



Vol. 13 #1

Solano Land Trust

VISTAS

www.solanolandtrust.org

Donor Offers \$450,000 Challenge Benefits Rush Ranch

Marilyn Farley, Executive Director



Rush Ranch Vista, Photo: Craig Hagstrom

An anonymous donor has gifted \$250,000 to Solano Land Trust and pledged up to \$200,000 more if SLT can raise \$450,000 from other supporters before October 1, 2006. "We are privileged to have a donor with such an incredible commitment to helping us reach our goals for Rush Ranch," said SLT President Bob Berman.

This gift kicks off an ambitious campaign approved by the board of directors at their January 2006 meeting, a plan that calls for raising a \$2-million endowment fund for Rush Ranch in the next year.

A portion of the donation will pay for on-going management of the ranch's abundant natural resources. The balance will guarantee a revenue

stream to cover ongoing maintenance of the new classroom and nature center, caretaker residence and facilities for visiting National Estuarine Research Reserve scientists.

The donor's commitment is based on his love of Rush Ranch and desire to help SLT preserve, protect and enhance the marsh environment. As he points out, Rush Ranch is home to rare and

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Spring
2006

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President's Message

Bob Berman, President



In January, Solano Land Trust welcomed a new executive committee. Sean Quinn, our president since Oct. 2002, has stepped down. Sean served as board president during some difficult financial times and deserves special recognition for spending countless hours to put

SLT in its strongest financial position ever. Sean also guided SLT through the transition to our current executive director, Marilyn Farley. We can't thank Sean enough! He remains on the board as immediate past president.

I am SLT's new board president, and have served on the board since SLT's inception in 1986 as the Solano County Farmlands and Open Space Foundation. I am a 33-year resident of Solano County and have spent much of that time active in land use issues.

Frank Morris continues to serve as treasurer and Jane Hicks as secretary. Ian Anderson, who has served on the board since 1999 and is a fourth generation Montezuma Hills farmer, is now vice president. He is also active on our Ag Conservation Easement Committee.

Other board changes include the resignation of Karin MacMillan, whose term as City of Fairfield mayor ended in December. Attorney Carl Debevec also resigned. Carl, who served on the board since 2004, was instrumental in starting up SLT's investment committee, and has resigned to pursue other community interests in the city of Vacaville. Thanks to Karin and Carl for their efforts on behalf of the Land Trust. The new City of Fairfield representative is Jack Batson, a Fairfield city council member since 1999. He is a retired teacher with a strong interest in preserving agriculture in Solano County.

April 20, 2006 will mark the 20th-anniversary of the formation of the Solano Land Trust. We have made exciting progress in the past 20 years in our effort to preserve farmlands and open space throughout Solano County. On behalf of the board of directors I want to thank all of you who have helped us in fulfilling our mission of land preservation. ❖

Donor's Challenge

Continued from page 1

endangered plant and animal species and is one of only a few major marshes remaining in California.

"Many local residents aren't aware of what a treasure we have right at our doorstep," says the anonymous donor.

The timing of this gift will greatly strengthen SLT's \$500,000 grant request to the State Coastal Conservancy (SCC) to complete construction of new facilities at Rush Ranch, according to Ann Buell, SCC's project manager. Buell told SLT that an endowment or other dependable revenue stream to care for the new facility will assure SCC that an investment made with public funds will be maintained over time.

Rush Ranch was the first property acquired by SLT after its founding in 1986. Area farmer and businessman Bob Dittmer, whose son Jeff now sits on the SLT board, sold the ranch to SLT in 1988. At that time, no money was available to establish an endowment for on-going stewardship of the land.

In past years, stewardship has been accomplished largely by volunteers, particularly the members of the Rush Ranch Educational Council, SLT's Land Steward Ken Poerner and Field Steward Terry Chappell, as well as through use of grants received for specific projects. The SLT board is now focusing on the need for funds to provide for improvements and on-going maintenance.

