt and Del Norte County farmlands, specifically the most productive agricultural bottomlands, from conversion to residential or other non-agricultural use. We

will work with willing landowners to put in place conservation easements, which allow farmers to stay on their land, keep the land in sustainable production, and protect the Northcoast from sprawl.

An example of a conservation easement at work on agricultural land in Humboldt County is the 3,600-acre Howe Creek Ranch. Steve Hackett, whose family has been on the ranch for four generations, placed a conservation easement on the property to keep it from ever being subdivided or converted from agricultural use, and to protect important streamside habitat areas. According to *Coast & Ocean Magazine* (Winter 2000-2001), Hackett sees the easement as "precipitat[ing] a shift from the regulatory-driven crisis-management mode that typifies the rancher's life into a proactive mode designed to assure long-term sustainability." The California Coastal Conservancy and the Wildlife Conservation Board assisted with the purchase of the easement.

The NRLT is pleased to report that the California Department of Conservation will be awarding us a planning grant to begin our program in late 2003. The NRLT will hire a part-time Projects Manager to conduct a Regional Strategic Plan; provide outreach to landowners, agencies, and the greater community; and initiate conservation easement projects with interested landowners.

The NRLT is in discussion with several owners of prime farmland properties in Humboldt County. Watch for upcoming news about this program, and contact the NRLT at 822-2242 if you would like more information. To learn about the Department of Conservation's California Farmland Conservancy Program, call: (916) 322-9721, or go to: www.consrv.ca.gov/dlrp/cfcfp.

SPACE, HABITAT AND WAY OF LIFE

Jay Russ: Sustainable Ranching in Loleta

by *Tempra Board*

Jay Russ' 160-acre natural beef ranch lies on a narrow strip in the Loleta bottoms, south of the Humboldt Bay National Wildlife Refuge. The ranch was a dairy until the Russ family purchased it after the flood of 1964 — when the land was still covered with silt. Jay began to manage his father's livestock business in 1997, but not before earning a degree in architecture from UC Berkeley and living in the Bay Area for 10 years. "I lived in Oakland and commuted to San Francisco every day and then realized that I don't have to live like that."



Jay Russ practices sustainable "rest-rotational" grazing on his 160 acres in the Loleta bottoms.

Photo: Tempra Board

In addition to his Angus cattle, Highlander cattle from the Long Meadow Ranch (a specialty wine and beef co-op in Saint Helena), are summering at the ranch. Jay raises natural beef cattle, meaning they are not fed any growth hormones or antibiotics. Currently, Jay sells his cattle to a conventional feeding company in Southern California, however he is researching the possibility of raising and selling his grass-fed beef locally. Numerous studies indicate that grass-fed beef is healthier for consumers than grain-fed. Grass-fed beef is leaner and lower in calories, higher in Vitamin E, and higher in "good fats" such as Omega-3 fatty acids, which may help prevent heart disease, cancer, and other diseases (www.eatwild.com).

Jay practices what's called "rest-rotational" or "holistic resource management" on 120 acres, rotating his cattle in three to five-acre, high-density blocks and allowing the remaining area to rest. This type of grazing benefits the land, the cattle and the bottom

line. The cattle essentially "harvest" an area, eating the premium and the less desirable grasses, before they are moved to the next plot, resulting in a more efficient use of the land. Jay can see how much grass he has left before the cattle get to it, and he can see how well the grass is growing back after the cattle have moved on. Yellow-flowering birdsfoot trefoil is carpeting large sections of the property, a nitrogen-fixing legume that Jay says is indicative of the soil's health. The cattle do well, gaining an average of three to four pounds per day during the growing season.

In addition to fattening his cattle, it could be said that Jay is responsible for the feeding of one of the North Coast's most notable annual visitors. In March, the Humboldt Bay Wildlife Refuge counted an astounding 19,000 Aleutian geese feeding on the Loleta bottoms. Jay's ranch ranked comparably to the refuge in usage. The U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service wants to know how to employ Jay's grazing plan to the refuge. "They think I'm doing something right," he says. Jay admits that the geese are heavier grazers than the cattle, and he takes his cattle completely off the area when the geese are present to let the growth rebound. "I manage around the geese," he says.

