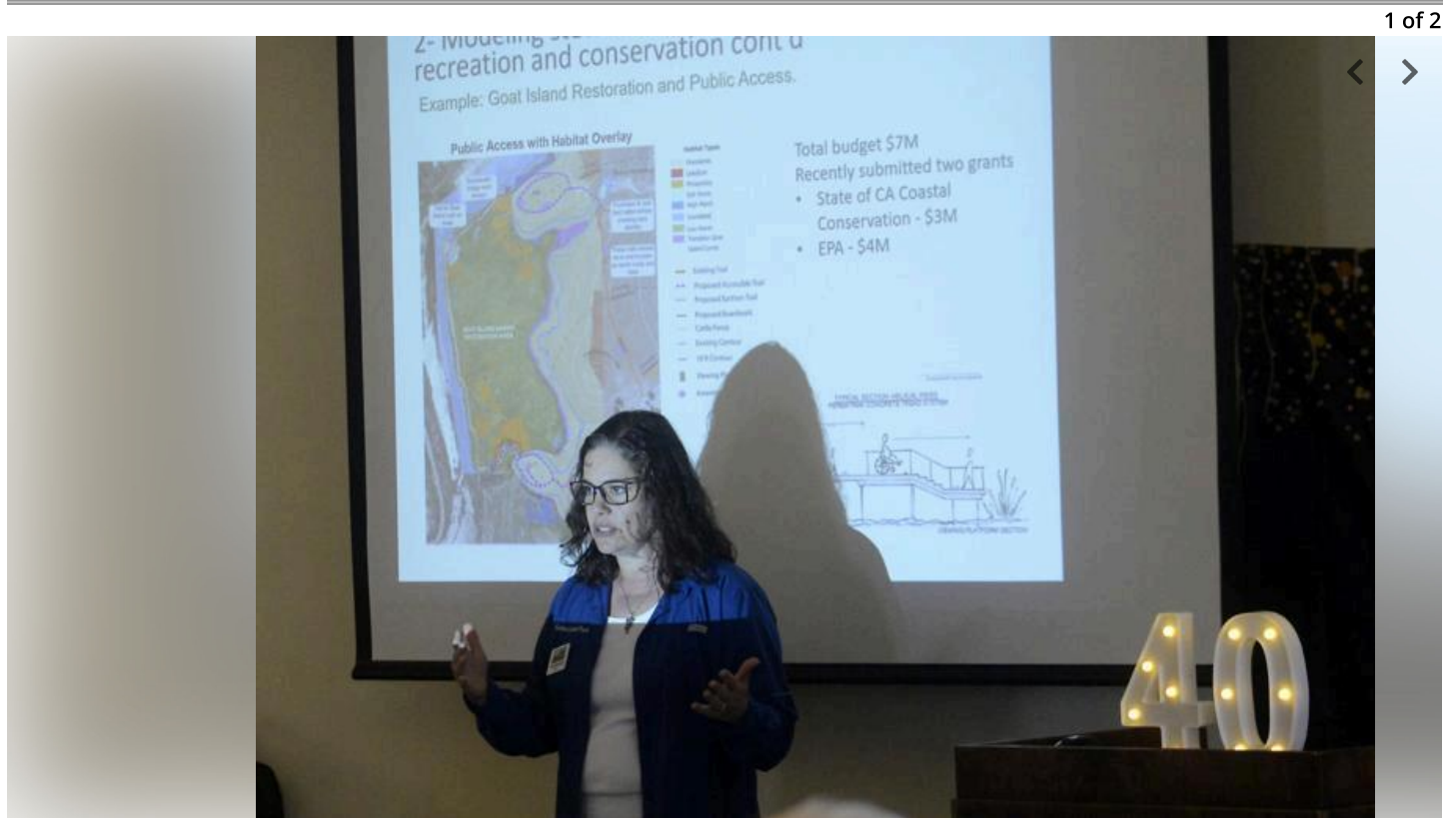


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FEATURED

# Forty-year wait for Goat Island restoration may be nearing an end for Land Trust

Todd R. Hansen  
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Solano Land Trust Executive Director Nicole Braddock gives a presentation on the nonprofit's efforts to protect agriculture lands and open space at the Breakfast at Rush Ranch, Thursday, March 26, 2026. More than three dozen attended. (Todd R. Hansen/Daily Republic)



SUISUN CITY — The Goat Island Marsh was one of the attractions for the Solano Land Trust to purchase the Rush Ranch property in May 1988.

