



Vol. 14 #3

Solano Land Trust

VISTAS

www.solanolandtrust.org

Fall
2007

Rush Ranch Nature Center opens soon!

Marilyn Farley, *Executive Director*



Solar panels contribute to the Center's off-the-grid energy needs

Photo: Ken Poerner

Solano Land Trust's new Nature Center at Rush Ranch will soon be ready for use by the public! Please watch our web site for an announcement of a grand opening. Attendees of the Heritage Feast on September 29 will get a sneak preview!

We're currently working on the final touches. The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) has approved an additional \$457,000 grant (NOAA and the Coastal Conservancy each contributed \$500,000 for the building's construction), which includes \$194,000 for remaining construction costs.

The balance of the grant will be used as follows:

- \$210,000 for interpretive exhibits to educate the public about the marsh
- \$35,000 for courtyard landscaping
- \$17,500 for furnishing the Nature Center and visiting scientist's quarters.

Inside

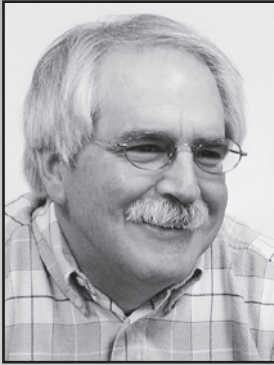
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President's Message

Bob Berman, President



Since our formation in 1986, Solano Land Trust has permanently protected 19,104 acres of Solano County's natural areas and farmlands. As we go about our work, it is important to recognize that SLT is part of a growing land trust

movement in the United States.

The Land Trust Alliance (LTA), a national non-profit organization, publishes a census every five years of lands protected by local and state land trusts. It is the nation's tabulation of land preserved through private, voluntary land conservation. The latest census found that:

- Total acres conserved by local, state, and national land trusts increased 54 percent to 37 million acres between 2000 and 2005.
- The pace of conservation by land trusts more than tripled between successive five-year periods.
- The number of land trusts grew to 1,667, a 32 percent increase over five years.
- The west is the fastest growing area for both acres conserved and new land trusts.
- The highest number of land trusts is found in California.
- Professionalism of land trusts is increasing, with most land trusts agreeing to more stringent rules of conduct and securing larger annual budgets with stewardship endowments.

LTA also reported that ballot initiatives providing new funding for conservation are becoming more common. In 2006, \$6.7 billion in public funds was approved in 133 ballot initiatives across the country, including California.

SLT is proud to be a part of this growing movement, and we are dedicated to continuing our work and spreading the word regarding the value of protecting land. The LTA census confirms that the public also understands the value of preserving natural areas and farmlands.



Heritage Feast

Join us for Solano Land Trust's Heritage Feast at Rush Ranch on September 29 from 5:30 pm to 10:00 pm. Wear western garb as you:

- Ride a horse-drawn carriage along the Suisun Marsh.
- Savor organic walnuts from Dixon Ridge Farms.
- Mingle with Benjamin Rush, Miz Cordelia, the sheriff, the doctor, the mountain man, the mayor and his wife, the school marm, and of course, the madam!
- Select from a rich variety of wine, art, trips, outings, and much more at live and silent auctions.
- Dine on local meats and produce prepared by Benicia Yacht Club Chef Manny Rodriguez.
- Dance to the music of the Phirehouse Philharmonics.

There is still time to purchase your tickets by using the enclosed envelope, ordering online at www.solanolandtrust.org, or contacting Development Director Susan Wilkinson at (707) 432-0150 x205 or susan@solanolandtrust.org.

Event sponsors include the Gordon & Betty Moore Foundation, The Wiseman Company, MV Transportation, Conservation Partners, Sheldon Gas Company, and Katherine Hoffman.

Nature Center

Continued from page 1

The multi-purpose room, courtyard and enclosed patio will be available to nonprofit and government agencies, businesses, and private parties (including weddings) later in 2007. The SLT board of directors is expected to approve rules and a fee schedule at their September meeting. Nonprofits, government agencies and schools will be asked to make a minimum donation for use. The rates for other groups will be available at www.solanolandtrust.org.

