



Looking across Freshwater Farms Reserve to Kneeland, the headwaters of Wigi

Aldaron Laird

Wood Creek Restoration Continues on the Felt Ranch

If you've driven between Arcata and Eureka along Myrtle Avenue in recent months, you may have noticed big changes taking shape on NRLT's Freshwater Farms Reserve and the adjacent Felt Ranch. The earth-moving and revegetation efforts that began this summer mark the beginning of Phase III of the Wood Creek Restoration Project, a major step forward for salmon, wildlife, and working lands in the Freshwater Creek watershed.

Thanks to your support, NRLT and our many partners have expanded our 20-year restoration journey at Freshwater Farms Reserve upstream into an area where healthier habitat is urgently needed. Together, we have already brought back thousands of young salmon and a rich diversity of native plants and wildlife to the lower reaches of Wood Creek. Fisheries monitoring following the previous project phases show the restored wetlands as having some of the fastest juvenile salmon growth rates of any Humboldt Bay tributary. With Phase III underway, we are carrying this momentum upstream.

Felt Ranch landowners Sean and Kathy O'Day have been remarkable partners in making this next phase possible. Their long-standing commitment to stewarding their land has resulted in two NRCS conservation easements on the Ranch – protecting both agricultural values and wetland habitat for the long term. (You can hear directly from Kathy in our 25th Anniversary video, page 3.) The O'Days' dedication is central to bringing healthier habitat back to this important stretch of the watershed.

The Felt Ranch is both a working cattle property and a haven for wildlife. Although water is abundant here, for more than a century it has been forced through straight, fast-moving ditches that flood seasonally and offer little refuge for fish. Salmon are still found on the property, but their chances of survival in these conditions are low. Phase III of the Wood Creek project – now under construction through 2026 – is transforming this landscape into one where both agriculture and wildlife can thrive.

Once completed, the project will expand vital wetland and rearing habitat for

salmon, tidewater goby, migratory birds, and other species while helping to alleviate flooding on the Felt Ranch and neighboring lands in the Wood Creek drainage. The project will create over a mile of new fish-bearing channels, restore 12 acres of wetlands and native vegetation, and strengthen climate resilience for surrounding grazing lands.

Continued on page 6

IN THIS ISSUE

From the Board President	2
Calendar of Events	2
Wildfire Resiliency Project	3
25th Anniversary Film	4
Mapping 25 Years of Conservation	4
Upstream: Wood Creek (cont.)	6
2025 Events Recap	7
Featured Artist	8



Board of Directors

President, Martha Spencer, Retired Land Use Planner
1st Vice President, Christine Manhart, Engineering Geologist, State Water Resources Control Board
2nd Vice President, Susan Moranda, Senior Tax Manager, DHS Advisors
Secretary, Julia Cavalli, Wildfire Resilience Planner, Dudek
Treasurer, Joseph Alexandre, Dairy Manager, Alexandre Family Farm
Nancy Diamond, Attorney, Law Offices of Nancy Diamond
Karen Diemer, Retired City Manager
Russell Dorvall, Timber/Log Procurement Mngt., North Fork Lumber Co.
Domingo Escamilla, Registered Professional Forester, Humboldt/Mendocino Redwood Company, LLC
Todd Fulton, Rancher, Land Security, Green Diamond Resource Co.
Tom Hjerpe, Attorney, Hjerpe Law, LLP
Peter Jermyn, Retired Business Owner
Erin Kelly, Natural Resources Professor, California Polytechnic University Humboldt
Robert Vogt, Road Manager, Humboldt/Mendocino Redwood Company, LLC
Mike Wallace, Ret. Fisheries Biologist

Board of Advisors

Blake Alexandre	Dave Imper
Mark Andre	Pete Jackson
Greg Blomstrom	Ann King Smith
Heidi Bourne	Aldaron Laird
Clif Clendenen	Roland Lamberson
Maya Conrad	Mandy Marquez
Melanie Cunningham	David McMurray
Jeff Dunk	Dina Moore
Yvonne Everett	Leland Mora
Gary Falxa	Chuck Powell
Gary Flosi	Dennis Rael
Annette Holland	Rondal Snodgrass
Rees Hughes	David Turner

Staff

Dan Ehresman, Executive Director
Beth Bray, Operations Director
Zach Wenderott, Project Manager
Nadia Van Lynn, Outreach & Development Director
Riley Martel-Phillips, Administration & Community Engagement Manager
Connor McGuigan, Project Manager
Kate Gazzo, Project Manager
Leslie Scopes Anderson, Newsletter Volunteer

The work upon which this publication is based was funded in part through a grant awarded by the California Department of Conservation.

