



WONDERS

PLACER LAND TRUST NEWSLETTER

Autumn 2022



So Much to Give Thanks For!

Whiskey Run Ranch

Picking Up The Pace on Conservation with Three New Preserves

It's been a busy summer and autumn at Placer Land Trust! Over the past few months, three new preserves have joined our roster of permanently protected lands in Placer County – a total of **1,594 acres!** In this issue of Wonders, we'll feature a look at these beautiful, diverse, and important landscapes.

Whiskey Run Ranch

Local Cattle Ranch Protected as Farmland Forever

In August, Placer Land Trust and landowners **Kevin and Patty Crisp** announced the permanent protection of **Whiskey Run Ranch**, a 197-acre working ranch north of the city of Lincoln. Whiskey Run Ranch is a family-owned and operated cattle and mixed livestock ranch.

The land is high-quality grazing land amidst blue oak woodlands and annual grasslands, with a quarter-mile stretch of Raccoon Creek running through the ranch.

Placer Land Trust purchased an Agricultural Conservation Easement from the Crisps at market value, permanently protecting the property while allowing the landowners to continue their agricultural operations. Under the Agricultural Conservation Easement, the landowners retain the right to limited development so that the family can continue to live on and work the land, while being compensated for giving up the right to subdivide and fully develop the property.

"Patty and I are both native Californians that grew up exploring

nature and just running wild as kids," says landowner **Kevin Crisp**. "We purchased the property because we saw it as a piece of California that hasn't changed significantly in the last 100 years, a place where we could walk through the hills surrounded by oaks, all the wildlife and nature. We want to preserve that part of California for our kids, grandkids, and all Californians. Placer Land Trust came to our attention as a partner that shared our interest in California's future."

In addition to the benefits to local agriculture, protecting this land helps preserve the Raccoon Creek corridor, an important migration route allowing wildlife to move west to east. The landowners have observed juvenile salmonids, bald eagles, golden eagles, various

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hawks, owls, hummingbirds, wood ducks, mallards, woodpeckers, turkeys, quail, deer, black bear, bobcats, foxes, and skunks on the property.

“Placer County’s agricultural lands are really attractive for development, but the real value of these lands is food production by local farmers and ranchers,” says Placer Land Trust Executive Director **Jeff Darlington**. “We’re pleased to provide State of California conservation funding to local farmers and ranchers who are willing to protect their productive agricultural lands forever.”

Funds for the Whiskey Run Ranch

project 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. Placer County remains one of the fastest-growing counties in California, and the growth of Lincoln has been particularly explosive, with

hundreds or even thousands of acres of farmland being converted to development every year. Agricultural conservation easements that limit development avoid the ongoing greenhouse gas emissions associated with that development while promoting healthy land use practices and environmental health.

State funds for the project were to be supplemented by federal grant funds, but federal funding fell through at the last minute, so Placer Land Trust tapped special reserve funding donated by land trust members over the years for agricultural conservation.



American River Headwaters Preserve

Protecting forest and watershed health, wildlife habitat, research opportunities, recreation and more

In October, Placer Land Trust and the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection (CAL FIRE) announced the permanent protection of **American River Headwaters Preserve**, located near Lake Valley Reservoir, south of Interstate 80 at Yuba Gap.

This 1,151-acre property contains the headwaters of the North Fork of the North Fork American River which contributes to the high quality of drinking water in Placer County. Significant wetlands and water resources are located on the property, including Sixmile Meadow, valued for its beauty as well as its ecosystem functions of storing and filtering water, regulating flow, sequestering carbon, and providing important wildlife habitat.

The property was formerly owned by Pacific Gas and Electric Company (PG&E). Through PG&E’s Land Conservation Commitment in partnership with the Pacific Forest and Watershed Lands Stewardship Council, the property has been transferred to CAL FIRE. CAL FIRE will own and manage the property, and Placer Land Trust



Wildflowers bloom at Sixmile Meadow, American River Headwaters Preserve

holds a conservation easement that permanently prohibits subdivision and limits development.

