



PLACER LAND TRUST

Strategic Plan

2022-2030





Dear friends,

Community has been at the heart of our work since Placer Land Trust's beginning. Community members founded Placer Land Trust in 1991, and it is their input that continues to inform and guide us in our strategic planning to make the biggest impact possible. We have learned a lot over the past three decades and are proud of what we've accomplished together—staff, board members, volunteers, partners, and donors. With guidance and support from the community, we are energized to set our sights firmly on the goal to **double our current impact and protect 25,000 acres by 2030.**

At this juncture we have protected nearly 12,000 acres of agricultural and natural lands in Placer County, ensuring these lands remain undeveloped for multiple public benefits. We're stewarding the lands in our care to make our preserves more resilient to catastrophic wildfires, remove invasive species and restore floodplains, provide refuge for wildlife, and build and manage trails that provide opportunities for people to recreate.

Building on the strengths and breadth of experience we have developed, we are well-positioned to increase our pace and breadth of conservation, so that future generations will benefit from protected lands in Placer County as we do today. We see permanent conservation and responsible stewardship as the best ways to preserve Placer County's unparalleled ecological, agricultural, and recreational land and resources for future generations, and we will strive to engage all who live, work, and play in the county in this mission.

There is no going it alone. We are indebted to the generations of people before us, and know that indigenous communities, farmers, ranchers and other landowners provide valuable knowledge about conservation and long-term stewardship of land. It is imperative to mitigate climate change impacts and stay laser-focused on land conservation that protects our important resources of water, wildlife, biodiversity, and food production. And to ensure the sustainability of this work, we will seek opportunities for people – especially those who have been underrepresented—to connect with land and each other. We look forward to growing partnerships with willing landowners, local communities, tribes, public agencies, and other conservation and community-based organizations to reach our goals.

We will employ strategic criteria to evaluate our potential projects, programs, and partnerships on a regular basis, to ensure that our work remains proactive, relevant, and impactful for today's and future generations.

Thank you to those who participated in helping us to develop this guide, and we welcome and thank all in advance who will join to realize the vision.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "JD", is positioned above the name of the Executive Director.

Jeff Darlington
Executive Director

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Christine a. Pieper", is positioned above the name of the Board President.

Christine Pieper
Board President

Vision

Placer Land Trust believes that the protection of wild open spaces, natural resources, farms and ranches are vital to our quality of life today and in the future so all living things can thrive. We envision Placer County filled with vast expanses of healthy and connected natural lands; thriving farms and ranches; and special protected places that foster lasting connections with nature and a commitment to stewardship.

Mission

Placer Land Trust works with willing landowners and conservation partners to permanently protect and care for natural and agricultural lands in Placer County for current and future generations.



Taking in the view at Harvego Bear River Preserve

Core Values

Respect for Landowners and Private Property Rights. We acknowledge our debt to past and current landowners, including indigenous communities and farmers and ranchers, who provide valuable knowledge about conservation and long-term stewardship. We also believe that farmers and ranchers are irreplaceable stewards of Placer County's working lands, and we support their willingness to protect land to farm and ranch in the future. We respect private property rights and are committed to working only with willing landowners on voluntary conservation.

Partnership and Collaboration. Partnership and collaboration are crucial to our success. We prioritize working with diverse partners to ensure that our conservation efforts are as impactful as possible. Through collaboration we bring out and utilize the core strengths of each partner to benefit the community. In each project we seek win-win-win outcomes for landowners, partners, and the land.

Integrity, Accountability, and Adaptability. We are dedicated to fulfilling our mission with integrity and accountability. We acknowledge that we have learned much from the past and we have much still to learn. To ensure that we remain relevant and effective, we will balance science-based best practices with adaptivity, creativity and risk-taking as we face evolving challenges.

Meeting Community Needs. Our conservation work must help meet community needs as they evolve over time, and all community members should feel welcome to be a part of our work and benefit from our work. That means focusing on a diverse set of projects to provide broad public benefit, including projects that protect clean air and water, promote biodiversity and adaptation to climate change, reduce the risk of catastrophic wildfires, promote local food production, respect indigenous culture and traditional ecological knowledge, and/or provide thoughtful access to open space. That also means expanding opportunities for underrepresented community members to connect with us as well as seeking projects that address unmet community needs.

