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Solano Land Trust

VISTAS

www.solanolandtrust.org

Winter
2007/8

Access Adventure and Syar Foundation bring Rush Ranch history back to life

*Sue Wickham, SLT Project Coordinator &
Mary Lou Fazel, Access Adventure Volunteer Administrator*



Micheal Muir driving his beautiful draft horses at Rush Ranch

Photo: Johnnie Burrell

Rush Ranch has seen an explosion of construction in the last year and we're not done yet! Now that the new Nature Center is finished, we have started on new corrals and an expansion of equestrian facilities at the ranch.

Access Adventure, a SLT partner and all-volunteer organization (see page 4), operates the equestrian program at Rush Ranch. The draft horses that serve Access Adventure are beautiful and gentle, with a strong work ethic. With a generous \$120,000 grant from the Syar Foundation obtained by Access Adventure, we are improving facilities near the new Nature Center for the horses and the program. The new wooden-rail fencing and upgraded stable will mimic the existing historic style while providing safety and accessibility. A new arena will be used to train draft horses and the volunteers that work with them. Volunteer workdays are scheduled through the next few months to construct the stable and fences. We could use your help! Call Teri at (707) 432-0150 x200. ❖

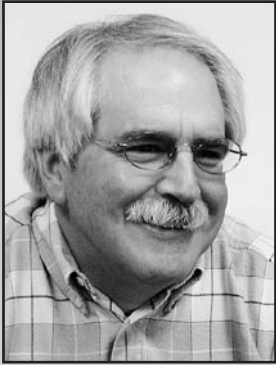
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President's Message

Bob Berman, *President*



In the *Vistas* summer issue, I wrote about attending the California Council of Land Trusts conference. In October, I attended the Land Trust Alliance's National Land Conservation Conference in Denver, Colorado. It was exciting to join over 1,900 of the country's land conservation leaders to discuss issues, learn new skills, and share ideas regarding land conservation. The Land Trust Alliance,

which celebrated its 25th anniversary in 2007, is a network of people who together represent a growing community working together to protect natural places all over the United States. Nearly 1,700 of the nation's land trusts (including Solano Land Trust) and related organizations are members.

The conference covered a myriad of issues. For example, there were several sessions that focused on the federal tax code and needed changes so that more landowners can afford to choose conservation over development. For certain landowners, federal tax incentives provide the necessary support for conservation easement donations.

There were also many sessions providing updated information regarding state-of-the-art tools that we can use to achieve land conservation. As an individual who started in the planning profession using magic markers and tissue paper overlays, I take every opportunity to learn how technology can help us in our efforts. The National Geographic Society is working with NatureServe (a nonprofit conservation group) to develop an online resource to support those working toward land protection on local, state, and national levels. When fully operational, an online map viewer will allow individuals to zoom from a national view to state and local perspectives anywhere across the country. Although still under development, a preview of the project is available at www.landscape.org.

As president of SLT, I am always looking for ways to make our monthly board meetings more productive, enjoyable, and even shorter. Many of the conference sessions focused on just that. Hopefully, I learned a few new techniques to facilitate effective group decision-making and to delegate certain decisions and details to staff.

One of the new areas of opportunities for land conservation is related to climate change. Several sessions discussed the role of land trusts in the emerging dialogue regarding climate change and actions we can take to reduce greenhouse gases.

My time at the Land Trust Alliance was well spent and hopefully Solano Land Trust will benefit from some of what I learned in Denver. ❖

Thanks to our labor and building industry friends

Marilyn Farley, *Executive Director*

Just as we finished the Nature Center at Rush Ranch, County building inspectors told us we needed to build a concrete "apron" as a transitional surface between Grizzly Island Road and our dirt and gravel driveway at Rush Ranch.

This apron was not in the budget so we were very fortunate to have Ben Espinosa, business agent for Cement Masons Local 400, come to our rescue. He organized fellow labor groups to donate the labor and a variety of suppliers to donate or offer reduced-price materials.

Ben got all the pieces together and construction was completed in September. Besides Ben, we would like to thank Mark Burton, Fairfield District Representative, International Union of Operating Engineers, and Mark Ferguson, Ironworkers Local 378. North Bay Construction contributed labor and materials, such as removal and export of asphalt, import of road base and preparation for inspection. The IUOE workers that did the actual construction were Mark Hawkins, Brian Say, Ken Cody, and Sonny Miller. Cement work was contributed by Fidel Tena, Roman Castro, Armando Naranjo, Raúl Jiménez and José Reyes of the Cement Masons Union.

