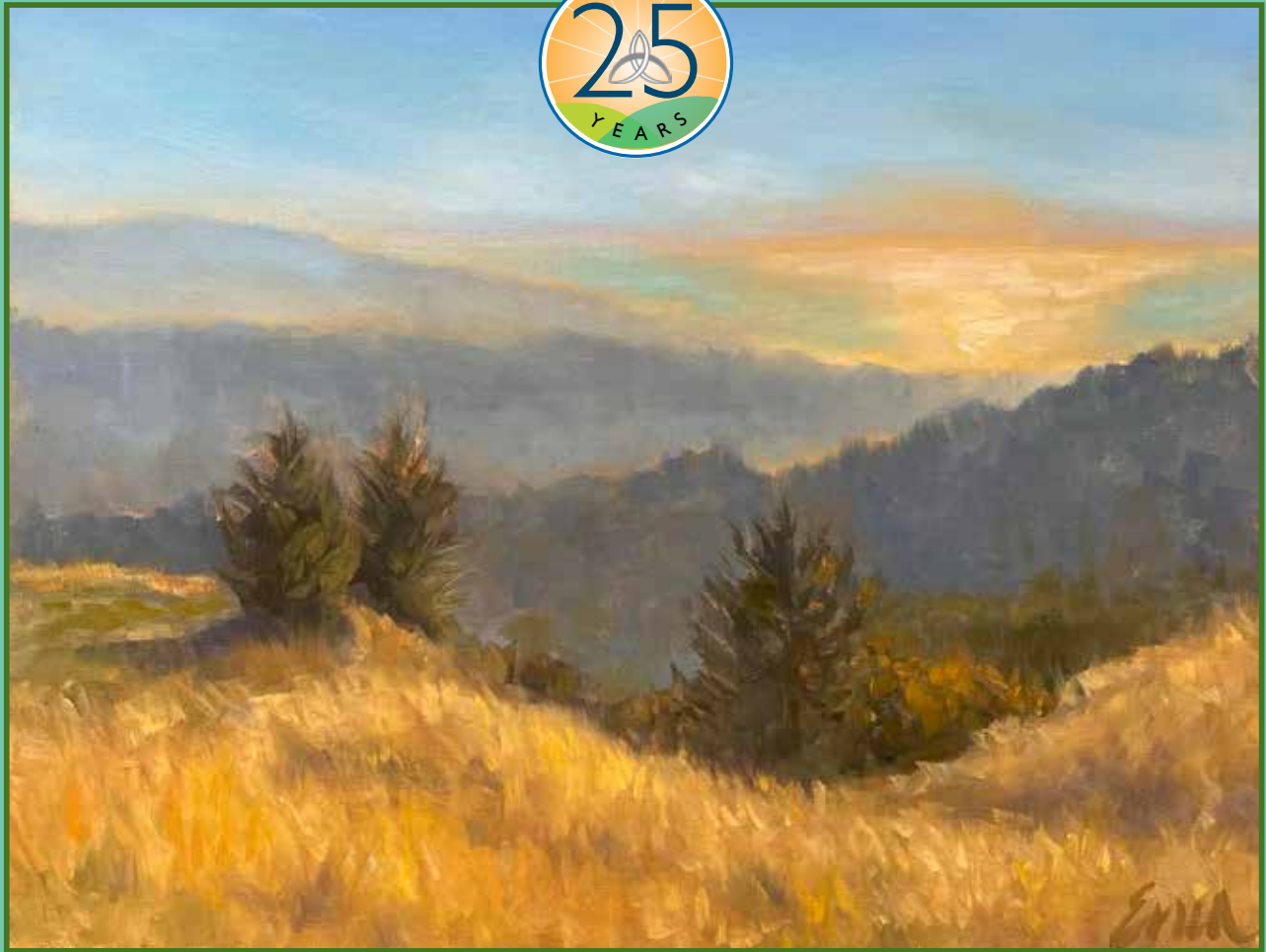




SPRING 2025

NORTHCOAST REGIONAL LAND TRUST



Golden Hour

Erica Brooks

Coming Together for the Land: How NRLT Began 25 Years Ago

This year, the Northcoast Regional Land Trust (NRLT) is turning 25. As we celebrate this big milestone, we want to share the story of how it all began – with two friends, a big idea, and a group of people who believed in working together to protect the land they loved. In a recent conversation with NRLT founders David McMurray and Rondal Snodgrass, they shared their stories about NRLT’s early days, and the enduring values that have guided us since day one.