Intergenerational and Multifaceted Impact. Future generations deserve a chance to live, work and play in Placer County much as we enjoy today. Permanently protected lands and waters sustain our quality of life and make our environment healthier and our communities and economies stronger. Protected lands also provide a place for people to connect with nature and each other, find joy, and lead richer lives. We see permanent

conservation and responsible stewardship as the best ways to preserve Placer County's unparalleled ecological, agricultural, and recreational land and resources for future generations.

Inclusion, Diversity, Equity, and Access to Land (IDEAL). Placer Land Trust seeks to protect land for the sake of the environment, the benefit of people, and the connections between them. Just as diversity strengthens a natural ecosystem, we know it makes our communities stronger and more resilient. Our long-term success depends on inclusive community support now and in the future, and on staying relevant to current and future generations. We believe our region's quality of life depends in part on equitable access to a healthy outdoors, yet our present-day enjoyment of the land stems from a privilege that is not afforded to all. Our vision is that all people — especially those who have been excluded or underrepresented — have a voice, a role, and feel a sense of belonging on our shared lands. We hope all who enjoy these natural lands and open spaces are inspired to play an active role in furthering our mission. We will continue to work intentionally towards this goal until our leadership, membership, and footprint ultimately reflect the diversity of identity, background, and experiences of our beautiful region – and then we will strive to sustain that diversity forever.

Land Acknowledgment

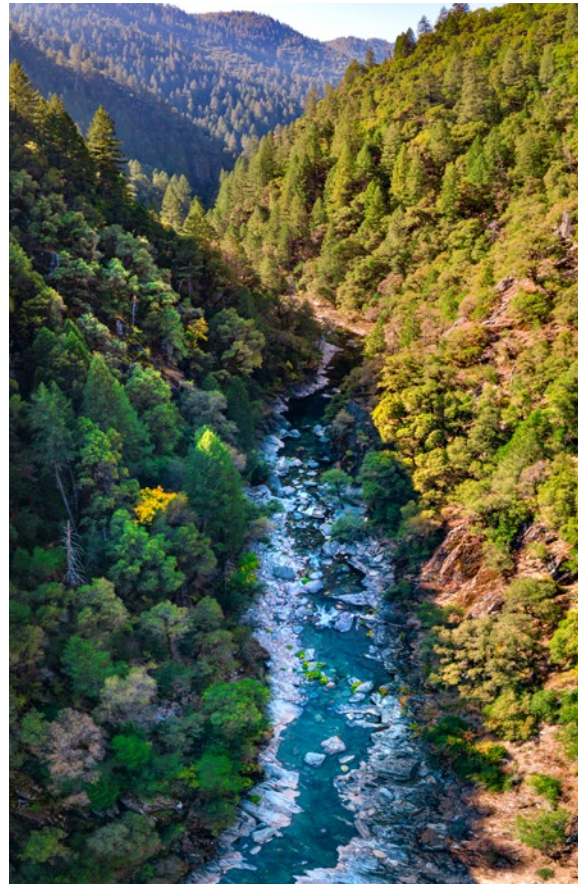
The protected lands in Placer Land Trust's care are the ancestral lands of the Maidu, Miwok, Nisenan and Washoe tribes. These lands were forcibly seized in the name of settlement, and these tribes were unjustly treated. Although Placer Land Trust cannot change the past, we seek to work with local Native American tribes where we can to help address this injustice.

Goal 1: Expand Land Conservation with a Focus on Water, Climate and Connectivity

By 2030 PLT will protect and care for over 25,000 acres of important lands for multiple public benefits, with expanded focus on protecting water resources, mitigating dangerous climate change impacts, and protecting wildlife habitat connectivity. Projects will be prioritized based on a strategic conservation approach and data-driven project selection criteria. Land conservation will be done in partnership with willing landowners, local communities, tribes, public agencies, and other conservation organizations.