We'd also like to thank Rinker Materials Corporation for a significant discount on the concrete; Pacific Coast Steel and Penhall for donating the rebar; Ghilotti Construction Company; and Cemex USA for the aggregate. ❖



Mark Burton, Mark Hawkins, Brian Say, Ken Cody, Sonny Miller and Ben Espinosa work on the concrete apron at Rush Ranch



Executive Director's Perspective

Marilyn Farley, *Executive Director*

Part of Solano Land Trust's mission is the preservation of open space and resources through, among other things, education and land management. This requires us to take good care of the land we own.

We've made great progress in stewardship over the last several years. We continue to partner with the UC Reserve System and our grazers to implement our new management plan at Jepson Prairie and Wilcox Ranch.

Through the work of local scientists Ted Swiecki and Liz Bernhardt, we're getting better insights into optimum grazing practices for helping vernal pool flora and fauna to thrive.

We've formed a Rush Ranch management team, with Rush Ranch Education Council, National Estuarine Research Reserve, and Access Adventure to balance habitat preservation and resource management with responsible public use. As a result, we've gotten grants to study the diked marsh and the tidal marsh, and to update the management plan for the Rush Ranch property as a whole.

The diked marsh could be improved as a site for waterfowl and other birds, or it could be returned to tidal marsh. We have a group of scientists, including a California Waterfowl Association consultant, looking at a range of options for our board to consider.

Regarding the tidal marsh, we expect to have very thorough survey information compiled on marsh species, geology, water flow and other factors that will help us better understand and manage the marsh, including eradication of a particularly insidious weed, the perennial pepperweed (see page 5) that has begun marching up the sloughs with the tides, particularly in the area of Spring Branch Creek. This creek is of particular interest because it originates in the vicinity of the proposed landfill expansion.

We now have exceptional data on the King and Swett Ranches thanks to recently completed biological studies. We are working with PG&E to determine the potential for extensive restoration work on the Swett Ranches to enhance habitat for red-legged frogs.

As we move through these planning stages and into implementation, the challenge is to raise the funds necessary to do the on-the-ground improvements. While planning grants (and grants to acquire lands and conservation easements) are generally available, money for basic stewardship is often not. That's why our endowment campaign is so important. The \$710,000 raised to date for our Rush Ranch endowment is invested with only a portion of the earnings drawn down to use on stewardship. The remainder is called a "non-wasting" investment and provides a stable base of financial support for our on-going stewardship. Our goal is \$2,000,000 for Rush Ranch, and like sums for the long-term nurturing of our other properties.

Meanwhile, with 10,000 acres under our care, we have the most land available to the public of any entity in Solano County. We offer plenty of opportunities for children and adults to bird watch, hike, bike, ride horses, and to participate in trail-building and habitat restoration activities. ❖

Contribute to the lasting legacy of Rush Ranch by helping us raise \$2,000,000. We have already raised over \$700,000 towards this endowment.

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

See our website for the order form and send it in today!

Making outdoor adventure accessible to all

Sue Wickham & Mary Lou Fazel



Chair-bound riders take to the trail with Access Adventure

Photo: Debbie Martin

Access Adventure provides wilderness and open space access for people with disabilities using innovative, wheelchair-accessible, horse-drawn carriages. Their services are provided without charge to people with disabilities.

Mike Muir, great grandson of naturalist John Muir, founded Access Adventure in 2005 after retiring as president of United States Driving for the Disabled. A lifelong horseman born in Dixon, California, Michael has lived with multiple sclerosis for more than forty years.

“People with disabilities can accomplish amazing things,” says Michael. “We still want to be active participants in everything life has to offer. The horses of Access Adventure, and the innovative adaptive equipment, are the links that carry us back to a close relationship with nature and wild

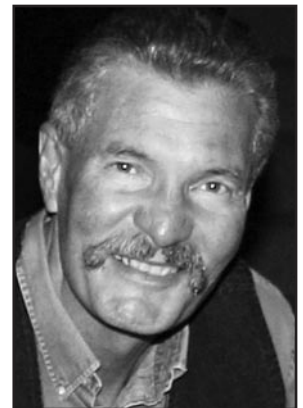
places. Demonstrating to others that life can still be full and rich and exciting after a catastrophic illness or accident gives people hope, and the value of hope is priceless.”