Immediate past President Sean Quinn notes, "This donor has a genuine love of our Rush Ranch property and has absolutely no desire to be in the limelight. He has been more than cooperative in helping us launch this campaign to endow Rush Ranch. We hope this challenge will inspire more donors to make a substantial contribution." ❖

Help Match \$450,000 Gift!

Supporters of Solano Land Trust are asked to make a generous donation to our endowment fund for Rush Ranch. By donating now, you can help ensure that SLT receives the full \$450,000 promised by our anonymous donor.

Naming rights for the new education center at Rush Ranch are available to a contributor who makes a significant contribution.

Please use the enclosed envelope or contact Executive Director Marilyn Farley at (707) 432-0150 ext. 201 for more information.



Executive Director's Perspective

Marilyn Farley, *Executive Director*

Raising money is a large part of the battle for any nonprofit. But once the check is written, wise fiscal management of the funds becomes very important. Based on the recommendation of SLT's Investment Committee, we began to search for professional investment management services at a low cost, and after many months of research, selected Commonfund as our investment manager.

The Center for Natural Lands Management, a nonprofit in San Diego County managing over 48,000-acres of conservation lands, recommended Commonfund based on their positive experience.

Originally focused on addressing poor endowment returns of higher education institutions, Commonfund was established by the Ford Foundation in 1971, and is now dedicated to helping non-profits achieve sound performance for their endowment funds.

SLT invests endowment money related to managing our conservation easements, mitigation projects, and stewardship of land. Under current board policy, a portion of our earnings are drawn down to cover the cost of monitoring easements and mitigation projects and to carry out habitat and other improvement projects on lands we

own. The remainder is reinvested to offset inflation and grow our funds.

Sound financial management will help ensure our ability to be good long-term stewards of the land. This move goes hand in hand with the board's decision to engage the services of a consultant, Rob Kusel of Essex and Drake, a firm specializing in helping non-profits with fund-raising.

I personally am committed to helping lead SLT's efforts to meet our fundraising goals. I expect to work with a leadership team, consisting of board members and others, to seek major contributions to our endowment fund for Rush Ranch. We're looking forward to having the money to carry out annual work plans and to have a caretaker or ranch manager on-site in 2007. ❖

Grants Fund Stock Fence and Signs

Thanks to Solano County Water Agency's (SCWA) \$28,000 award, SLT will build a new stock fence to permit managed grazing in the 20-acre Docent Triangle Pasture at Jepson Prairie.

Grazing has not occurred in this area — the site of Olcott Lake, Jepson's largest vernal pool — since the 1980s due to concerns that grazing would be detrimental to endangered species. However, recent studies by Jaymee Marty of The Nature Conservancy have shown that there is an increase in diversity and abundance of native species with controlled grazing.

The fence will be built later this summer. Besides several large gates to move the animals in and out, two self-closing hiker gates will be installed to provide access to the self-guided nature trail.

"We hope to 'mob' the pasture this fall with

several hundred sheep to trample the weeds and thatch that have built up over the years. Then we will start a controlled grazing regime," said Ken Poerner, SLT's land steward.

SCWA's funding, designated for mitigating for threatened and endangered species due to impacts at Lake Berryessa, comes from the U. S. Bureau of Reclamation.

For the Rush Ranch property, the San Francisco Estuary Project has awarded SLT \$8,000 to design, build and install five interpretive trail signs. This work will be done cooperatively with the Rush Ranch Educational Council and the San Francisco Bay National Estuarine Research Reserve. The signs will help educate the public about the natural resources and current estuary research at Rush Ranch. ❖

Wanted

- A high-quality, heavy-duty brush chipper for property maintenance.
- A good quality used or new 4-wheel drive
- A heavy-duty ride-on lawn mower

Call Ken Poerner at
(707) 580-6277.



Local Kids Grind Acorns, Learn about Patwins of Yulyul

Aleta George, *Editor*



Throwing spears in the Patwin Village

Photo: Dotty Schenk

If Travis Air Force Base could harness the vigor of third-grade kids exploding out of their vehicles and onto the Rush Ranch property for a field trip, they'd have no need for any other fuels. Free from the classroom's four walls, the kids leap and bound into the day.