David and Rondal first began working together in southern Humboldt in the late 1980s. They were quick to recall the “timber wars,” a divisive and emotional time in our region, no matter where your beliefs fell on the spectrum. In the midst

of that tension, a story was unfolding in the Mattole River watershed that would lead to a regionwide conservation effort. At the Redwoods Monastery, Sister Miriam Darden noticed tags on trees bordering the monastery’s forest and she gathered a small group of concerned citizens to protect it – among them Rondal and David.

“We found that cooperation and negotiation rather than confrontation was a good strategy,” said Rondal. “So we bought the land, trusting that the funds would appear when we really needed them,” David adds, laughing. “That’s just how we did things back then.”

This grassroots group would go on to form Sanctuary Forest, a watershed-based land trust which still operates today. By the

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From the Executive Director

Earlier this month, NRLT board members, advisors, and staff gathered to celebrate the expanding corridors of conserved working lands, wildlife habitat, and the people – including you – who have made it possible through support in its many forms. We feel incredibly thankful for everyone who has made this organization what it is today!

As we celebrate the Northcoast Regional Land Trust's 25th anniversary, it is inspiring to hear the stories of this organization's beginnings, take pride in all that has been accomplished together, and reflect on the importance of continuity for generations to come. In this issue we also celebrate the recently completed Butler Valley Ranch conservation easement – a story that showcases a multi-generational commitment to land stewardship.

All of our work together – from 65,000 acres conserved (and counting!), to ongoing wetland and oak woodland restoration, to community programs and educational field trips – has been possible because of supporters like you.

In a time when many of our nation's institutions are being challenged – including many of the public trust agencies that have been so important to carrying out our Land Trust's mission – organizations like NRLT will likely play an even more important role in conserving the places we all care about, the resources we depend on, and the vital habitats that are part of our world's splendor.

So, thank you, dear reader, for being a part of the important work that was envisioned 25 years ago, and with all of you we will continue to lead in conserving the wild and working lands that make this corner of the world so extraordinary.

With gratitude,



Dan Ehresman, Executive Director

CALENDAR OF EVENTS

25th Anniversary Events: Join NRLT and partners on the 25th of each month through October to celebrate our 25th anniversary! More details at ncrlt.org/events

Summer Celebration at Freshwater Farms Reserve: *Saturday, August 9th, 4 pm - 8 pm, Freshwater Farms Reserve (5851 Myrtle Ave., Eureka CA).* Help NRLT raise funds and awareness for conservation in our region, while enjoying music by Huckleberry Flint, local food and drink vendors, and family friendly activities. This event sells out every year – tickets will be available online this summer!

Annual Celebration - Boots and Birkenstocks: *Saturday, October 11, 5pm - 9 pm, Fortuna River Lodge (1800 Riverwalk Dr.).* Celebrate community and conservation at our annual gathering. Enjoy a locally produced dinner, open bar, music, and live and silent auctions. More information will be available at ncrlt.org/events.

Stewardship Days: Join us and the Humboldt Trails Council every third Sunday of the month through October to steward the trails at Freshwater Farms Reserve. Safety equipment, tools, and coffee provided. **June 15, July 20, Aug. 17, Sept. 21, Oct. 19.**

For more information and the most up to date calendar, go to ncrlt.org/events or follow us on social media! You can also subscribe to our mailing list by emailing info@ncrlt.org.

NRLT's Mission: *The Northcoast Regional Land Trust is dedicated to the protection and economic viability 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.*

A Family Legacy: Protecting Butler Valley Ranch for Future Generations

We're proud to announce the permanent protection of Butler Valley Ranch – NRLT's most recently completed conservation easement and one rooted in deep family ties, a love for the land, and a legacy of stewardship.

Owned by the Carrington family since the late 1970s, Butler Valley Ranch spans 2,440 acres of farmland, forests, and rangeland nestled along the Mad River. This private working landscape produces food, timber, and hay – but its impact stretches far beyond the fenceline. With over 3.5 miles of riverfront, the ranch supports clean water, native grasslands, and habitat for Roosevelt elk, eagles, salmon, and more. By protecting this land, we're safeguarding what makes Humboldt County special: natural beauty, clean waters, land-based livelihoods, and a shared sense of place.