Call for volunteers!

The Access Adventure program trains volunteers to assist riders and to drive the wheelchair-accessible carriages led by experienced draft horses. Volunteers are also needed to care for the horses. The training program welcomes disabled volunteers and the able-bodied. Training sessions for youth interns are currently scheduled on Thursday mornings, and for other volunteers (as well as youth) on the third Saturday of each month.

The program, which provides rides for people with disabilities on Solano Land Trust and Muir Heritage Land Trust properties from spring through fall, will resume in April with brand new corrals and an arena.

To participate, you can volunteer to work with the horses, learn to drive a horse-drawn carriage, or help the program in many other ways. For more information go to www.access-adventure.org or call (707) 432-0152.



Michael Muir, founder of Access Adventure

Photo: Johnnie Burrell

Lynch Canyon user group works together

Teri Engbring, Volunteer & Education Coordinator

The Lynch Canyon User Advisory Group is a team of dedicated volunteers who meet periodically with Solano County Parks and Solano Land Trust staff to anticipate potential problems, explore solutions, and discuss the needs of various user groups at Lynch Canyon. Representatives include hiking, biking, birding, horseback riding, running, and education enthusiasts. Public comments and suggestions are welcome. Send to teri@solanolandtrust.org.

Science on the Land

First in a series: NERR researcher studies invasive weed at Rush Ranch

Christine Whitcraft, Post-doctoral Researcher, SF Bay National Estuarine Research Reserve

On a sunny, warm day at Rush Ranch, my co-worker and I hiked out to our field site with a sense of anticipation. Forty-eight hours earlier, we had buried plastic cups (called pitfall traps) in the ground to see what ground-dwelling insects would wander into the traps. These traps are just one piece in a multi-faceted experiment aimed at understanding how one particular non-native plant alters its surroundings. This non-native plant, perennial pepperweed, or *Lepidium latifolium*, is a weed in the mustard family that forms dense stands in a variety of habitats, including riparian areas, wetlands, marshes, and floodplains.

Originating in Europe and Asia, pepperweed was introduced to the United States and is a problem in most states west of the Mississippi River. Despite its attractive white flower and bright green stem, this plant forms dense stands that can displace certain species (like the endangered salt marsh harvest mouse), eliminate important nesting space for birds, shade out young native plants, and transform the physical environment by lowering the water table and increasing the salinity of the soil.

As a CALFED-funded post-doctoral researcher working at the Romberg Tiburon Center for Environmental Studies and the San Francisco Bay National Estuarine Research Reserve, I am working with Solano Land Trust to study pepperweed at Rush Ranch. The research is designed to ask several questions:



Pepperweed stand at Rush Ranch

Photo: Christine Whitcraft

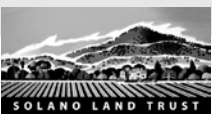


Silphidae beetle dominates pepperweed habitat

Photo: Christine Whitcraft

- *How does pepperweed impact its habitat?* We are evaluating how pepperweed changes the soil, the microclimate under its canopy, the insects and invertebrates, and the surrounding native plant community.
- *How does pepperweed affect the marsh food web?* We are studying how pepperweed might change food sources and primary consumers, which should help us to understand how its presence affects animals higher on the food chain, such as fish and birds.
- *How do these results translate into effective management and eradication at Rush Ranch?* We are helping to identify areas that are most seriously impacted by pepperweed.

Where do pitfall traps fit into the research? Well, to return to our sunny field day, we reached our study area, retrieved the cups, and found them teeming with insects. Although we are still working on the data, it is clear that different insect communities inhabit pepperweed than inhabit the non-invaded marsh. Silphidae beetles, a type of carrion beetle, dominated the pepperweed areas while almost none of these beetles appeared in non-invaded habitat. Why? We continue to work on this exact question, but clues point to the influence of an increased amount of decaying plants and the cooler, wetter conditions under pepperweed. ❖



SLT develops new training program for docents

Teri Engbring, *Volunteer & Education Coordinator*

A unique new training program for Solano Land Trust volunteers began in October. Nearly 40 volunteers participated in a two-hour training program at the newly completed Rush Ranch Nature Center. The course featured basic first aid and emergency procedures for volunteers who lead classes, hikes, and tours at sites that are often remote and inaccessible. It included information on how to recognize, prevent and respond to an emergency, including when and how to call for help. Problems from heat stroke and allergic reactions to wildfires and snakes were also discussed.