Newsletter published twice a year by NRLT
 P.O. Box 398, Bayside, CA 95524
 Phone: 707.822.2242,
 info@nrlt.org; www.nrlt.org

From the Board President

As I look back on another remarkable year of conservation work, I'm once again humbled by what we've accomplished together. From on-the-ground restoration at Wood Creek to progress on more than a dozen conservation projects, to getting people out on the land – none of this would be possible without the dedication and generosity of our community. I'm deeply grateful to be protecting, restoring, and stewarding these special places alongside you.

When I first got involved with NRLT more than a dozen years ago, I was driven by a passion to protect the wild and working lands that make our region so extraordinary. I didn't know it was possible, but that passion has only grown – stoked by people like you, who share your own stories of commitment to this work. Whether it's a ranching family determined to keep their land intact and in production, or a fellow board member who's seen special places damaged by development and wants to protect our rural way of life before it's too late – we are all connected by a shared love of the lands that sustain us.

More than 25 years ago when NRLT's founders asked "Can we protect lands on the North Coast? Can we protect our home?" we rolled up our sleeves and got to work! It's inspiring to see how far we've come since then. The growing map of conserved lands (p. 4-5) is a testament to what can happen when a community comes together around a common vision. Each protected property represents years of thoughtful care – consideration for the families, habitats, waterways, histories, and working landscapes that make each property unique. This is how we "get our hands dirty" as we cultivate a sustainable future together.

We really can do so much more when we work together. Our new short documentary film (p. 3) celebrates that spirit of collaboration – it's a story of partnerships and perseverance, and a reminder of what's possible when we join forces for the places we love.

It has been incredibly special celebrating our 25th Anniversary this year with so many of the people who have made it possible. It was heartwarming to hear from David McMurray, an NRLT founder, and Maya Conrad, NRLT's first Executive Director, at this year's Annual Celebration. And it is gratifying to see new supporters joining in all the time! This year, we welcomed Karen Diemer, Russell Dorvall, and Domingo Escamilla to the Board, as well as Project Manager, Kate Gazzo, to our staff.

Many thanks are also due to Mike Miles, who retired from the board after nearly ten years of service. Like so many before him, Mike remains involved and committed to conserving wild and working lands – proof that once you're part of NRLT, it's hard to stay away! Thank you for staying connected to this important work.

Wishing you a merry holiday season,

Martha Spencer
 Martha Spencer



Kate Gazzo



Russell Dorvall



Domingo Escamilla

CALENDAR OF EVENTS

Holiday Party and Open House: *Friday, December 12, 4 pm - 7 pm, NRLT Office (901 Samoa Blvd. Arcata).* Join NRLT board members, advisors, staff, and other partners in conservation as we celebrate the holidays and a big year ahead!

MLK Day of Service: *Monday, January 20, 9 am - 12 pm, Freshwater Farms Reserve (5851 Myrtle Ave., Eureka).* Join Cal Poly Humboldt for a day of service at various sites throughout the community, including at Freshwater Farms Reserve. This is a wonderful opportunity for college students, staff, and the greater community to contribute to local organizations while commemorating the life and legacy of Dr. King. More information available at nrlt.org/events.

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

A Conservation Commitment to Fire Resiliency: Helping forests, ranches, and communities stay safe

We're excited to announce an important forest health project has been selected for funding to address one of northwestern California's most pressing ecological challenges: wildfire.

Tucked into the Little Van Duzen River watershed along Highway 36, the Butte Creek/Buck Mountain Forest Health Project will treat over 1,500 acres of wild and working lands by removing dry brush and small trees that can make wildfires worse. The project was developed by Cottrell Ranch, LLC, in collaboration with the Northcoast

Regional Land Trust (NRLT) and several other partners to lower the chance of catastrophic wildfire and protect both natural resources and nearby rural communities. Work on the project includes establishing shaded fuel breaks near roads and powerlines, thinning crowded forests, and restoring native oak woodlands. This work is especially important in a landscape where climate change, historic fire suppression, and tree mortality have increased fire risk. As wildfires become more common and more dangerous, projects like this show how caring for the land today can protect us tomorrow.