The property includes flat pastureland to the west and 40 acres of hill on the east, which Jay says is essential here if you want to graze in the winter months. The high water mark from the past season's rains reached the top of Jay's four-foot fence. But already in the last ten years, neighboring ranches have been developed, with homes popping up on the desirable hillsides, removing them from production. Jay's biggest concern is the continued loss of these hillside parcels to development. "It's essential that this land stay open and productive," Jay says. Without winter grazing and the ability to move cattle to higher ground, ranchers like Jay could not make ends meet.

The biggest unknown is the future of Jay and his family's way of life in Humboldt County. A study by Northcoast Regional Land Trust founding member Ben Morehead shows that our County's agricultural producers are aging. A survey representing 40% of all agricultural producers in Humboldt County shows that 45% of respondents are over the age of 60. Jays says this could mean that more land will become available for ranchers to lease — or it could mean a rash of subdividing and development.

Jay feels a sense of success and satisfaction when he looks over his ranch and sees the grass growing back thickly after the rotation. It is this way of life, and the benefits it brings to Northcoast people and wildlife, that the NRLT is working to protect through its Northcoast Farmland Conservation Program.

LOCAL LAND TRUST HIGHLIGHTS

Humboldt North Coast Land Trust

The Humboldt North Coast Land Trust has been actively managing coastal property since our inception 24 years ago. Our properties are in the Trinidad area. Some of these are very popular and well used by the public, including Baker Beach, Houda Point, and the Merryman easement on Moonstone Beach.

This year with California Conservation Crews HNCLT replaced trail steps on their property leading to Indian Beach. The HNCLT can be reached at 677-0716, PO Box 457, Trinidad, CA 95570.

Sanctuary Forest

Our Lands Program focuses on the recovery of native salmon. Four hundred and fifty acres of key spawning and rearing habitat were added to the Sanctuary Forest in Anderson Creek, Lost River Corridor and the Mattole Connection, funded by our donors, the Wildlife Conservation Board, and Department of Fish and Game. A two-year project to decommission abandoned, eroding logging roads harmful to fish is drawing to a successful conclusion. Policy focuses on developing a resource management plan for our old-growth forest and salmon reserve in the Mattole Headwaters. Want to experience the Mattole headwaters in a whole new way? Become a Sanctuary Forest docent through our Education Program. For information: (707) 986-1087 or sanctuary@asis.com.

South Fork Trinity River Land Conservancy

The SFTRLCLC is dedicated to the protection, restoration and preservation of the South Fork Trinity River watershed in Trinity and Humboldt Counties. Eighty-five percent of the watershed is public land including six roadless areas. We are working with the California Wild Heritage Campaign to protect these areas with permanent wilderness designation. The SFTRLCLC is developing its land trust capacities and is working to protect smaller pieces of private land in Trinity and Humboldt Counties using conservation easements. This fall we will offer a watershed meeting in Hyampom with local landowners to discuss land protection opportunities on private and public lands. For information: wildriver.trinity@starband.net or (707) 574-1077.

Middle Mattole Conservancy



Redwoods in the Mattole headwaters.

Photo: Carrie Grant

The Middle Mattole Conservancy, located in the center of the Mattole River watershed, is coordinating outreach for the future Gilham Butte Management Plan. We'd like to invite everyone to share concerns and ideas for the future care of this special place.

Gilham Butte is an Area of Critical Environmental Concern (ACEC), and a Natural Resource Study Area. For twenty-six years people throughout Humboldt County have worked to protect this area as an important wildlife corridor between Humboldt Redwoods State Park and the King Range National Conservation Area.

We look forward to creating a document allowing for recreation and protection of wildlife values. We appreciate the willingness of the Arcata BLM, Save-the-Redwoods League and Ancient Forests International to work with the community.

Written comments can be mailed to: Middle Mattole Conservancy, PO Box 73, Honeydew, CA 95545, or e-mail us at middlemattole@asis.com.