Objective 1.1: Develop and Use a Strategic Acquisition Approach and Planning Tools

- a. Develop and implement a high-level strategic acquisition approach focused on key metrics associated with overall conservation goals and specific goals for priority landscapes.
 - Identify high-profile conservation projects or landscape-level campaigns that will stand out as high priorities for the region and engage broad-based community support.
 - Focus on landscape-scale opportunities for improving climate change adaptation and resilience.
 - Incorporate project selection criteria as described below.
- b. Develop and use detailed project selection criteria focused on identifying priority areas with significant weight placed on protecting water resources, diverse and high-quality habitat, and habitat connectivity.
 - Incorporate assessment of relevant GIS data.
 - Integrate principles of climate-smart conservation planning into project selection.
 - Incorporate IDEAL input and objectives into criteria and decision-making.
 - Identify areas of the County with the most limited access to parks, trails, and open space.
 - Apply prioritization criteria to create a priority listing of selected large parcels to be used as a decision-making tool for long-term strategic planning analysis within specific geographic areas with critical conservation land characteristics (i.e., valley, foothills, Sierra).
- c. Rely on established conservation standards and scientific considerations when prioritizing, assessing, and protecting land.



North Fork of North Fork American River Preserve

Objective 1.2: Effectively Engage Partners to Achieve Conservation

- a. Continue to partner with Placer County on acquisitions, particularly through the Placer Legacy Program and the Placer County Conservation Plan (PCCP).
- b. Maintain and enhance working relationships with government entities.

- c. Successfully conclude conservation easement acquisitions with PG&E and CAL FIRE under the Stewardship Council's Land Conservation Program.
- d. Build partnerships with local tribes to identify and pursue important lands for conservation.
- e. Seek opportunities to partner with complementary conservation organizations, landowners, funders, and others, particularly on high profile projects with exceptional public benefit.

Objective 1.3: Pursue Existing and Innovative Opportunities for Acquisition Funding

- a. Concentrate PLT's efforts on State funding at times when State funding is robust.
- b. Seek funding to protect water/watersheds and critical rare species habitat.
- c. Explore new or innovative ideas that may attract acquisition funding.

Objective 1.4: Maintain PLT as a Respected Resource for Land Conservation Expertise

- a. Be a reliable resource for land conservation information.
- b. Discuss the benefits of conservation with landowners, as well as offering technical assistance and expertise while raising community awareness of the benefits of conservation.



Oest Ranch - Lake Clementine Preserve. Photo by Loren Oest

Goal 2: Ensure Effective Stewardship of Land to Protect Conservation Values and Communities

PLT is committed to the perpetual protection of the lands in its care. PLT will practice adaptive management on its preserves that addresses past harmful land uses and the challenges posed by climate change, particularly the risks of catastrophic fires in areas where communities may be impacted. The plans will incorporate evolving scientific understanding and traditional ecological knowledge.

Objective 2.1: Ensure that Long-Term Stewardship Obligations Are Met

- a. Monitor CEs and fee title preserves annually and take action to ensure compliance, including ongoing compliance with legal obligations and adherence to conservation best practices. Build sustainable funding to support required long-term stewardship.
- b. Build sustainable funding to support required long-term stewardship.
- c. Develop annual work plans consistent with funding availability.
- d. Identify opportunities to work with tribes and indigenous communities to incorporate traditional ecological knowledge into stewardship practices and to partner on restoration and stewardship projects.
- e. Ensure each PLT fee title preserve has an adaptive management plan.
- f. Incorporate advanced ecology-based land management principles into PLT's stewardship practices and staff training.
- g. Identify adaptive management goals with a focus on (1) reducing the risks of catastrophic fires for nearby communities; and (2) improving forest and watershed health.
 - Primary short-term focus should be on reducing wildfire risk in areas closest to communities
 - Longer term management should ideally rely on restoration of natural ecological processes where possible.
 - Management involving fuel load reduction and creating fire breaks should be implemented in ways that minimize negative impacts on conservation values.



Gerjuoy North Fork Preserve

Objective 2.2: Ensure Adequate Capacity within Stewardship Staff and Provide Supporting Resources

- a. Review annual stewardship schedule, ongoing management and maintenance needs, identify priorities, and adjust workload as needed.
- b. Seek additional local partners and volunteers to assist in stewarding PLT's properties, especially to meet seasonal demands.