This project is made possible thanks to funding from California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection's (CAL FIRE) Forest Health Grants Program as part of the California Climate Investments Program to support climate-smart forest stewardship on a meaningful scale.



Rolling hills, woodland pastures, and forested mountains dominate the working landscapes stewarded by the Cottrell/Moore Family. This fuels reduction project will safeguard the natural and agricultural values of these productive lands.

Work on the Butte Creek/Buck Mountain Forest Health Project is coordinated with other forest work by the Bureau of Land Management and the Six Rivers National Forest, making an even bigger impact across the region.

NRLT is grateful for our ongoing partnership with the Cottrell/Moore family, solidified by a conservation easement on the Butte Creek Ranch completed just last year (read about it in our Winter 2024 newsletter). We are also currently working on a conservation easement on the nearby Cottrell Ranch, which we expect to complete in 2026.

Conservation easements ensure these iconic landscapes remain wild and working for generations to come. Meanwhile, on-the-ground stewardship, such as this forest health project, enhance the current conditions and ensure lasting benefits for people and wildlife alike. It is exciting to have both conservation and large-scale stewardship work happening together on the Butte Creek Ranch and we look forward to sharing the results of this project in the future.

Read more about this project and the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection's (CAL FIRE) Forest Health Grants Program at www.NCRLT.org/news-announcements.

Short Documentary Film Completed in Honor of NRLT's 25th Anniversary

This year, we set out to tell the story of our shared work – and we're thrilled to announce the release of our new short documentary film now streaming on YouTube! This ten-minute film captures a significant moment in time for NRLT through the voices of local landowners, staff, project partners, and community supporters like you.

From working forests and ranchlands to restored wetlands, the film highlights the deep connections between people and place that

drive our mission to conserve the lands that sustain us. It was a real challenge to distill our work to just ten-minutes! So much of what is featured in this film relies on the stories and faces behind the scenes which have supported this work for 25 years and counting.

We're deeply grateful to everyone who participated – and to you, our supporters, whose generosity and engagement keep these projects thriving. Special thanks go to our partners at the California Department of Conservation, whose funding made both the work and the film itself possible (read more about the Strategic Growth Council and California Climate Investments in the video caption). And to Will Goldenberg at Goldenberg Film for his stunning cinematography and careful editing.

We hope you'll take ten minutes to watch, reflect, and celebrate what we've accomplished together. Scan the QR code or find @northcoastregionallandtrust on YouTube to view the film and share it with a friend!



A sneak peek of the film premiered at our Annual Celebration dinner and auction this fall, where it received an outpouring of heartfelt responses – several guests said they were moved to tears. credit: Jose Quezada



Scan to watch

NORTHCOST REGIONAL LAND TRUST

2000 - 2025

Celebrating 25 years of wild and
working land conservation in
Northwestern California