Chief Jay Huyssoon of the Cordelia Fire Protection District developed the interactive emergency training program for SLT. His Powerpoint presentation was well received by volunteers from the Rush Ranch Education Council, Jepson Prairie docents, and Access Adventure programs, as well as all of the regularly-scheduled docents who lead public tours at Lynch Canyon and King-Swett Ranches.

This first phase of the training program will be repeated early next year for volunteers who were unable to make the October dates. Additional training is also being developed for Lynch Canyon, King-Swett, and Rush Ranch that will focus on the unique flora and fauna, rules and programs of those sites.

The renowned Jepson Prairie docent-training program that covers unique vernal pool plants, ecology, and creatures from endangered salamanders to fairy shrimp, will be offered in February. Dates for all future trainings will be posted at www.solanolandtrust.org.

Volunteers are still needed to lead tours, teach classes, help at special events and exhibits, maintain these precious properties, and help in the office. Please contact me at (707) 432-0150 x200 or teri@solanolandtrust.org. ❖

Jepson Prairie docents are on a mission!

Ben Wallace, *Conservation Project Manager*

The Jepson Prairie Docents foster understanding, appreciation and stewardship for the natural and cultural landscape of the Greater Jepson Prairie Preserve Ecosystem. We do this through interpretive field tours, educational programs and restoration and stewardship activities.

That's the new mission statement for the Jepson Prairie docents. For the past 25 years, this all-volunteer group has organized a highly-respected volunteer training program on vernal pool ecology; delivered docent-led tours for the general public during peak vernal pool activity; led special tours for schools, colleges and other interested groups; and, produced the Jepson Prairie Handbook. They have accomplished all of this with no formal governance structure and virtually no funding.

During the past summer, which is normally a dormant period for the volunteers and the prairie, the docents have embarked on a whole new endeavor. With support from the National Park Service's Rivers, Trails, and Conservation Assistance program, they started work on defining a mission statement and devising a strategic plan to guide their myriad volunteer activities for the next 25 years. They are also putting together a visitor management plan to enhance the facilities and interpretive signs at Jepson Prairie.

"The way new docents have stepped up to take leadership roles in this process is a real inspiration," said long-term docent Kate Mawdsley. "I'm always renewed by the enthusiasm other people have for Jepson Prairie."

For more information on the docent-training program in February, or the spring tours that begin mid-March, go to www.solanolandtrust.org or call Ben Wallace at (707) 432-0150 x203. ❖

Fundraising Program Achieves 2007 Goals

Susan Wilkinson, *Development Director*

Solano Land Trust has now had a formal development program for a year, during which time significant milestones have been achieved.

Our primary 2006-07 fundraising goal was to raise \$200,000 by June 30th in a matching dollar-for-dollar campaign. The campaign ultimately raised \$232,686 by the deadline, with a total of 270 donations in amounts ranging from \$5 to \$25,000. The Rush Ranch endowment is now at \$710,840 with an ultimate goal of \$2 million.

The next challenge was our premiere Heritage Feast, held in September. With experienced leadership by volunteer Pam Nelson, and a delicious feast of locally grown food prepared by chef Manny Rodriquez, the near-sellout event was a wild success. Live and silent auctions and brisk libation sales contributed to a net profit of \$10,000, far exceeding our break-even goal for the first year of the event.



Highlights from the Heritage Feast

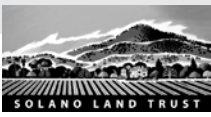
These fundraising activities were accompanied by “soft” development projects, important efforts that support fundraising but do not directly raise funds.

The redesign of SLT’s website has contributed greatly to our ability to share information about SLT in an attractive and practical format. Make that “award-winning” website! We received a “Standard of Excellence” from the Web Marketing Association in the non-profit category. In collaboration with SLT staff, the site was designed by Hudson Business Networks and developed by Aleta George.