Objective 2.3: Collaborate with Landowners on Stewardship

- a. Identify opportunities to use stewardship collaboration to maintain positive relationships with landowners.
 - Evaluate potential opportunities to increase communications with landowners related to shared stewardship goals.

- b. Help connect owners of conserved properties with resources to support restoration and enhancement of conserved lands.

Objective 2.4: Restore and Enhance PLT-protected Lands

- a. Restore and enhance PLT lands, when appropriate and funding is available, to enhance existing conservation values, restore natural attributes and/or provide additional public benefit.
- b. Seek opportunities to create resilient ecological communities and mitigate threats and adverse effects of drought and climate change.



Preserve Stewards at work. Photo by Mark Rideout

Goal 3: Provide Meaningful Opportunities for People to Connect to Land

PLT will invest in facilitating partnerships and programs that promote meaningful opportunities for people to connect with land and each other. This will include providing carefully designed recreation access where appropriate, developing and maintaining trails and access to streams and rivers, strategically facilitating programming to engage with the land, expanded focus for youth and underrepresented communities, and cultural access for indigenous communities.



Objective 3.1: Assess and Prioritize Public Access to Recreation on Suitable PLT Lands

- a. Consider community need, benefits vs cost/risk, and strategic planning criteria when making decisions about public access and activities on PLT lands.
- b. Determine which PLT protected lands are suitable for recreation enhancements, in keeping with legal obligations, adaptive management, and priority consideration for conservation values. Identify and address potential conflicts with tenants, neighbors, and existing uses.
- c. Prioritize, plan, and implement recreation enhancements that PLT can afford and sustain.
- d. Provide trail and access connections from PLT protected lands to public recreation lands in support of IDEAL goals.

Objective 3.2: Facilitate Activities that Provide Opportunities for People to Connect to Land

- a. Employ strategic planning criteria to engage people on the land and contribute to our mission and primary goals.
- b. Provide a variety of volunteer-led or staff-led activities, with a focus on specialized ones that highlight PLT's successes and conservation practices, fill opportunity gaps for underrepresented groups, and/or include youth.

Objective 3.3: Foster Partnerships to Create Connections, especially among Underrepresented Communities

- a. Sustain existing partnerships that provide opportunities for connection.
- b. Develop new, long-term, trusted, mutually beneficial partnerships with groups whose goals and activities are compatible with PLT protected lands. Work with these groups to provide access to protected lands in the ways that are important to them.
 - Partner with groups that offer a variety of outdoor experiences.
 - Partner with groups that work with underrepresented community members with more limited access to open space in the Greater Placer/Sacramento region.
 - Partner with local tribes and indigenous communities on mutual priorities, including but not limited to land ownership, land management, and cultural or educational access and activities.

Goal 4: Engage with Community to Increase Awareness and Investment in PLT's Mission

PLT will focus its outreach and communications to better understand and meet community needs related to conservation. Increasing name recognition and communicating about the effectiveness of PLT's work will be the foundation of a strategic approach to expanding community support. Raising funds and support in an ethical and equitable way to meet PLT's needs will be a top priority.

Objective 4.1: Use Outreach to Better Respond to Community Needs with a Focus on IDEAL

- a. Use community outreach and engagement to help identify barriers and opportunities to establish connections for land and people, especially for underrepresented community members.
- b. Reach out and engage with youth, people of color, people with disabilities, and underrepresented community members with less access to open space resources.
- c. Increase PLT's public visibility through broad outreach activities, including attendance at key community events and activities with an emphasis on the more populated western Placer County region and specific communities and demographics in which PLT is lesser well-known.
- d. Enhance, diversify, and utilize PLT's network of committees, teams, and exceptional volunteers to expand outreach capacity.