Scientists with the National Estuarine Research Reserve doing research at Rush Ranch will be the primary users of the scientist's quarters. Others may reserve the two-bedroom, fully-furnished residence up to 30 days in advance. We expect to have it available in late 2007. ❖

There is still time to buy a brick for the Rush Ranch Nature Center courtyard!

- Be included in the original courtyard construction phase
- Leave a permanent legacy with a personal message
- Support Solano Land Trust

Construction is scheduled to begin later this year. See our web site for the order form and send it in today!

Executive Director's Perspective

Marilyn Farley, *Executive Director*



Volunteers are critical to the success of Solano Land Trust, and I am continually amazed at their high level of commitment. They truly make a difference in our community. For example:

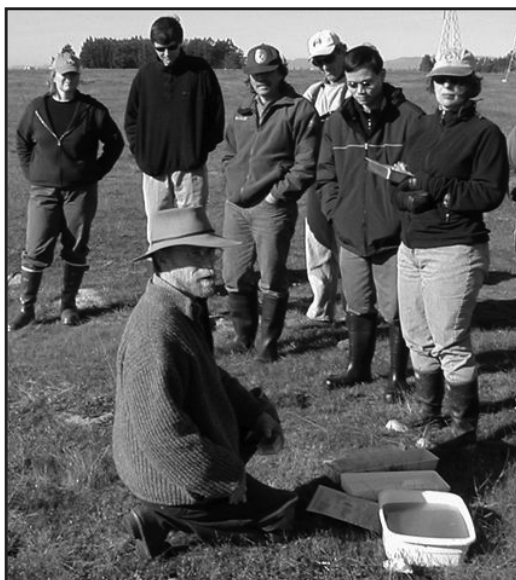
- Jepson Prairie docents organize and teach an annual training program about vernal pools and lead spring wildflower tours. They've been doing it since before SLT existed! This year, the National Parks Service selected them

for a technical assistance grant, with NPS advisors helping them to develop a strategic plan and improve visitor management.

- Rush Ranch Educational Council docents have been educating visiting schoolchildren about Patwin Native American culture since at least 1990. They also coordinate the annual Rush Ranch Days and other events.
- Access Adventure has attracted a horde of dedicated volunteers in the last two years. Led by Mike Muir, the great grandson of John Muir, Access Adventure offers carriage rides to people with mobility limitations. Volunteers also learn to care for the huge draft horses now residing at Rush Ranch.

These partners are the tip of the iceberg. SLT has many other volunteers and volunteer opportunities. This fall, we plan to launch our own docent-training program. Teri Engbring, our new volunteer and education coordinator, is developing a curriculum that will include general orientation, as well as more in-depth training for people who want to lead work parties, outings, and wildlife tours. The schedule will be posted later this fall at www.solanolandtrust.org.

Can you help? Would you like to become a docent with the popular Jepson Prairie or Rush Ranch programs? Do you have a skill or a passion that you'd like to share? Contact Teri Engbring at teri@solanolandtrust.org or (707) 432-0150 x200 to explore your opportunities with SLT. ❖



Docent and volunteer Jim Steinert leads a tour at Jepson Prairie

Photo: Solano Land Trust

Volunteers follow their hearts:

- Retired Fairfield firefighter Doug Wirtz has amassed a beautiful photo collection of the flora and fauna at Jepson Prairie, and other SLT sites.
- A local Latter-Day Saints church gathered about 150 volunteers at Rush Ranch to paint the barn and fences, plant oak trees, and collect tules for the Patwin school program.
- Armijo High School student and Future Farmers of America (FFA) member Sarah Doolittle jumped in to teach visiting international students about livestock. We hope to work with her FFA chapter later this year to raise animals at Rush Ranch.
- Nineteen volunteers from Vallejo's First Baptist Church cleaned up two miles of fire damage on a Lynch Canyon trail.
- Fairfield resident Pat Moran has come in almost weekly for two years to help maintain our donor database.
- Long-time volunteer blacksmith Virgil Sellers is rebuilding our power shed and has spent hundreds of hours restoring floorboards from the old ranch house for the Nature Center.