"It's just a gorgeous piece," says landowner Francis Carrington, who first partnered with NRLT to conserve the Iaqua Ranch nearly two decades ago. "It's got everything – elk, deer, trees – and we raised our kids there on the river. Sometimes we can hear salmon swimming upstream in the riffle."

Thanks to the Carringtons' vision and a grant from the California Department of Conservation's Sustainable Agricultural Lands Conservation Program, this land will remain whole and productive, even as pressures on rural properties continue to grow. "At the time we first bought it, we were always scared they would build a dam," Francis recalled. "They voted it down just at the last minute. Now, the right thing is happening to the ranch."

Today, Francis's grandson Derek manages the ranch and is raising his own children in the same house he grew up in. "I wouldn't take it away for anything," he says. "My kids absolutely love the ranch – they never want to leave."



Butler Valley Ranch

Derek's approach to land management reflects both tradition and care. "We're old-fashioned. It's just me, my wife, and our kids out here – no fancy equipment. We grow hay to feed our cattle through the winter, rotate them through pastures, and take care of what needs doing," he explains. "Pretty much as organic as you can get – we don't fertilize, don't spray. Just try to keep it clean and healthy."

His daily work – mending fences, prepping for hay season, rotating cattle, and pulling invasive thistles – helps ensure the ranch's ecological health while honoring the family's vision. "I just hope it stays the same," Derek says. "Ranching on large properties is kind of going away in California, but I think it should stick around. There's so much wildlife out here, and it's really nice to get to witness it."

This easement also marks a full-circle moment: Butler Valley Ranch is the Carringtons' second property conserved with NRLT, after Iaqua Ranch – NRLT's first ever conservation easement project completed back in 2006.

"This is about continuity," says NRLT Executive Director Dan Ehresman. "It's about honoring the past, supporting the present, and protecting treasured lands for future generations."

While each easement is unique, the Carringtons have now voluntarily limited future development on two expansive properties – conserving over 7,000 acres in the region. By donating a portion of the easement's value back to NRLT and making a capacity contribution, they are also helping to ensure that our organization can continue this important work.

"It's a wonderful program, whether people understand it or not," Francis said. "You give up development rights, but you get to keep the ranch and do almost anything you would with a ranch. This is a dream come true."

Funds for the Butler Valley Ranch Conservation Easement were made available through the California Strategic Growth Council's Sustainable Agricultural Lands Conservation Program (SALC) in collaboration with the Department of Conservation. SALC is part of California Climate Investments, a statewide initiative that puts billions of Cap-and-Trade dollars to work reducing greenhouse gas emissions, strengthening the economy, and improving public health and the environment – particularly in disadvantaged communities.



Ranching takes some big rigs. Derek's family manages the land at Butler Valley Ranch.

Coming Together for the Land: How NRLT Began 25 Years Ago

Continued from page 1

late 1990s, there were other land trusts like Sanctuary Forest protecting lands at the local level, like Jacoby Creek and McKinleyville Land Trusts, but there were still great swaths of open space and productive lands beyond the scope of those organizations – lands that were being split up and sold at an increasing pace. Broken into smaller and smaller pieces, habitat was fragmented and they lost their ability to be economically viable working ranches and forestlands.

It was Rondal who first voiced the idea of a larger regional land trust – one that could span timber, agriculture, and conservation interests, and serve as a bridge between communities. “We needed something that could represent all the people who love and work this land.”

David believed in the idea too. Together, they invited people from across the region to join them – ranchers, farmers, timber workers, scientists, and community leaders – in a feasibility study to hear their needs and determine if a regional land trust could provide a possible solution. For six months, they met once a month at 6 a.m. for breakfast at the Woodley Island marina. The meetings were early, but the conversations were powerful.

“We didn’t always agree,” Rondal said, “David really put his heart into it, and his background as a counselor really showed us all how to listen. And we found common ground.”