Objective 4.2: Develop and Implement an Inspiring Communications Strategy that Reaches People Where They Are

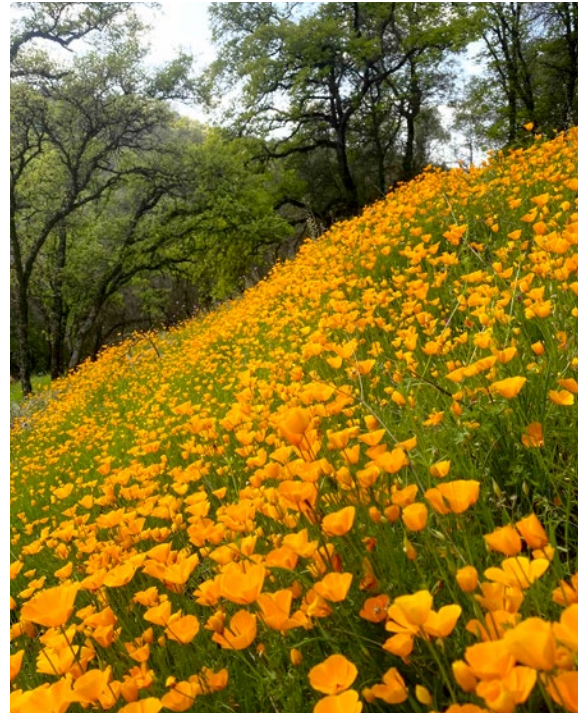
- a. Create a well-defined communications plan to ensure that PLT's potential and existing supporters and partners are inspired to support or continue supporting our work and able to connect to land.
- b. Increase PLT's public visibility through broad communication activities and monitor and implement strategies with highest impact.
- c. Install and maintain public signage acknowledging PLT's successes, partnerships, project benefits, land management practices, indigenous history, and current indigenous connections to the land.
- d. Develop resonant communication materials for target audiences and potential partners.

Objective 4.3: Implement a Fundraising Program that is Ethical and Equitable, and Meets and Sustains PLT's Needs

- a. Ensure that the Board of Directors remains actively involved in fundraising, and gradually increase the Board's role in fundraising.
- b. Sustain incremental growth of PLT's membership at all levels (i.e., individuals, businesses, and organizations) and the scale of annual giving by inviting more people to join our cause.
- c. Enhance PLT's stewardship of existing donors and volunteers, including recognition and retention.
- d. Sustain incremental growth of enrollment in the Forever Society, and continually market planned giving.
- e. Seek opportunities to secure operational funding from private and public grants.
- f. Periodically evaluate and prioritize PLT's fundraising efforts using cost-benefit analysis as well as other measures such as friend-raising.
- g. Ensure fundraising planning and actions are grounded in equity and social justice.

Objective 5.1: Develop Strategies to Address Organizational Health

- a. Ensure sustainable funding, budgeting, and financial management to address long-term capacity needs and deliver strategic plan success.
 - Maintain balanced annual budgets while growing PLT's financial resources.
 - Pursue a broad spectrum of proven income generating programs such as landowner donations, grazing leases, grant funding for transaction work, and conveyance fee funding.
 - Consider opportunities for resource-based, market-based funding agreements and fee-for-service work when appropriate.
 - Advocate at the County and State level for conservation funding.
 - Continue improving sustainable financial management, including consistent endowment contributions to annual stewardship (SSF) and operations.



Harvego Bear River Preserve

- b. Create opportunities for board and staff to share ideas, strategize on moving PLT forward, and address any ongoing concerns or challenges. Incorporate a focus on IDEAL values into hiring and retention practices, human resources policies, and workplace culture.
- c. Incorporate a focus on IDEAL values into hiring and retention practices, human resources policies, and workplace culture
- d. Plan for succession of PLT leadership, including board and staff.
- e. Update PLT's policies regularly to ensure they are compliant, relevant, and contribute to PLT's effectiveness and satisfaction.

Objective 5.2: Ensure PLT has an Effective Staff

- a. Retain, reward, and attract high performing staff. This includes sustained investment in human resources, administrative support, competitive compensation and benefits, inclusive work environment, professional development, technology, and physical assets.
- b. Maintain an organizational culture that brings out the best in each person.
- c. Retain PLT's status as a respected leader in the land trust community by continuing to participate in appropriate networks and associations that support staff development and PLT success.

Objective 5.3: Ensure PLT has an Effective Board of Directors

- a. Increase and diversify the Board's circles of influence with a focus on IDEAL, in part by encouraging new Board members to serve.
- b. Increase the capacity of PLT's Board of Directors through ongoing board development activities

Objective 5.4: Utilize partnerships and volunteers to increase capacity and impact

- a. Use Strategic Planning Criteria and evaluation of existing and potential staff capacity to identify which partners and volunteers can contribute the greatest impact to achieving PLT's goals.