The ranch was the first of the Land Trust's holdings, acquired two years after the founding of what was then the Solano County Farmlands and Open Space Foundation.

The Solano Land Trust is celebrating its 40th anniversary this year.

It was a combination of open space advocates, land developers and local government entities working together that created the foundation.

"This unusual genesis created the structure for a board of directors that reflects all sides of land-use issues united in the mission to preserve the agricultural legacy and natural landscapes of Solano County and enhance people's relationship to the land," the Land Trust said in its history material.

It received a \$1.507 million grant from the California State Coastal Conservancy toward the purchase.

It wasn't until 2004 that the foundation officially became the Solano Land Trust – and through the decades, the restoration of the Goat Island Marsh from a managed, leveed duck club to its historical standing as a tidal marsh still had not been realized.

The Land Trust now owns more than 12,000 acres of natural habitat areas: Rush Ranch, Jepson Prairie Preserve, King-Swett Ranches, Lynch Canyon Open Space, and the newest piece, the 1,500-acre Patwino Worrta Kodoi Dihi Open Space Park.

Additionally, the nonprofit has secured nearly 14,000 acres into conservation easements, and has close to 400 more acres in the works.

"I'm probably getting another phone call a week" asking about easements, Tracy Ellison, director of conservation for the Land Trust, told the gathering at the annual Business Partners Breakfast held Thursday at Rush Ranch. More than three dozen people attended.

Nicole Braddock, the executive director of the Land Trust, in her 18th year with the nonprofit, said prior to the breakfast that she can now see that vision of Goat Island Marsh come into focus.

She shared that vision at the breakfast, too.

"It has been an interesting journey," Braddock said of the Land Trust history and its land protection work. "But doesn't this seem more powerful right now."

She noted the California Forever annexation proposals in Suisun City and Rio Vista, as well as another 7,000 acres proposed by a different landowner for annexation into Dixon.

Braddock called the Solano County General Plan update – and the Orderly Growth Initiative that sunsets in 2028 – critical for the future of the county. It is an opportunity, she said, to balance the preservation of the county's natural history with the needs of housing and economic vitality.

Braddock hopes to learn by June if two grants – one for \$4 million from the state Environmental Protection agency, and a \$3 million grant from the California State Coastal Conservancy – have been approved for the Goat Island Marsh project.

If they are, Braddock said "we would start pre-construction work this fall." The land trust also needs a host of permits to do the work in the Suisun Marsh.

"If we don't get the permits, it will push us back a year. But if we get the permits, construction will begin in 2027, 2028," she said.

The 80-acre piece is part of the 2,070 ranch property.

When the work is completed, tidal flows will return to the area, and a trail – including a boardwalk into the marsh – will be constructed for public access. With the slopes of the land cajoled, and the overgrown reeds around the current walkway cut away, visitors will better engage with the habitat – flora and wildlife both.

"And we are doing this in partnership with National Estuarine Research Reserve System," said Braddock, adding that will mean additional opportunities for science projects in the area.

Rush Ranch is part of a specific National Estuarine Research Reserve site along with China Camp State Park, and supports critical research on marsh ecosystems and provides community education opportunities.



The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, for example, uses the site as part of its global research.

There are 30 sites in the reserve system.

"One of the things we bring is hope, and there is a lot of hopelessness out there," Braddock said, looking out from the ranch education center to a grassy hill that hides the Goat Island Marsh footprint.

"There's a lot of exciting things going on," she added.

Other projects in the works include:

- Filling in a 2-mile gap in the Bay Area Ridge Trail by navigating around guarded butterfly, burrowing owl and endangered frog habitat to connect Blue Rock Springs and Hiddenbrooke.
- Construction of a \$50,000 well to allow a year-round source of water for cattle grazing to control evasive grasses that have overtaken golden violet flowering plants, the only plant on which a rare butterfly lays its eggs. The area is part of King-Swett Ranch.
- A \$1 million habitat restoration project to improve habitat for the threatened red-legged frog. The work includes lowering the spillway for the Lynch Canyon Reservoir.

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