Throughout the school year, local children arrive at Rush Ranch for the Patwin Program, an outdoor, half-day lesson that teaches about the Native Americans who once lived on the Rush Ranch property. Started in 1994, the program has since grown to serve about 1,500 kids and 350 accompanying adults each year.

Lu King, a Cambridge Elementary teacher, has been bringing her classes to Rush Ranch for eight years because the program ties into State-required third-grade curriculum. For months before the field trip, she teaches the children about the Patwins and the marsh.

"The field trip is the culmination of our studies, where the students experience firsthand the sights, sounds and smells of the marsh," said Lu.

The program starts on the wooden deck of the Kit House—a Sears and Roebuck catalogue house erected in 1932 now serving as the ranch's small museum. With the children sitting on a tarp, the docents teach them a few basics about the Patwins, the southernmost tribe of the Wintun language group. According to anthropologist Alfred L. Kroeber, a small tribe of Suisunis — a subtribe of the Patwins — lived on the Rush Ranch property in a village called Yulyul.

Docents then lead the kids down the marsh

trail towards the recreated Patwin village located on the western edge of the property adjacent to the Suisun Marsh. The kids learn that the Suisunis hunted with spears and arrows for tule elk and bear; scooped fish out of the water after stunning them with the bulbous root of the soap plant; netted ducks after attracting them with tule decoys; traded for acorns in the Rockville hills; decorated baskets with shells, porcupine twills, and feathers; and, kept their babies in cradle boards to keep them from harm. The kids grind their own acorn flour, make shell necklaces with a wooden hand drill, and shoot cattail spears through tule hoops.

At times the children listen attentively, but they are also often distracted by C-5s flying low overhead, ladybugs in the grass, and birds calling from the marsh.

"It's better to see the nature than to go to the mall and the movies because you learn stuff from looking at plants. Thinking about nature is very important," said Annais Mardirous, an eight-year-old from Amy Blanc Elementary, who attended the program in February.

The Patwin Program is so popular that RREC needs to turn away 10-12 schools each year. In the near future, RREC hopes to offer the program two days a week so that they can accommodate all the schools interested in participating. They say it can be done with half-a-dozen more volunteer docents. If interested in fresh air and helping Solano County teachers and kids, join the RREC docents by calling Don Taynton at (707) 425-3706. ❖



Volunteer Highlight:

Don Taynton Leads Rush Ranch Docents

Aleta George, Editor



Don Taynton at Rush Ranch
Photo: Dotty Schenk

Don Taynton signed up to become a docent for the Patwin Native American Program after retiring in 1994. "I like working with children. Third graders are interested and sincere in accepting what we teach them. They get hands-on experience with Indian culture that they can't get out of a textbook," he says.

He taught the "plants for food and medicine" station until becoming docent coordinator in 2000, a volunteer position. Don is also the ranch's resident historian. "History is

everywhere you look at Rush Ranch," he says. By contacting Rush family descendents, and spending hours at the Solano County Records Office and local libraries, Don has contributed a significant amount of knowledge about the ranch's history. In 2003 he updated the Rush Ranch Handbook (originally published in 1997) by adding his historical findings and increasing the plant list from 167 to 234. Each spring he

conducts wildflower walks on the property (see activities on the back page).

Don and the other RREC board members want to increase their docent roster. With six more docents they could offer the program twice a week and not have to turn schools away. "We have a strong, ongoing program, but we need more docents," he says. "We have fun and enjoy each other's company."

Docent Mary Ann Rich, a retired teacher from Cleo Gordon Elementary, loves coming to Rush Ranch on Tuesday mornings. She was at first nervous to come out because she thought there would be a lot to learn. "I was relieved to find out that I only needed to learn one teaching station," said Rich, who now helps Don with coordinating the docents. ❖

Attention Interested Docents!

A docent orientation and information meeting will take place at the Solano Land Trust offices on April 5, 2006 at 7:30 p.m. Call Don Taynton at (707) 425-3706 for more information.