The property is the second of a three-phase project with multiple partners to create a permanently protected 2,618-acre Demonstration State Forest spanning the Upper American and Bear River watersheds in Placer and Nevada counties on both sides of Interstate 80 from Emigrant Gap to Cisco Grove. The first phase was CAL FIRE’s recent acquisition of 267 acres between

the South Yuba River and Bear River below Lake Spaulding, permanently protected by a conservation easement held by the Nevada County-based Bear Yuba Land Trust. The final phase will be the addition of 1,200 acres near the Bear River anticipated to be acquired from PG&E in early 2023.

These Demonstration State Forests serve as ‘living laboratories’ where researchers, scientists, landowners and interested citizens can learn about forest management,



2022 – A Year to Celebrate!

As you reflect on any given year, how do you determine if it was a good one? For those of us at Placer Land Trust, there's no question that 2022 was one that made us smile! We're on track to protect more acres of land in one year than ever before, we took a small step to right a past injustice by donating ancestral land back to the Colfax-Todds Valley Consolidated Tribe, and we were able to celebrate these successes and so many more with our members and friends in person at our Pie Party and through our Conservation Celebration Week events!

The support of our members means the world to us as we know you're right there with us, wanting to

do whatever we can as individuals and as a collective group to protect our natural and agricultural treasures before they're gone. And even though it's important to pause and celebrate our accomplishments, we can't rest on our laurels – there is so much more work to be done.

That's why this season of giving, **we hope you'll consider one more donation, or a gift of membership for a loved one** to Placer Land Trust. We need each and every gift, whether given through Big Day of Giving, Conservation Celebration Week, and at all other times of the year to make our work possible – as you know, land is expensive! Your investment today through the end

of December will protect the lands that benefit our physical and mental well-being, protect our local food sources, reduce pollution in our water and air, provide habitat for local wildlife, create opportunities for outdoor exercise and play, improve resilience to drought and other impacts of climate change... and so much more!

Help us reach our goal of protecting 25,000 acres by 2030 – not because the numbers are important, but because of all the life improving benefits those protected landscapes will provide! We thank you, and future generations will thank you!

You can further Placer Land Trust's mission through monetary gifts (one-time or recurring), stock transfers, IRA distributions, donor advised funds, donations of vehicles or land, and/or leaving a legacy gift in your will or estate plans. For more information, please visit www.placerlandtrust.org/ways-to-give or contact Kara Walker at 530-887-9222 or kara.walker@placerlandtrust.org.



Panoramic views at American River Headwaters Preserve

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, 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.

Gathering to Celebrate Conservation

Our first-ever **Conservation Celebration Week** was so much fun – and a tremendous success! Whether you sponsored the events, contributed auction items, purchased tickets to one of our events, bid on auction items, and/or invested directly in land conservation, we are SO grateful for your support! These events resulted in **over \$79,000**, which will be invested right back into the community in the form of newly protected land. Together, we are playing our part to increase quality of life for all who live, work, and play in Placer County.

And congratulations to the recipient of our 2022 Placer Conservator Award, **Paul Aronowitz!** Paul graciously joined us at all three events so our members could spend time with him and help us recognize his achievements. Paul's law firm has acted as legal counsel on numerous Placer Land Trust projects, and he is committed to educating his clients about the benefits of philanthropy and land conservation. Paul, along with his wife Diane, has also been a member for nearly two decades, helping to fund the permanent protection of our valued lands. We simply wouldn't be where we are as an organization without Paul's involvement!

Finally, it was so wonderful to see so many of our members after years of not gathering in person. Thank you to all who came out to celebrate land conservation, and we look forward to catching up with you all again in the near future!

Thanks to our lead sponsors for their generous support!



Jeff Darlington and Paul Aronowitz



Placer County Board of Supervisors present a commendation to Paul



Conservationfest at Kathrin's Biergarten



Live music under the stars at Party on the Preserve



Party on the Preserve

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forest health, timber production, public recreation, watershed and wildlife protection, habitat restoration, and climate adaptation strategies related to wildfire. The property will also be open for recreation activities including fishing, hunting, camping, hiking, and quiet

enjoyment and study of nature.

Funding to ensure the property's permanent protection was provided to Placer Land Trust by the Stewardship Council. The land will be stewarded under a Forest Management Plan to be approved by the Board of Forestry and Fire

Protection; CAL FIRE Sacramento Resource Management will be managing the property. CAL FIRE retains the right to build forest and fire management structures on less than 2% of the property, such as a fire station, lookouts, or barracks for fire/forestry personnel working in the area.