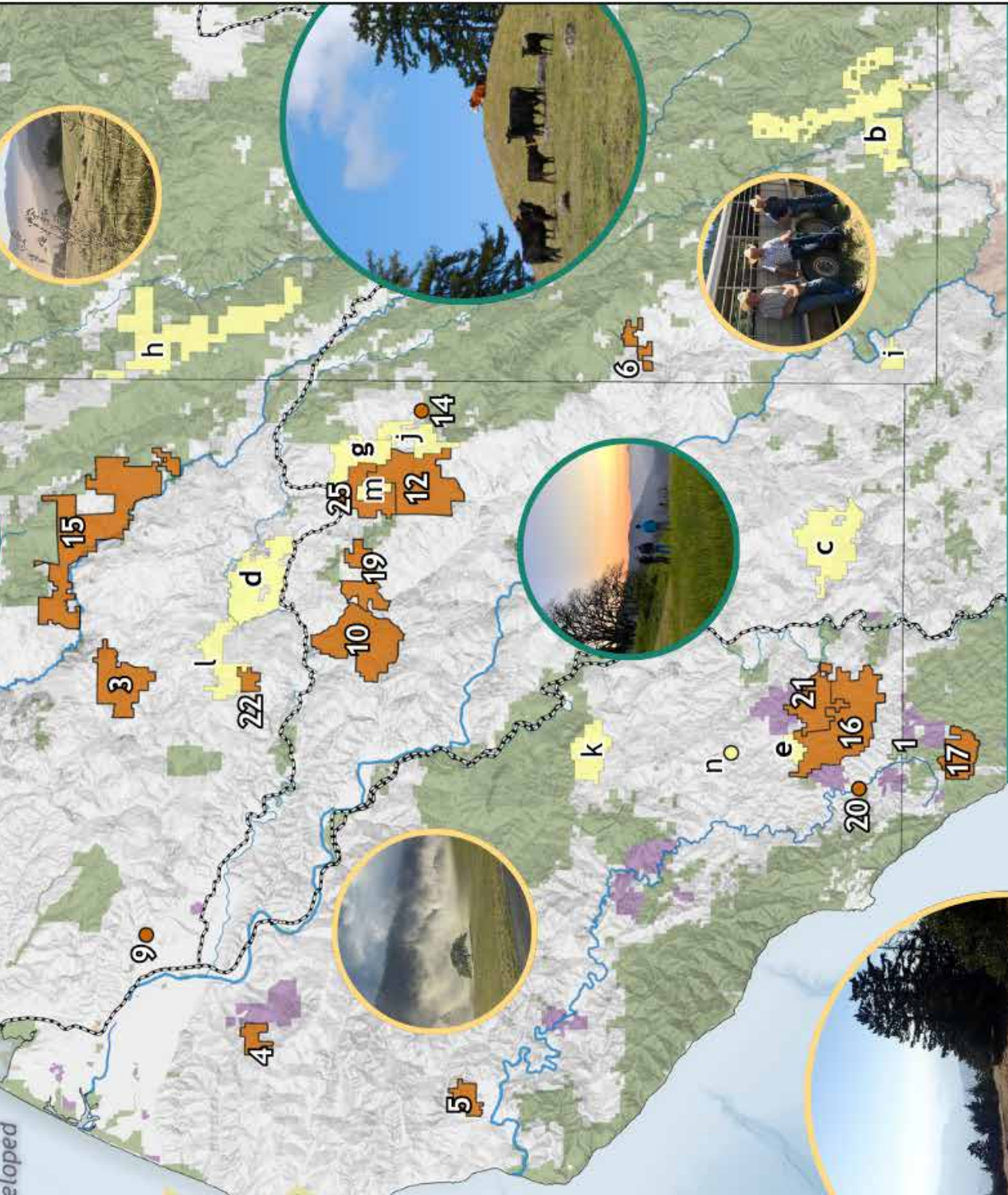
Completed Conservation Projects

1. 3 V's (2004) - transferred to BLM
2. Freshwater Farms Reserve (2005/2012)
3. Jaqua Ranch CE (2006)
4. Price Creek Ranch CE (2006)
5. Valley View Ranch CE (2008)
6. Grizzly Mountain Ranch CE (2008)
7. McNamara Dairy (2009)
8. Dr. Watson CE (2010)
9. Fortuna Family Forest CE (2010)
10. Chalk Mt. Ranch CE (2010/2012)
11. Martin Slough (2011)
12. Charles Mt. Ranch CE (2011/2012)
13. Miller Forest CE (2012)
14. Red Mountain CE (2016)
15. Hunter Ranch CE (2018)
16. Sproul Creek CE (2018)
17. Indian Creek CE (2018)
18. Panther & Summit Creeks
CEs (2019)
19. Diamond D Ranch CE (2020)
20. Mattole Meadows CE (2021)
21. Wagner Ranch CE (2022)



- 22. Grizzly Creek CE (2022) - CE developed by Steve Hackett
- 23. Hansis Forest (2024)
- 24. Butler Valley Ranch CE (2024)
- 25. Butte Creek CE (2024)

66,439 acres CONSERVED
plus 56,574 acres in progress



In Progress Projects

- a. Lindsay Creek CE
- b. Travis Ranch CE
- c. Kinsey Ranch CE
- d. Cottrell Ranch CE
- e. Lost Coast Redwood Creek CE
- f. Black Dog Woodlands CE
- g. Buck Mountain Ranch CE
- h. Trinity Timberlands
- i. Island Mountain
- j. Little Van Duzen Headwaters CE
- k. Chapman Ranch CE
- l. Palace Rock Ranch CE
- m. Horse Creek Ranch CE
- n. Elk Ridge CE

- NRTL Completed CE
- NRTL CE in Progress
- ★ NRTL Property
- Additional CEs
- Public Lands
- Tribal Lands
- Major Rivers
- Highways
- Counties



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.