- b. Engage with the community to determine volunteer and partner interest.
- c. Sustain and build on current volunteer and partnership efforts to enhance expertise and capacity. Develop new partnerships and approaches to expand volunteer commitment and contribution to meet organizational needs and IDEAL goals. Ensure volunteers are adequately trained, equipped, supported, and appropriately recognized; and volunteer and partner contributions are tracked to help inform future decisions.



Strategic Planning Criteria

The following criteria questions were developed to help the staff and Board with evaluating potential projects, programs, partnerships, and other actions (all included under the term “work” below).

- Alignment with Mission and Values. How well does this work align with our mission and our core values? Will it help us realize our vision for Placer County?
- Alignment with Conservation Priorities. Will this work have important impacts through protecting water quality, wildlife habitat, or important agricultural land? Will it help facilitate meaningful connections with the land? Will stewardship work help improve climate resilience and reduce the risk of catastrophic fires?
- Leveraging Strengths. Will this work leverage PLT’s existing strengths or help build capacity in an area where PLT wants to better align with our mission and core values? Would the work help build important new partnerships?
- Feasibility. How feasible is this work? Does PLT already have the capacity and expertise to successfully accomplish the work? If not, would building that capacity and expertise be practical and beneficial to PLT? Would the work help PLT leverage new sources of funding?
- Urgency. How urgent is this work? If the work does not happen soon, will critical conservation values and benefits be lost? Would the work not be accomplished without PLT?
- Transformative Change. Does this work have the potential to contribute to large-scale, transformative impacts particularly in ways that promote climate resilience? Is the work innovative or scalable in ways that could drive positive changes elsewhere?
- IDEAL. Will this work help PLT expand its commitment to inclusion, diversity, equity, and access to land? Will it help PLT connect with underrepresented community members, Indigenous communities, or with the next generation of conservationists?

Overview of the Planning Process

The staff and Board worked with Land and Water Connections Consulting to lead internal and external engagement for the development of this revised Strategic Plan. Engagement took place primarily in September and October 2021 and included:

- A detailed survey of staff and members of the Board and Community Council (26 participants)
- A focused survey of conservation partners and community members (76 responses)
- Interviews with conservation partners and community leaders with experience in inclusion, diversity, equity, and access to land (32 interviews)
- Two (2) consultant-facilitated strategic planning workshops with staff and Board plus additional structured discussions of key topics facilitated by staff and Board members

Further, to seek overlay, alignment, and leverage of our impact with efforts underway by other significant conservation champions in the region, we reviewed their guiding documents and plans, including:

- Placer Legacy, a countywide program adopted in 2000 to help implement open space and habitat protection elements of the County’s 1994 General Plan
- Placer County Conservation Program, authorized in 2021 as a framework for conservation of special status species, stream systems, and natural communities in western Placer County, with an overall goal to protect a 47,000-acre reserve system within 45 years