In March 2025, NRLT’s Board, Advisors, and staff convened for a Year in Review/Year Ahead meeting. Top row, left to right: Dave Imper, Rondall Snodgrass, Mike Wallace, Martha Spencer, Yvonne Everett, Mike Miles, Ann King Smith, Rollie Lamberson, Connor McGuigan, Dina Moore, Karen Diemer, Annette Holland, Russ Dorval. Front Row: Gary Falca, Dennis Rael, Julia Cavalli, Nancy Diamond,

After those six months, the group decided: yes – we can do this. With help from supporters like Carrie Grant and Annette Holland, NRLT quickly became an official nonprofit after the completion of the feasibility study.

When it came to securing early funding, they paired the grounded practicality of local ranchers with the passionate energy of environmental advocates in their pitch to the Columbia Foundation. “We had boots and Birkenstocks,” David laughed. “And they loved it.” That meeting brought in the first grant to help launch the land trust.

This spirit of partnership is reflected in the early board, which included figures like rancher Steve Hackett, forester Kim Browning, organic farmer John LaBoyteaux, and Humboldt State University (now CalPoly

Humboldt) biologist, Jeff Dunk. The diversity of perspectives helped build credibility and trust across the North Coast’s cultural and economic divides.

“Our approach wasn’t about taking over land,” Rondal said. “It was about preserving continuity of habitat and resource values for humans and wildlife alike – against the pressures of change.” The foundations laid in NRLT’s early years, from early stewardship of Baker Creek (the organization’s first land protection project) to educational forums with landowners, have led to our present successes conserving more than 65,000 acres across our region.

All the while, there’s been continuity across landscapes and over time, as the original values remain: work with respect, listen to different voices, and protect the land – both wild and working – for the future.

Looking back, both David and Rondal emphasize that their shared legacy was one of complementary leadership. “Rondal was the eagle – visionary, soaring above. I was the field mouse,” David smiled, “keeping things moving on the ground.”

Today, NRLT is made up of a strong team of staff, board members, landowners, community supporters, and early visionaries like David and Rondal – who still come around the office occasionally to cheer on the team, share advice, and drop some spare dollars in the tip jar.

Their story is a reminder that land conservation is not just about property or policy – it’s about relationships, perseverance, and shared love for place. We thank David and Rondal for their vision, their heart, and their belief in what is possible when we work together.

Here’s to the next 25 years, grounded in the same values that sparked it all.



NRLT Board of Directors and Technical Advisors as pictured in the organization’s first newsletter, published Winter/Spring 2003. Top row, left to right: Kim Browning, Blake Alexandre, David McMurray, Wes Anderson, Rondal Snodgrass, Tempra Board. Middle row: Steve Hackett, Ben Morehead, Michael Smith, John LaBoyteaux, Sandra Jerabek, Sabra Steinberg. Front row: Ruth Blyther, Annette Holland, Melissa Bukosky, Carrie Grant.

From the Archives: Excerpts from the NRLT Winter-Spring 2003 Newsletter by Carrie Grant

I confess that I did not know what a land trust or a conservation easement was when I was first asked to join in the September 1999 feasibility study group that would evolve into the North-coast Regional Land Trust.

The realization of protecting land in perpetuity, through the tool of a conservation easement, brought profound satisfaction to me through the evolution of my work. As a landscape photographer, no longer were my efforts to inspire protection of the open landscape that I love restricted to placing photographic images in front of my buying audience, as decoration for their homes and offices.

With this new-to-me tool, I saw that my work could evolve beyond mere portrayal of the landscape to actual and permanent protection of it.

— From “Notes from a Founder”

Our group was indeed diverse, and among the earliest discussions was the need to create balance, a bridge, non-extremism, and a common vision. He wanted to protect farmland. She wanted to preserve pristine forests. He wanted to ensure long-term family ownership and management of family ranches, farms, and dairies. She wanted to protect wildlife habitat. He

wanted to provide public trails. He wanted to ensure economic stability on timberlands. We struggled, we squirmed to stretch beyond our individual ethics and personal goals to incorporate and respect each other’s needs and priorities.

As perspectives and visions were expressed over the first three feasibility study meetings, it was determined that we all wanted to protect open space, whether it be ranch land, timber land, riparian corridors, or forest preserves. We were passionate about maintaining open space. Vistas. Unpaved land.


As we developed our original Board of Directors in 2000, with David McMurray as our first president, we looked to the future and found ultimately our goals were the same.