PO Box 398, Bayside, CA 95524 | (707)822-2242 | www.ncrllt.org

Wood Creek Restoration Continues on the Felt Ranch

Continued from page 1

We are excited to complete this phase of restoration in 2026 and invite you to follow along as the work unfolds. As the salmon in this watershed know well, swimming upstream can be challenging, but it is essential for survival. We are profoundly grateful for the partners and supporters who help us swim strong as we work toward healthier lands and waters for people and wildlife alike. Because of your support, the salmon's journey upstream in Wood Creek will be made a little bit easier. Thank you!

Phase III is supported by funding from the California Department of Fish and Wildlife's (CDFW's) Cannabis Restoration Grant Program (CRGP), Point Blue Conservation Science's Roots Program, the State of California's Wildlife Conservation Board (WCB), and the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation (NFWF). Planning for this project was led by the Buckeye Conservancy, with funding from CDFW's Fisheries Restoration Grant Program (FRGP) and the California State Coastal Conservancy (SCC).

The views and conclusions contained in this document are those of the authors and should not be interpreted as representing the opinions or policies of the U.S. Government or the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation and its funding sources. Mention of trade names or commercial products does not constitute their endorsement by the U.S. Government, or the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation or its funding sources.



In 2025, NRLT welcomed the community to two public presentations and tours of the Wood Creek project. Attendance ranged from long-time supporters involved since the early days of restoration, to community members new to the project and NRLT. The positive response is truly inspiring as we continue restoring this important wetland habitat together!



This year, earthworks contractor GR Sundberg reshaped the landscape at the Felt Ranch, excavating new stream channels and connecting them to restored reaches at FWER. They installed large woody debris structures and created raised hummocks which will be the eventual site of a coastal spruce forest-wetland. Revegetation contractor Samara Restoration is already planting native species and removing invasives to help the restored habitat flourish. This project follows designs developed by Michael Love and Associates, and in partnership with GHD, Thomas Gast and Associates, Pacific Earthscape, Cal Poly Humboldt, and many others.

While construction is paused for the winter, biologists from Thomas Gast & Associates continue to monitor salmon using a PIT-tag antenna that detects fish moving through the site. Previous monitoring in the restored Wood Creek channel found more than 500 juvenile Coho in a single season! We're excited to see what the coming years reveal as the restored habitat comes to life.



Large woody debris (LWD) in place at Wood Creek site (see next page)

Drone Image from this past September shows in-progress work on Phase III restoration at the Felt Ranch, with tie in to the previously restored sections of Wood Creek at Freshwater Farms Reserve.

What's Good About Large Wood?

Since construction began this summer, many people have asked about the large wood structures appearing throughout the restoration area. These features – made of logs, rootwads, stumps, and branches – are known as large woody debris (LWD). They may look simple, but they play an essential role in restoring healthy streams and rebuilding habitat for salmon and other wildlife.

For decades, well-intentioned projects focused on removing fallen trees and other woody debris from waterways because they were viewed as hazards or eyesores. Today, science tells a different story: LWD is an important ingredient in a thriving watershed. Whether naturally occurring or carefully engineered and placed, these structures help shape the flow of water, improve habitat, and even support flood resilience. Here's why LWD matters:

Slows the flow: LWD works like a natural speed bump, slowing down fast-moving water. This reduces erosion and helps prevent excess sediment from washing downstream. Salmon and other fish also benefit from the calmer pockets of water created behind the logs.

Scour power: As water moves around and beneath LWD, it carves out deeper pools in the streambed. These cool, sheltered pools provide critical refuge during low-flow seasons and are especially important for young salmon.

Made in the shade: Large wood offers shade, shelter, and perching spots for many species—from fish and amphibians below the water to reptiles and birds above it. By shading the stream, LWD also helps maintain cooler water temperatures that salmon need to survive.

Leave it be: When LWD collects leaves and other organic material, it creates small "microecosystems" where aquatic insects and other invertebrates thrive. Those invertebrates then become food for fish, amphibians, reptiles, and birds, supporting a healthy food web.

While LWD brings many ecological benefits, land managers must evaluate potential risks to downstream communities, infrastructure, or property before placing it in waterways. In some restoration projects, LWD can be as simple as strategic cutting and placing of trees in a stream. In others – like the Phase III Wood Creek Restoration Project – engineered log structures secured within newly built channels produce more effective and longer-lasting results.

Thanks to project partners and supporters like you, we're excited to watch these structures help bring Wood Creek back to life.