Drive Away With Mike

Sue Wickham, Resource Management Plan Coordinator

While visiting Rush Ranch from April to October you may see large draft horses pulling a special carriage on open grassland trails. The brainchild of Michael Muir, Access Adventure is a local volunteer group that provides outdoor access for people with mobility restrictions on the properties of Solano Land Trust and Muir Heritage Land Trust in Contra Costa County. The rides are for people with all forms of mobility restrictions, including wheelchairs.

An avid horseman, horse breeder and open space advocate (like his famous great grandfather John Muir), Dixon-born Michael Muir likes Rush Ranch because of its past. With harness hooks still hanging on barn walls, a sense of horse history abounds. Since Muir began Access Adventure rides at Rush Ranch in July 2005, they have been extremely popular. Last autumn one of the outings

had over 45 people sign up.

Michael says that a disability does not need to restrict one's world. Having lived with multiple sclerosis since age 15, he lives by the motto: "If we will not be limited by the challenges we face, we are free to challenge our limits." In 2001 he and an international group of horsemen with disabilities drove wheelchair accessible, horse drawn carriages three-thousand-miles from California to Washington, DC.

Where others hike a trail, Michael drives
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Mike Muir at the reins
Photo: SLT



Bringing Back Lindsey Slough: *SLT Develops Restoration Plan for Calhoun Cut Ecological Reserve*

Ben Wallace, *Conservation Project Manager*



Calhoun Cut slices through the historic Lindsey Slough channel.
Photo: Solano Land Trust

Two six-foot long submarine sandwiches were barely enough for the 35 people who gathered in February to learn about a restoration project being designed for the Calhoun Cut Ecological Reserve. In 2002, SLT developed a conservation plan for the Jepson Prairie-Prospect Island corridor and raised funds to restore the historic channel of Lindsey Slough on the Calhoun Cut Ecological Reserve. The California Bay Delta Authority Ecosystem Restoration Program has provided funding for both projects.

Calhoun Cut was built in 1913 as part of an urban development scheme. Today, the historic channel of Lindsey Slough is still largely intact, as it curves and winds

outside of the arrow-straight, levee-bound channel of Calhoun Cut. In the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta, where water diversions, levees, and intensifying land use have dramatically reduced the range of natural marshlands, Lindsey Slough presents a rare opportunity to restore a natural waterway.

SLT has brought together a scientific team, including Philip Williams & Associates and EDAA, an environmental planning and design firm, to design a project that reconnects the freshwater tidal marsh riparian community without adversely affecting the surrounding land. The project site is next to SLT's Jepson Prairie Preserve on land owned by the California Department of Fish and Game.

"We are working hard to involve our neighbors early on," says Ben Wallace, SLT's conservation project manager. The outreach effort appears to be paying off: more than a third of the people who came to the meeting were neighboring landowners and local agricultural producers.

The Solano Irrigation District hosted the Feb. 21 meeting at their Vacaville office, and the Solano Resource Conservation District helped organize the event. The project team is also working closely with the Solano County Water Agency to make sure the project protects the water quality at the nearby pumps that provide municipal drinking water for many communities in the Bay Area. ❖

Drive Away With Mike

Continued from page 5

wagon train style over mountain passes, ranches, and plains. This year he and fellow volunteers at Access Adventure are planning four wilderness trips through the Los Padres National Forest, Fort Hunter Liggett, Fandango Pass and the Lost Coast above Mendocino.

Access Adventure will be showcasing two new carriages at the Rush Ranch Open House on April 29, 2006. The larger carriage holds 12 passengers

or five wheelchairs or a combination of both, and the smaller wagon holds two wheel chairs.

Rides at Rush Ranch are free, and groups are welcome to schedule special trips. Donations for this program can be sent to the Solano Land Trust and will be used for insurance and vehicle acquisition and repair. To sign up for an Access Adventure trip contact Michael at (707) 426-3990 or stonewallmike@hotmail.com. ❖

Thanks to All Our Recent Contributors

We want to thank all those who have recently contributed to help us preserve, manage, and educate the public about agricultural lands, wetlands, and open space in Solano County.