Bushamul Vernal Pool Preserve

Protecting Rare Wetlands for Endangered Species

In partnership with PG&E, we just completed our newest project – the permanent protection of **Bushamul Vernal Pool Preserve**, 246 acres of vernal pool grasslands, wetlands, and habitat for endangered species in Sheridan.

The preserve is made up of approximately 211 acres of grasslands and 35 acres of wetlands, vernal pools, streams, and riparian habitat. This diverse landscape provides critical wildlife habitat and scenic open space in the unincorporated area of Sheridan north of the City of Lincoln.

A Conservation Easement covering the 246-acre preserve was donated to Placer Land Trust by PG&E as required by the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service and other public resource agencies to mitigate for impacts to vernal pool species and wetland, riparian and grassland habitat. The Preserve contains similar habitat to some of the lands impacted by the operation and maintenance of PG&E's electricity and natural gas infrastructure in Northern California.

The most unusual animal that lives, feeds, and breeds on this preserve is the Vernal Pool Fairy Shrimp (*Branchinecta lynchi*), a tiny freshwater crustacean endemic to California that is Federally listed as a threatened species. Over 90% of California's vernal pools have been destroyed by development and other land conversion. This preserve and other Placer Land Trust vernal pool preserves provide some of the

last protected habitat for the shrimp and other vernal pool species.

Vernal pools are an integral part of the Central Valley ecosystem. Migratory waterfowl feed on the fairy shrimp and the other aquatic life in the vernal pools as they move up and down the Pacific Flyway. The grasslands surrounding vernal pools teem with other bird life. The Northern Harrier (a State species of special concern) is frequently seen here, and the preserve also provides suitable habitat for other rare birds such as Swainson's Hawk, Western Burrowing Owl, and Tricolored Blackbird.

Bushamul Vernal Pool Preserve got its name from the historic Nisenan village of Bushamul. According to the United Auburn Indian Community (UAIC), the Preserve is situated near the site of this historic village. UAIC gave their approval of the use of the Nisenan name for this purpose.



Bushamul Vernal Pool Preserve

PG&E owns the land and will continue to manage it for wildlife benefit consistent with the terms of the easement, including livestock grazing and beekeeping, which are beneficial not only to our local agricultural industry but also to the vernal pool grassland habitat. Placer Land Trust's role will be to monitor the Preserve on an annual basis, ensuring the terms of the easement are being upheld, and that the conservation values of the land are protected for future generations.

"Vernal pool grassland protection projects like this help our rural county balance the growth of development with the protection of endangered species," says Placer Land Trust Executive Director **Jeff Darlington**. "Current and future generations benefit from this balance – as does our environment, economy, and quality of life."



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Vernal Pool Fairy Shrimp at our newest preserve... full story inside!

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Welcoming Gary Wells as Stewardship Assistant

Join us in welcoming Gary Wells to the Placer Land Trust staff as our new Stewardship Assistant! Gary is a longtime Placer Land Trust supporter and volunteer since 2006. Over the years, Gary has assisted with many land stewardship activities as a volunteer, so he has great experience!

Gary was recognized as our Land Steward of the Year in 2007, and, with his wife Shannon, was honored as Volunteer of the Year in 2019. Some of our members may recognize Gary from his promotion of Big Day of Giving – for the last few years he’s done a personal BDOG fundraising campaign for us, and then puts the names of all of the donors into a song that he writes and records!

Gary was a teacher for over 20 years, much of that time at E.V. Cain Middle School in Auburn. He recently retired from teaching with a goal to do more conservation work outdoors. He is also a UC Extension-certified California naturalist, a volunteer with Gold Country Wildlife Rescue, an award-winning DJ at local community radio station KVMR, and has served on our Community Council. Gary and Shannon live in Auburn and enjoy backpacking and birdwatching.



Upcoming Hikes & Events

December 10: Open Preserve Day at Taylor Ranch Preserve

December 11: Docent-led Hike at Harvego Bear River Preserve

For more upcoming hikes, visit placerlandtrust.org/calendar