McKinleyville Land Trust

The McKinleyville Land Trust (MLT) is reviewing the draft management plan for its 74-acre Mad River Bluffs (MRB) property. At MRB, MLT's former Americorps member, John Moseman, spearheaded the installation of a bench on a scenic overlook providing a spectacular view of the Mad River estuary, coastal dunes and Pacific Ocean.

Also, the McKinleyville High School wood shop class helped design a weather-resistant sign and interpretive display case for the entrance to the MRB property. The MLT accepted two "Offers To Dedicate" coastal access easements north of Trinidad from the Coastal Commission.

For the past few years the MLT has relied on Youthserve Americorps members to fulfill some staffing needs. The loss of the Americorps program's funding will result in overloading the MLT's hard-working but small volunteer Board of Directors.

The MLT is looking for volunteers to serve on committees and on the Board. Contact Dennis Halligan at (707) 269-1370.

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FEATURED LAND TRUST

Filling a Coastal Niche

by Lisa D. Hoover

Land Trust Program Chair, Friends of the Dunes

For the past 20 years, Friends of the Dunes has involved the community in coastal dune conservation through various educational programs and restoration activities, such as docent-led dune walks, the Bay to Dunes School Program, and removal of the non-native yellow bush lupine. In keeping with the mission of the Friends, we expanded our conservation tools and became a land trust in 2000.

The Friends' land trust is coastally-oriented and fills a unique niche in the north coast land trust community. Our stewardship efforts include an array of distinctive and limited habitats associated with the dunes, maritime forest, freshwater wetlands, and baylands of the North Spit and Humboldt Bay. These areas provide habitat for rare and threatened species such as the snowy plover, Humboldt Bay wallflower, and beach layia. Two important features of our coastal habitats are the largest population of the rare lichen, *Bryoria spiralifera* and extensive "stop-over" habitat for migrating birds. Along the west coast, these communities are limited in their distribution; many are highly degraded, rendering native and ecologically functioning communities rare and threatened.

Threats to dune habitats include the spread of non-native, invasive plant species, particularly European beachgrass, yellow bush lupine, and English ivy. The beachgrass and lupine dominate the environments of Clam Beach, Mad River Beach and large portions of Manila and Samoa beaches. English ivy spreads into the maritime forest. The pervasive nature of these plants diminishes native species and homogenizes the landscape.

Cooperative restoration efforts over the years have kept invasive plants at bay in portions of the coastal environment that are publicly owned and managed for natural resource values (e.g. U.S. Fish &

Wildlife Service, Bureau of Land Management, Manila Community Services District). The north spit of Humboldt Bay is owned privately by several individuals who have varying objectives for their parcels. Of concern for the conservation of coastal environments is the potential for discordance between the management objectives of adjacent properties. The Friends' land trust came into being to address this concern by

providing an option to "soften" the edge across property lines through the acquisition of easements or fee title to land for restoration, education, research and coastal public access (where appropriate).

Using Geographic Information Systems (GIS) technology we printed an aerial map of the north spit displaying the relationship between public and private land ownerships, and developed data tables with information on habitat quality codes and parcel size. We then identified parcels considered strategically important from a conservation perspective. With assistance from the California Coastal Conservancy, we are now exploring acquisition options with a coastal landowner. If secured, this transaction would encompass approximately 110 acres of maritime forest with freshwater swamp habitat included.

Friends of the Dunes recognizes the necessity of land conservation along the coast due to ongoing threats from invasive plant species, habitat fragmentation and the potential for irreversible developments. Our approach requires cooperation not only among those that own, manage, and steward north coast dunes, but among other entities working to conserve lands for open space, wildlife and fish habitats, farms and forests, as well as family-owned ranches. We share a common interest – land conservation on the north coast.

For more information please contact the Friends of the Dunes office at (707) 444-1397 or fod@arcatanet.org. Land Trust Committee Members: Lisa D. Hoover-Chair, Jerry Martien, John St. Marie, Bill Weaver, and Ragen Tilzey.



The distinctive Northcoast dune environment.

Photo: Lisa D. Hoover

Mission: To conserve coastal properties on the north coast of California through various land conservation tools (e.g. easements, willing seller acquisitions) ensuring that land use is consistent with the ecological values of native coastal environments and with quality of life values of the north coast.