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planning. Memorial
gifts and bequests
are placed in our
endowment fund so
that these gifts can
permanently support
conservation in
Solano County. We
welcome inquiries
about bequests at
(707) 432-0150 x 201.



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Our Mission Statement

Solano Land Trust is a private, nonprofit organization whose mission is the preservation of agricultural lands, open space, and resources through the acquisition of land and conservation easements, education, and land management.

Activities & Events

Jepson Prairie Preserve

Jepson Prairie's Peak Wildflower Season!

Docent-led Tours

Saturdays & Sundays, Mar. thru May 14. 10 a.m. - Free

Join docents on easy walks around flower fringed vernal pools and ogle rare fairy shrimp and tiger salamanders. A \$1 donation per person is requested. Located on Cook Lane, 11 miles south of Dixon off Highway 113. Groups larger than five should contact (707) 432-0150, x-202. Visit www.solanolandtrust.org

Rush Ranch Open Space

Open to the public Tue. to Sat. from 8 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. Suisun Hill Trail (across the road from Rush Ranch) is open seven days a week, dawn to dusk. For additional information visit www.rushranch.org.

Spring Wildflower Walk

Apr. 8. 9 a.m. - Free

Take a beautiful spring walk through open grasslands and along the marsh's edge while learning about many of the region's wildflowers from docent Don Taynton.

16th Annual Rush Ranch Open House

Apr. 29. 10 a.m. to 3:00 p.m. - Free

Learn about the ranch's natural and cultural history while enjoying horse-drawn wagon rides, live music and square dancing, blacksmithing, falconry, working sheepdog demonstrations, and an art sale and poetry reading. Call (707) 422-4491 or visit www.rushranch.org for details

Marsh Discovery Walk

May 21. 10 a.m. - Free

Discover the amazing wetlands of Rush Ranch with San Francisco Bay National Estuarine Research Reserve's educational coordinator, Sarah Davies. Please RSVP to davies@sfsu.edu.

Solano Land Trust
1001 Texas Street, Suite C
Fairfield, CA 94533
(707) 432-0150

Access Adventures: Challenging the Limits of Disability

Michael Muir leads a recreational horse-drawn carriage program for people with disabilities. For more information go to www.access-adventure.org, or contact Mike at mmuir@access-adventure.org or (707) 426-3990.

Volunteer Workdays

First Saturday of the month:

Apr. 1, May 6, June 3. 9 a.m. - Free

Call Ken at (707) 580-6277.

Blacksmith Shop Demonstrations

Third Saturday of the month:

Apr. 15, May 20, Jun. 17. 10 a.m. to 1 p.m. - Free

Night Photography Workshop

July 7 - \$100

Learn how to photograph the ranch under a full moon with professional photographer Tim Baskerville. To register contact Tim at basket@thenocturnes.com or call (707) 645-9860.

Lynch Canyon Open Space

Currently Lynch Canyon is open to the public during staff- or docent-led activities only.

Volunteer Trail Care Days

Second Saturday of the month:

Apr. 8, May 13, Jun. 10. 9 a.m. - Free

Call Ken at (707) 580-6277.

Scenic Hikes

Fourth Saturday of the month:

Mar. 25, Apr. 22, Jun. 10. 9 a.m. to 1 p.m. - Free

Call Ken at (707) 580-6277

King and Swett Ranches

The newly acquired King and Swett Ranches are part of the Sky Valley-Cordelia Hills Open Space and are currently open to the public during staff- or docent-led activities only.

Scenic Hikes

Saturdays, Apr. 8, May 6, Jun. 3. 9 a.m. - Free

Meet at the Park-and-Ride lot at the Hiddenbrooke Parkway/American Canyon Road exit at I-80. Co-sponsored with the Bay Area Ridge Trail Council. Kathy Blume is April hike leader; Jim Walsh is May-June hike leader.

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