Honoring the past: The Rush family at Rush Ranch

Don Taynton, Board Member, Rush Ranch Educational Council

Don Taynton, Rush Ranch Educational Council (RREC) docent and board member, began researching the Rush family and their tenancy at the ranch for the Rush Ranch Handbook, an invaluable document prepared and published by RREC that covers the ranch's natural and cultural histories. Don's greatest source was Tom Rush and Fred "Jake" Rush, great grandsons of Benjamin Rush, who sent him newspaper articles, documents, and personal memories.



*The dapper
Benjamin Rush*

You could say that Rush Ranch had its start when Hiram and Sarah Rush left Indiana and came to California by wagon train in 1849. In about 1860 the family moved to Suisun City, and in 1864 Hiram started purchasing the land in the Portrero Hills that became a part of Rush Ranch.

Hiram met an untimely death in 1869 when his buggy tipped over on a hill at the ranch. At the time of his death, Rush Ranch consisted of approximately 2,000 acres, all of which were east of the present Grizzly Island Road. Benjamin Rush was just 17, but had already attended Heald Business College and was working as a bookkeeper in San Francisco. In about 1874 Ben returned to the ranch to help his mother with management, and together they continued purchasing land. By about 1888 they had acquired 5,100 contiguous acres that became known as Rush Ranch.

The ranch headquarters, which consisted of a substantial residence, barn, and other buildings, was about a mile east of the present Rush Ranch. Photographs of these buildings are on display in the Rush Ranch Kit House. In the late 1940s, these dilapidated 80-year-old buildings were intentionally burned.

The family raised cattle, sheep, horses and some crops. Under Ben's influence, the ranch's operation was changed from raising cattle and sheep for beef and mutton to that of raising livestock for breeding. He became a scientific breeder concentrating on Durham/Shorthorn crossbred cattle and more exotic breeds of sheep. He was also interested in breeding and raising harness horses, including speedy trotters that were sold for as much as \$8,000. The present 2,070 acres of Rush Ranch, then known as Tule Ranch, was used principally for raising his prize horses.

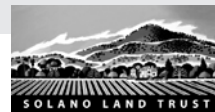
In 1876 Ben married Anna McKean from Astoria, Oregon, and they had seven children. Ben developed interests other than ranching. He was Solano County Sheriff from 1894 until 1899; served six years as the first president of the Solano County Agricultural Society; and, in 1906 was elected to the California State Senate where he served for 24 years.

Probably about 1910, because of Ben's other commitments, his son Richard took over the active management of the ranch. Ben died in 1940, and under the terms of his will, banks managed a newly-established trust that sold all but the 2,070 acres of what is now Rush Ranch. Richard and two of his sisters lived on the remaining acreage, providing their livelihood until 1956.

According to Jake Rush, the ranch flourished for over 100 years. He said his family "practiced good stewardship by rotating livestock in pastures to keep them from overgrazing. This made much more pasture available for the animals and enabled the stewards to run more livestock and increase their profits without damaging the land and environment."

Solano Land Trust purchased Rush Ranch, its first acquisition, in 1987.

The Rush Ranch Handbook contains a more detailed account of ranch and family history, as well as the environmental significance of the Suisun Marsh. (You can purchase a copy for \$10 at the SLT office.) ❖



Farm-to-table: How products from local farms and ranches get to the table

Fourth in a series: Putah Creek Ranch - McNamara Easement

Wendy Low, Land Transaction Specialist

Solano Land Trust holds conservation easements on many types of Solano County farms and ranches. This article is the fourth in a series showcasing the owners of these properties and informing readers where they can purchase the products.