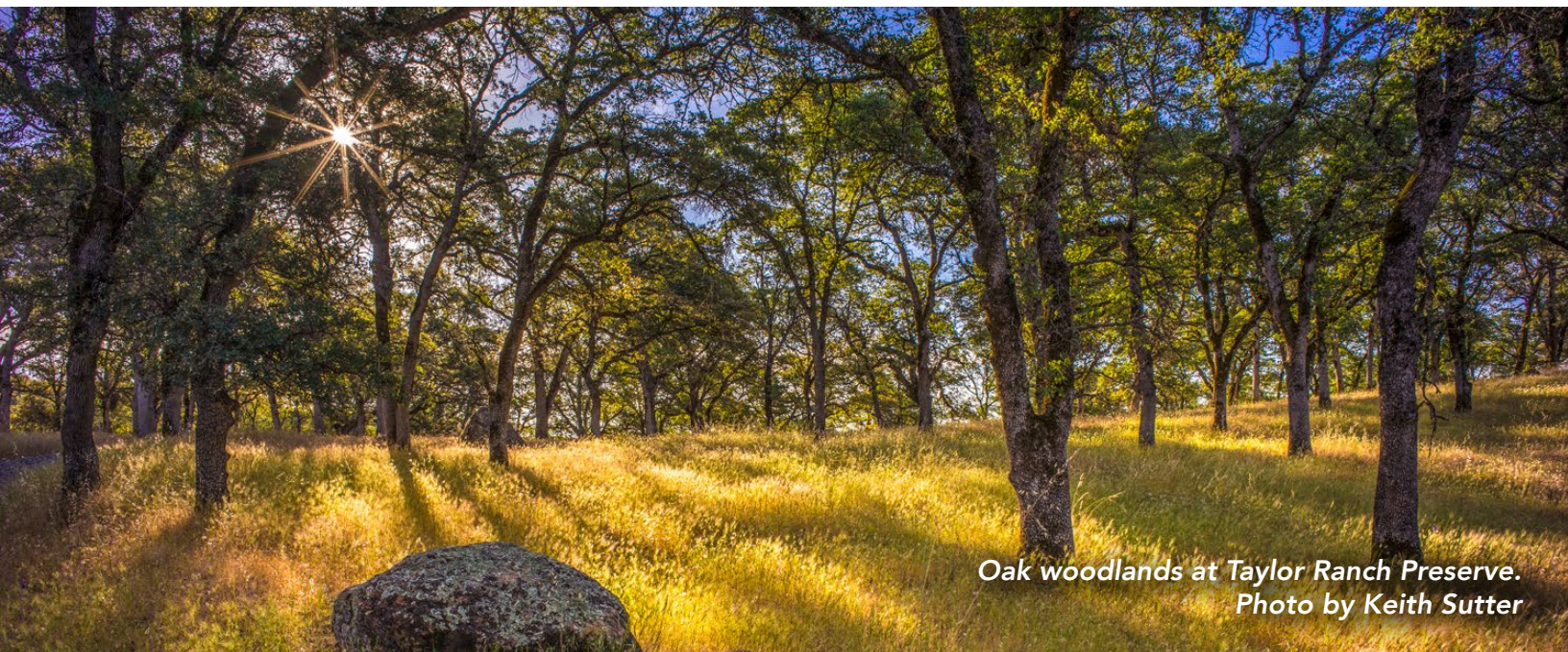
- Sierra Cascade Land Trust Council Strategic Conservation Action Plan (S-CAP), developed and adopted in 2021 by fourteen local land trusts based in the Sierra Nevada and California Cascades, to provide overarching vision and guiding principles for regional attainment of conservation goals and objectives over a 5-year period

The County programs have important overlaps with our conservation priorities for habitat and water resources, and each program also includes potential funding and partnership potential. S-CAP provides a regional framework with shared elements to incorporate into our plans, at the same time ensuring that our contributions can help to achieve agreed-upon regional goals.

The goals of the strategic planning process were to:

- Build on previous strategic planning, but also incorporate voices of newer staff and Board members
- Build on Placer Land Trust's (PLT's) successes and call attention to new issues and areas where PLT has not made as much progress
- Understand the key priorities of existing partners and potential partners
- Identify a strategic approach to helping people connect to land that does not take away from PLT's primary focus on conservation and stewardship
- Create pathways to greater inclusion, diversity, equity, and access to land (IDEAL) in PLT's work
- Establish a clear, inspiring vision for conservation success that is a compelling to funders and partners
- Provide aspirational, but also practical and attainable, goals and objectives to serve as a roadmap for the PLT Board and staff

Revising the Strategic Plan included updating the existing vision and mission statements and developing a set of shared core values based on staff and Board input. The final draft of the strategic plan was reviewed by the staff and Board in November 2021 and approved by the Board in January 2022. The final strategic plan is considered a working document that can be revised by the staff and Board to meet evolving challenges and take advantage of new opportunities in keeping with PLT's vision, mission, and values. Implementation plans will be developed in 2022 and annually (or as needed) to fulfill the Strategic Plan through specific and measurable goals, timelines, and accountability. The Strategic Plan covers the years 2022 to 2030, with annual check-ins.



*Oak woodlands at Taylor Ranch Preserve.
Photo by Keith Sutter*