Through debate, argument, understanding and laughter, we reach for the bridge, while maintaining our diversity.
— From “The Formation of NRLT”



Celebrating 25 Years of Wild and Working Land Conservation with events on the 25th of each month through October

<p>SAT 25 JAN</p> <p>WINTER WALK AT FWFR 10AM TO 12PM</p>	<p>TUE 25 FEB</p> <p>VIRTUAL VOLUNTEER INTEREST MEETING 7:30 TO 8PM</p>	<p>TUE 25 MAR</p> <p>STEWARDSHIP CIRCLE COFFEE 8AM TO 10AM</p>	<p>FRI 25 APR</p> <p>WOOD CREEK PRESENTATION 4PM TO 6PM</p>	<p>SUN 25 MAY</p> <p>STEWARDSHIP EXTRAVAGANZA! 9AM-12PM</p>
<p>WED 25 JUN</p> <p>LAY OF THE LAND MORE INFO TBA</p>	<p>FRI 25 JUL</p> <p>PINT NIGHT @ MAD RIVER BREWERY</p>	<p>MON 25 AUG</p> <p>MARTIN SLOUGH TOUR MORE INFO TBA</p>	<p>THU 25 SEP</p> <p>CONNECTING WITH PLACE: MINDFULNESS WALK AT FWFR 5 TO 7PM</p>	<p>SAT 25 OCT</p> <p>PUMPKIN CARVING & NIGHT WALK AT FWFR 4:30 TO 7:30PM</p>


MORE INFO AT: WWW.NCRLT.ORG

ANNUAL REPORT 2024

ACHIEVEMENTS

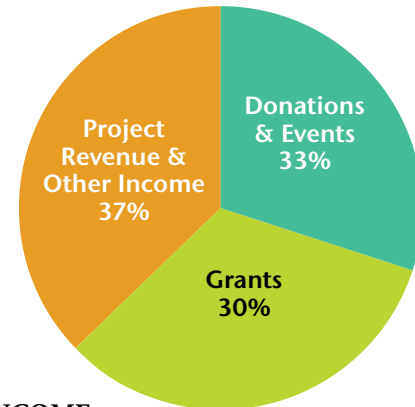
The Northcoast Regional Land Trust is pleased to provide our partners with an accounting of accomplishments for 2024.

- We completed two conservation easement projects – on the Butte Creek Ranch and the Butler Valley Ranch – that will permanently protect over 5,000 acres of agricultural land and diverse habitats in the Mad River and Van Duzen Watersheds. This work was made possible thanks to the partnership of two multi-generation landowners – the Carrington and Cottrell/Moore families, with support from the Department of Conservation and California Strategic Growth Council's Sustainable Agricultural Lands Conservation program. These projects will ensure that the families can continue to steward these special places, support rural livelihoods, and protect the natural resources that we all depend on.
- Thanks to the partnership of some extraordinary landowners and funding partners – including you – we continued work on ten more conservation projects, four of which are expected to be completed in 2025.
- Our Project Managers oversaw monitoring and stewardship of conservation easements comprising over 65,000 acres of rangeland, forests, and other diverse habitats.
- We secured funding for the Wood Creek Phase III Restoration project that will restore stream and wetland habitats at Freshwater Farms Reserve and the neighboring Felt Ranch.
- We were gifted a special 160-acre property by Richard Hansis, long-time NRLT supporter and conservationist.
- We renewed accreditation with the Land Trust Alliance, ensuring we continue to meet the highest standards for protecting land.
- We welcomed new staff members to the team, including Connor McGuigan, Project Manager, and Riley Martel-Phillips, Admin and Community Engagement Manager.
- The California Coastal Commission awarded NRLT a WhaleTail grant to support opportunities for people to connect with coastal lands at Freshwater Farms Reserve and beyond.
- With support from Humboldt Trails Council, the WhaleTail grant, CalPoly Humboldt, and others, we hosted nine stewardship events and seven interpretive events and tours at Freshwater Farms Reserve.
- Thanks to support from the McLean Foundation and Dean Witter Foundation, more than 300 local students learned about the compatibility of wildlife habitat and agriculture through our Cows & Cattails and High School Biological Monitoring programs.
- We continued our popular friend and fundraising events, including the Summer Celebration with Huckleberry Flint, the Annual Celebration Dinner and Auction, and the Open Office Holiday Party to close out a fantastic year!