Across a line of old olive trees along Putah Creek Road, the driveway leading onto Putah Creek Ranch passes a vintage bungalow and a tail-water pond. The 324-acre ranch supports a mix of organic walnut orchards and irrigated field crops such as grape rootstock and tomatoes.

It is also the headquarters for Center for Land-Based Learning, a non-profit founded by Craig McNamara (see *Vistas*, Summer 2004). Landowners Craig and Julie McNamara placed an easement on 283 acres of the 324-acre property, protecting the agricultural and creekside areas while excluding the corner where the Center is located, to allow for its future expansion and separate ownership.

“As we looked at our piece of land, we realized that while we could probably sell several estate properties for a million dollars each, it was important to keep it in agricultural production, as well as having the educational program.” said McNamara.

Craig McNamara came to farming from a very unusual background. The son of former Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara, Craig came of age during the national crisis of the Vietnam War, made intensely personal by his father’s leadership role. He left Stanford to travel throughout Latin America, where the dramatic relationship between land, agriculture and political power inspired him to pursue a career in agriculture and bring produce to U.S. inner cities. He returned to school, studying plant and soil science at UC Davis. After searching for farm ground across the country, he came back to the Davis area to settle in the prime soils near Winters, where he got his start selling his fruits and vegetables at a farm stand. In 1980 he and Julie bought the walnut farm where they still live, and in 1986 purchased nearby Putah Creek Ranch.

Craig founded the Center for Land-Based Learning in 1993. Under the FARMS Leadership and SLEWS Programs, the Center hosts a variety of tours, workshops and educational field days for students related to sustainable agriculture, natural resource conservation, and ecological restoration.

In 2003, students from Grant High School who had participated in the FARMS Leadership program began selling their own salsa and marinara sauce at Davis and Sacramento food co-ops. At first, the students contracted out for the ingredients and preparation. The next year, the students got directly involved in the farm-to-table process, growing their own herbs and assisting in planting and harvesting their own tomatoes. Campbell Soup Company processed the tomatoes in Dixon, and Sonoma Gourmet bottled the sauces according to the students’ own recipes. The label of their product is “E.A.T. from the Garden” (E.A.T. stands for Ethnic American Treasures).

Craig leases out a portion of the walnut orchards to Martinez Orchards. The organic walnuts are distributed by Dixon Ridge Farms, whose operations are just across Putah Creek Road. They sell walnuts to national distributors who provide bulk walnuts for Whole Foods, Trader Joe’s, and many co-ops.

Craig’s influence as a farm leader has been far-reaching. Among his many roles, he serves on the UC Davis Dean’s Advisory Council and has enjoyed working with state leaders as a member of the California State Board of Farming and Agriculture since 2001. ❖



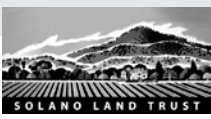
Photo courtesy of Craig McNamara

Where to find Dixon Ridge Farms organic walnuts:

- SLT’s Harvest Feast on September 29!
- Chez Panisse, Berkeley
- The Natural Grocery Company, El Cerrito & Berkeley
- Trader Joe’s, Fairfield & elsewhere
- Whole Foods Market, Berkeley & other Bay Area locations

To see photos and description of how walnuts are grown, harvested, and processed by Dixon Ridge Farms and their growers, see www.dixonridgefarms.com

For more information about Center for Land-Based Learning, go to www.landbasedlearning.org



Oaks grace the King-Swett Ranches

James Walsh, Solano Land Trust docent

Help protect SLT's oaks from the pathogen that causes Sudden Oak Death!

- Stay on established trails and heed trail closures
- Clean your shoes after hikes
- Bicyclists: Clean your wheels too!
- Equestrians: Remove mud and debris from horse's hooves before leaving site

Have you ever looked at the hills clustered between Fairfield, Benicia and Vallejo and wondered what was beyond the freeway? For years I did, but no longer have to. As a Solano Land Trust docent, I have the pleasure of leading hikes on the SLT-owned lands known as the King, Eastern and Vallejo Swett Ranches.