Celebrating together in 2025

2025 was a year unlike any other, at least in terms of events for NRLT. We kicked off the year with a winter walk in January, and kept it rolling with events on the 25th of every month through October. And this was in addition to the Summer Celebration, Annual Celebration, Humboldt Trails Council work days, and other events we offer each year.

It has been a true joy getting together with our community so much this year. From family pumpkin carving to volunteer work days at Freshwater Farms Reserve and Martin Slough, to our Summer and Annual Celebrations, and everything in-between – it's been a year of celebrating the people who make this work possible. Thank you for supporting NRLT in our 25th anniversary year and beyond!

We hosted twenty-two events in 2025, and connected with more than 1,100 people

about land conservation and stewardship. We also continued field trip programming for college and elementary students to learn about the compatibility of wild and working lands. And your support at fundraising events aids these efforts and more!

We are deeply grateful to all the volunteers, landowners, business partners, board members, staff, and supporters who make this work possible. You are the heart of what we do, and your support ensures that future generations will continue to benefit from the lands that sustain us!

You can still join us for our last event of 2025, our Office Holiday Party on Friday, December 12th! 4-7pm at 901 Samoa Blvd. Arcata. More info on nrlt.org/events. See you there!



Stewardship Days: Tremendous thanks go out to every volunteer who joined us for stewardship days at our Freshwater Farms Reserve or Martin Slough properties.



Freshwater Farms Reserve Fall Fest: We loved carving pumpkins and lighting up the nature trail together this October!



Field Trips: Over 450 students came out to Freshwater Farms Reserve in 2025 to learn about wetland habitats and local agriculture!



Summer Celebration with Huckleberry Flint: Such a joyous event at Freshwater Farms Reserve, this year's sold out event brought over 500 people to our ambassador property, and raised more than \$16,000!



Boots & Birkenstocks: This year's Annual Celebration felt a little extra special for our 25th Anniversary. We enjoyed celebrating with so many longtime supporters, and those new to the organization, too! Thanks to all who contributed, we raised an incredible \$85,000 for our conservation programs. These funds will support the protection of critical habitats, working landscapes, and watersheds that sustain our communities.



Instagram



Featured Artist – Aldaron Laird

Aldaron Laird is a photographer, educator, and environmental planner who has spent decades exploring and documenting the ever-changing lands and waters of Wigi, or as many know it today, Humboldt Bay. His photographs capture both the beauty and the complexity of this dynamic landscape, revealing stories of resilience, restoration, and change. His recent book, *A Photographic Exploration of Wigi (currently called Humboldt Bay)*, combines 119 curated photos with Soulatluk language place names to tell these stories.

Demonstrating both the observational rigor of a scientist with the poetic eye of an artist, Laird's work beautifully documents the changing landscape amidst habitat restoration, development, and the pressing realities of sea-level rise. Through his lens, Laird

invites us to look closely at this region's wild character – and our collective responsibility to protect it. Laird is a longtime NRLT supporter, and currently serves as an Advisor. He lives in Arcata, where he continues to advocate for and document coastal waters and lands.

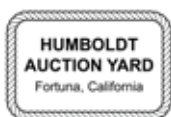
You can find *A Photographic Exploration of Wigi (currently called Humboldt Bay)* at local bookstores and at Wiyot Tribe's 'Da Gou Rou Lowi' (the ongoing return of all) Cultural Center, the Morris Graves Museum of Art, Arcata Marsh Interpretive Center, Friends of the Dunes Humboldt Coastal Nature Center, and more.

Order direct from Lulu Press or download for free at CalPoly Humboldt Digital Commons: digitalcommons.humboldt.edu/monographs/23/



Freshwater Slough

Thanks to our current business partners



Aalfs, Evans & Company, LLP; Almquist Lumber Company; Clendenen's Cider Works; Coldwell Banker Cutten Realty; DeepSeeded Community Farm; Edward Jones – Hec Wood; GHD, Inc.; Humboldt Area Foundation; Julian Berg Designs – Architecture & Planning; Kelly-O'Hern Associates; LACO Associates; Owens & Ross Attorneys at Law; Pacific Mindfulness; Pierson Building Center; Planwest Partners; Ramone's Bakery & Cafe; Redwood Capital Bank; Roy E. Corsetti, CPA; Valley Pacific Petroleum; Vollmar Natural Lands Consulting

Learn more about our Business Partner Program at www.nrlt.org/ways-to-give/business-partners.