Also, on the proverbial “shoestring” budget, we produced SLT’s first advertising campaign, which featured our properties. The ads generated a spike in hits to our website in the months they ran in area newspapers.

Another important initiative this year involved outreach to the business community, which included a brochure entitled “Open Space is Good for Business”. We also now belong to three local chambers of commerce to gain better recognition and visibility in that sector.

We’ll expand on all these efforts in 2008. With a raised profile in the community and a successful start, SLT will continue to build a strong development program. ❖



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- Ian Anderson, Vice President
- Darrin Berardi, Secretary
- Frank Morris, Treasurer
- Sean Quinn, Immediate Past Pres.
- Frank J. Andrews, Jr.
- Jeff Dittmer
- Jane Hicks
- John Isaacson
- Russell Lester
- Albert Lavezzo
- John M. Vasquez

STAFF

- Marilyn Farley, Executive Director
- Teri Engbring, Volunteer and Education Coordinator
- Rob Goldstein, Land Transaction Specialist
- Wendy Low, Land Transaction Specialist
- Kirsti Muskat, Bookkeeper
- Cathy O'Connor, Finance Officer
- 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 events and directions to our lands go to www.solanolandtrust.org!

Unless otherwise noted, all events are free and require no advance registration. Workday groups should call ahead. For more information contact Teri Engbring at (707) 432-0150 x200 or teri@solanolandtrust.org. No dogs allowed on trails (except Suisun Hill Trail across from Rush Ranch).

Jepson Prairie Preserve

A free docent-training program (registration required) takes place in Feb. Docent-led wildflower and wildlife tours begin mid-Mar. For more information go to our website or contact (707) 432-0150 x200 or jepson@solanolandtrust.org.

Planting Workday

Saturday, Jan. 26, 2008. 9 a.m.

Meet at the docent triangle.

King and Swett Ranches

The King and Swett Ranches are currently open to the public during staff- or docent-led activities only.

Scenic Hikes and Birding

First Saturday of the month:

Jan. 5, Feb. 2*, Mar. 1, 2008. 9 a.m. to 1 p.m.

(*Special birding event for SF Bay Flyway Festival)

Explore Solano County's largest protected open space on a vigorous docent-led hike and birding tour. Meet at the Park-and-Ride lot at the Hiddenbrooke Parkway/American Canyon Road exit at I-80. Contact Sue at (707) 432-0150 x207 or sue@solanolandtrust.org.

Restoration Workdays

Saturday, Jan. 19, Feb. 23, Mar. 22, 2008

Time and locations TBD

Plant tree seeds, clean-up weeds, and do other restoration. Bring gloves, & picks or shovels.

Lynch Canyon Open Space

Lynch Canyon is open to the public Wed. through Sun. from 8 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.

Docent-led Birding Hike

Sunday, Jan. 13, 2008, 9 a.m. to 11:30 am

Earl Swenerton will lead a birding hike on moderately difficult trails.

Scenic Hikes

Fourth Saturday of the month:

Dec. 22, Jan. 26, Feb. 23, 2008. 9 a.m. to 1 p.m.

Join Dave Warner for one of his popular Lynch Canyon hikes.

Volunteer Trail Care and Restoration Workdays

Second Saturday of the month:

Jan. 12, Feb. 9, Mar. 8, 2008. 9 a.m.

Get some fresh air while helping with trail maintenance & restoration planting. Bring gloves and a favorite planting tool. Water, snacks and parking fee available for volunteers.

Rush Ranch Open Space

Rush Ranch is open to the public Tue. to Sat. 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.

Birds of Rush Ranch Docent-led Tour

Saturday, Jan. 26, 2008, 9 a.m. to 11 a.m.

Sponsored by Rush Ranch Educational Council

Joanne Castro will introduce the birds of Rush Ranch and the Suisun Marsh. Expect muddy conditions. Call (707) 422-4491 for more information.

Volunteer Workdays

First Saturday of the month:

Jan. 5, Feb. 2, Mar. 1, 2008. 9 a.m.

Help with ranch and trail maintenance. No experience or tools 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

Jan. 19, Feb. 16, Mar. 15, 2008. 10 a.m. to 1 p.m.

Watch or participate in the art of blacksmithing and explore Rush Ranch on a horse-drawn carriage in dry weather.

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

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