These open, rolling hills that are green in the spring and golden in summer, also have wooded areas with several types of oaks. Here are a few clues to help you tell the oaks apart.

The predominant oak species is the coast live oak, a tree that can grow up to 70 feet tall and is often wider than it is tall. It is the only evergreen oak on the property, meaning it doesn't lose its holly-like leaves in winter. The bark on old trees can be deeply fissured, but on young trees it is smooth and gray. The acorns are about one-inch long with a scaly cup that covers about one quarter of their length.

The other large oak is the valley oak, which can reach 70 feet or more. These trees are found only at Eastern Swett. It has massive limbs and a typically straight trunk with a gray-checked bark. This tree develops "oak balls", corky growths the size of baseballs. Its leaves are green above and pale below, about four inches long and three inches wide, and have deeply cut lobes. The acorns are one and one-half to two and one-half inches long with a bowl-shaped cup covering one-third of the acorn.

The last oak found on the properties, but represented by only one or two specimens, is the blue oak, which grows to 50-feet tall and looks like a stalk of broccoli. The leaves are blue green and oval shaped with lobes not as deep as the valley oak's, and are up to four inches long and two inches wide. The bark is gray and checkered. Acorns are about one-inch long with a sharp point and a thin flat cap.

For anyone who has admired these hills, and the oaks that grace them, I encourage you to join me or another docent on a hike. The birds are plentiful, and there are excellent views of the San Francisco Bay. ❖



Oak woodlands at King Ranch

Photo: Bud Turner, WildLight Photography

Docent-led scenic hikes at King-Swett Ranches

First Saturday of the month:

Oct. 6, Nov. 3, Dec. 1. 9 a.m. to 1 p.m. - Free

Explore Solano County's largest protected open space on a vigorous docent-led hike on uneven terrain (may not be appropriate for children). Long pants, water, snacks and good boots are recommended. Meet at the Park-and-Ride lot at the Hiddenbrooke Parkway/American Canyon Road exit at I-80. Contact Sue Wickham at (707) 432-0150 x207 or sue@solanolandtrust.org.

Volunteer profile: Jim Walsh

Teri Engbring, *Volunteer Coordinator*



Docent Jim Walsh leads hikes at Vallejo Swett Ranch

Photo: Teri Engbring

Jim Walsh is the volunteer who unlocks the gates and welcomes the public to the King and Swett Ranches for docent-led hikes. Jim has been guiding monthly tours of the 3,930-acre site, and sharing his appreciation for open space and wildlife, for nearly three years.

Jim is a transplant from urban New Jersey. He moved to California with Coleen, his wife of 27 years, in 1984. He

has always loved the outdoors, which explains his career in landscaping. His current employer, TruGreen Landcare, is supportive of his significant community service. He is an avid birder, active with Audubon and a participant in the Solano Breeding Bird Atlas. On his hikes, he shares his knowledge of birds, native plants, trees, and other wildlife.

Jim meets his guests in the morning on the first Saturday of each month. There is no standard tour. Instead, he discusses the highlights and challenges of each of the three properties and decides with the group where they will hike that day. A personal favorite stop is an ancient California bay laurel nearly 12 feet in diameter.

“These hikes are my pastime and my passion. I love to get out and enjoy these great properties, to share the awesome views from the ridge tops, and let people see the wealth of life behind the hills they see from the Interstates,” says Jim.

Marilyn Armbruster, a guest on his August hike wrote in: “Today was wonderful. We saw beautiful vistas, birds, red-legged frogs, and oak and willow trees. Jim has such an enthusiasm for the land it is infectious.”

To prospective Solano Land Trust volunteers Jim says, “This is a great way to meet people and explore Solano County’s treasures.” If you want to learn more about volunteering or guided activities with Solano Land Trust, please call me, Teri Engbring, at (707) 432-0150 x200. ❖



2nd Annual Suisun Valley Fun Family Farm Days

Sep. 23, Oct. 21, 11 a.m. – 5 p.m.