INCOME

OPERATIONAL INCOME

Grants	\$214,500
Donations & Events	235,000
Project Revenue & Other Income	263,800
TOTAL	\$713,300



OTHER INCOME

Stewardship Contribution*	\$324,500
Capacity Contribution**	180,000
Realized/Unrealized Gains***	262,600
TOTAL	\$767,100

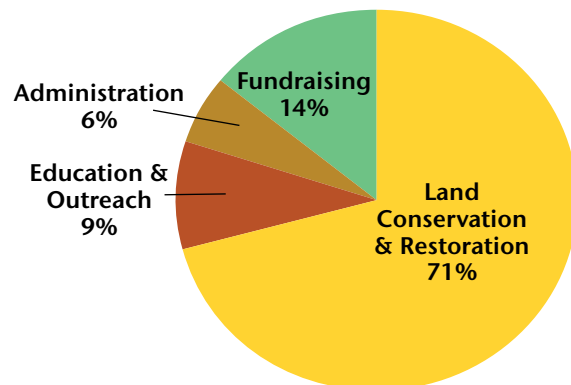
* Stewardship Contributions were made upon the completion of two conservation easement projects. These donor-restricted funds are held in an investment fund that will support the perpetual monitoring and stewardship of each completed conservation easement.

** Capacity Contributions were made upon the completion of two conservation easement projects. These board designated funds are strategically invested to support priority conservation activities and organizational development.

***Realized/Unrealized Gains were earned, primarily as interest earned from donor-restricted stewardship contributions that are placed in an investment fund, allowing for the ongoing monitoring and stewardship of conservation easements.

EXPENSES

Land Conservation & Restoration	\$464,900
Education & Outreach	57,600
Administration	39,000
Fundraising	92,200
TOTAL OPERATIONAL EXPENSES	\$653,700



Together, we are
protecting the
lands we love.



DONORS 2024

Thank You NRTL Supporters! We are grateful to the following who gave grants, donations, or support in 2024.

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Americorps Watershed Stewards Program
Association for Environmental and Outdoor Education
The Buckeye
CA Coastal Commission
CA Conservation Corps
CA Department of Conservation
CA Department of Fish & Wildlife
CALFIRE
CA Forest Legacy Program
CA Native Plant Society - North Coast Chapter
CA Natural Resources Agency
CA State Coastal Conservancy
CA Wildlife Conservation Board
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Melissa Wilcox and Karl Falk-Carlson
Jana and Lynn Wilkins
Jane and Paul Wilson
Stephanie Witzel
Cornelia Woodke
Timothy Woodward
Cheryl Zuber

In Honor Of

Kirby Bay, Sr.: John Woolley
Pete Bussman: Archie and Sue Mossman
Rahim Malelu: donna luckey
Louis Schipper IV: Karen McCarty

In Memory Of

Gale Blomstrom: Greg Blomstrom and Debra Harrison
Barry Collins: Judy Tengbom and Alison Collins
Lyford Land Dayton: Jeff Dayton
Kevin Ebbert: Erik and Toni Jansson
Rich Hess: John and Debbie Kelly
Guy Kuttner: Diane Korsower and Darius Brotman
Steve Mansfield: Laura Fisher and Robert Bissland
Buck Noel: Syn-dee and Earl Noel
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Featured Artist – Erica Brooks

Erica, originally from Philadelphia, developed a passion for art at a young age, earning scholarships to study at Moore College of Art. After obtaining her BFA, she moved to Brooklyn but soon sought a quieter setting to focus on her work. She relocated to Humboldt County, where the region's natural beauty became a central inspiration for her landscape paintings.

With an MFA in Fine Art and an MA in Illustration from Academy of Art San

Francisco, Erica honed her skills in plein air painting, still life, and portraiture. She served as President of the Redwood Art Association and continues as its Newsletter Chief. She also taught landscape painting at Cal Poly Humboldt.

Now based in Charleston, South Carolina, Erica is an exhibiting artist with the Charleston Artist Guild and a member of Plein Air Painters Carolina. You can find more of her works at fineartbyerica.com.



Mad River by Erica Brooks

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