Support the agricultural community in
your own backyard!



BOARD MEMBERS

- Bob Berman,
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- Ian Anderson,
Vice President
- Darrin Berardi,
Secretary
- Frank Morris,
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- Marilyn Farley,
Executive Director
- Teri Engbring,
Volunteer and Education Coordinator
- Rob Goldstein,
Land Transaction Specialist
- Wendy Low,
Land Transaction Specialist
- Kirsti Muskat,
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- Ken Poerner,
Land Steward
- Ben Wallace,
Conservation Project Manager
- Sue Wickham,
Project Coordinator
- Susan Wilkinson,
Development Director
- Aleta George,
Editor, SLT Vistas
- Logo design based on original art by Don Birrell*

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

For latest news on all of our events go to www.solanolandtrust.org!

Jepson Prairie Reserve

Take a self-guided tour in the "Docent Triangle" seven days a week during daylight hours. Docent-led wildflower tours will resume next spring. For more information contact SLT at (707) 432-0150 x203 or ben@solanolandtrust.org.

King and Swett Ranches

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.

Docent-led Scenic Hikes

Please see page 6 of this issue

Lynch Canyon Open Space

Lynch Canyon is open to the public Wednesday through Sunday from 8:00 a.m. to posted closing time. Trail maps are available at parking lot kiosk. As a Solano County Park, there is a \$5 per-day, per-vehicle parking fee. Annual parking fees are also available by calling (707) 784-7905.

Scenic Hikes

Fourth Saturday of the month:

Sep. 22, Oct. 27, Nov. 24. 9 a.m. to 1 p.m. - Free

Join Dave Warner for a popular Lynch Canyon hike. No potable water on site, bring your own. Other guided hikes are scheduled throughout the year. Contact Teri Engbring at (707) 432-0150 x200 or teri@solanolandtrust.org.

Volunteer Trail Care Days

Second Saturday of the month:

Oct. 13, Nov. 10, Dec. 8. 9 a.m. - Free

Water, snacks and parking fee available for volunteers. Great team building and service learning opportunity. For information contact Teri Engbring (see above).

Rush Ranch Open Space

Rush Ranch is open to the public Tuesday to Saturday from 8 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. The Suisun Hill Trail (across the road from Rush Ranch) is open seven days a week, dawn to dusk.

Night Photography Workshop

Monday, September 24. 3 p.m. until late

Pre-registration required - \$100

Professional photographer Tim Baskerville will lead a photography workshop under a harvest moon. Contact Tim at (707) 645-9860 or basket@thenocturnes.com.

Rush Ranch Heritage Feast

September 29, 2007, 5:30 to 10 p.m. - \$50 per person

Join us for Solano Land Trust's Heritage Feast with locally grown foods, silent auction, horse-drawn carriage rides, and ranch dance. Contact Susan Wilkinson at (707) 432-0150 x205 or susan@solanolandtrust.org.

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 info@access-adventure.org or (707) 426-3990.

Volunteer Workdays

First Saturday of the month:

Oct. 6, Nov. 3, Dec. 1. 9 a.m. - Free

Help with ranch and trail maintenance. No experience necessary. Contact Ken at (707) 580-6277, or Teri at (707) 432-0150 x200.

Blacksmith Shop Demonstration & Access Adventure Carriage Rides

Third Saturday of the month

Oct. 20, Nov. 17, Dec. 15. 10 a.m. to 1 p.m. - Free

Watch or participate in the art of blacksmithing and explore Rush Ranch on a horse-drawn carriage. No reservations required. Contact Teri Engbring at (707) 432-0150 x200 or teri@solanolandtrust.org.

We are using a new database for Vistas addresses. If your address contains an error please notify susan@solanolandtrust.org. We are also compiling email addresses. Please send us yours to the email listed above. Thank you.

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