



Solano Land Trust's Five-Year Strategic Framework

Conservation Changing Lives:

A Case for Increasing Impact, Reach, and Connections



Tom Muehleisen



Samuel Adams



Ron Lanza



Solano Resources Conservation District



Tom Muehleisen

*“When we see land as a community to which we belong,
we may begin to use it with love and respect.”*

– Aldo Leopold



If Ever There Was a Time, It is Now

What makes Solano County special to you?

It's a question that generates wide-spread and enthusiastic conversations: conversations that we have had with community members, farmers and ranchers, wildlife specialists, tribal leaders, and municipal partners as part of our strategic planning process.

Our community recognizes that Solano County is changing rapidly.

Conversations with hundreds of people over the past several years clarified, more than ever, that they, too, believe that all people deserve access to local natural areas, a healthy environment, and the opportunity to grow and enjoy local food and products.

There's broad consensus that caring for the lands our land trust owns, as well as those owned by local families and communities, can provide far-reaching benefits to people, wildlife, and agriculture and slow down and reduce the impacts of climate change.

We need to think not in years but in generations.

As caretakers of the land and long-term community members, our land trust

recognizes we need new ways of thinking and working as we navigate a sustainable balance between the mounting needs of inclusive recreation, hands-on experiential learning, and protecting and caring for land.

Over the next five to ten years we will work to enrich the lives and health of more people and provide hope, joy, and inspiration for our community that is centered around the benefits of land and water.

As someone who cares, you are a central part of this effort. We look forward to the opportunity to work together and share our combined vision and passion for the change we want to see.



Mission and Values

Our Mission: To inspire a love of the land and preserve it for people, food, and the natural environment.

Our Values: We are committed to balancing our work to benefit the entire community, today and for future generations. We recognize that land and people are inextricably linked and have been for thousands of years.

We also acknowledge that we cannot meet our *forever promise* in a way that is meaningful to people throughout our community without intentional and sustained attention to the community and the organizational integrity necessary to carry our mission forward.

Land Acknowledgment

As we honor the relationship of people to the lands and waters of Solano County, we wish to acknowledge the indigenous people who lived here and whose ancestors are still living here.

When a Community Comes Together, Amazing Things Happen

Building the Foundation for the Next Ten Years: Key Accomplishments from 1986 to Where We are Today



Natural Area Protection & Stewardship

- Protected and managed over 12,000 acres of critical oak woodland, native grassland, and marsh habitat.
- Planted and cared for thousands of native trees and shrubs and restored miles of creeks and streams to improve water quality, wildlife habitat, and climate change adaptation.
- Enhanced cattle watering access to support native grassland management and fire mitigation.



Farm & Ranchland Protection

- Helped 20+ families to achieve their goal of protecting almost 13,000 acres of working farm and ranchland.
- Donated over 60,000 lbs. of local meat and produce to Solano families during the Covid-19 pandemic.
- Regranted \$35,000 to partners to support fire recovery efforts on their conserved properties.



Community Partners

- Collaborated with over 50 agency and organizational partners representing education, science, business, agriculture, transportation, health, and more to broaden our reach and impact.
- Partnered with the Yocha Dehe Wintun Nation to rename Rockville Trails to Patwino Worrtla Kodoi Dihi Open Space Park.
- Facilitated a coalition of outdoor educators, parks managers, and public health experts to get more kids outside in nature; established a collective goal to get 100% of Solano youth outdoors throughout the year and their lives.



Trails & Access

- Built and maintained 20+ miles of trails and a nature center.
- Facilitated guided hikes, walks, and community festivals on more than 10,000 acres of local natural areas.
- Constructed accessible and welcoming trails at two nature parks.
- Created a year-round program to host field trips for local school children to learn from the land and connect with each other.



Capacity & Sustainability

- Obtained National Accreditation and raised over \$10 million in mitigation funds for land stewardship, demonstrating an ongoing commitment to excellence and caring for the land
- Grew our team from three to 19 to more fully serve our community, resulting in a 350% increase in the pace of conservation and lands and water.

Positioned to Seize the Moment

To understand where we are going and the opportunities and challenges that lie ahead, it is essential to recognize how far we have come.

Thirty-five years ago, it would have been a stretch to imagine that our land trust would have assisted numerous local families in conserving over 13,000 acres of some of our region's most important farmland.

Nor could we have imagined that we would inspire so many people from all corners of Solano County to come together and conserve an additional 12,000 acres for public access, ranching, research, and education.

Those lands, like Rush Ranch Open Space, have become iconic and treasured by our community.

Our vision reflects what we have heard for 35 years: that Solano County needs to retain its identity as a place that balances growth and economic development with the communities, lands, and water that surround us.

We have committed to learning, adapting, partnering, and trying new ideas for over a generation.

We know that change is continual, and our work is only as strong as the partnerships and teams that make it happen.

Our organization embraces change, respects relationships, supports community initiatives, and steps up to help and listen.

This plan reflects the widespread realization that now is the time to come together for a future we can all be proud of. Thank you for being part of this journey.

“I have found the African proverb, ‘If you want to go fast, go alone. If you want to go far, go together’ a guiding principle in my life.

“There is no better time to honor those words as when we are undertaking visionary change.”

– Chris Rico, President and CEO,
Solano Economic Development
Corporation

Strategic Conservation Relies on a Holistic Approach

Vision & Strategic Directives

Over the next five to ten years, our strategic areas of focus are to:

- Conserve farms, ranchlands, and the spaces between our cities.
- Balance development with agriculture, natural areas, wildlife habitat, parks and trails, and community health and wellbeing.
- Expand inclusive access to nature and local food throughout the county.
- Bring joy and connection to the land through programs and community events.
- Care for lands and waters to balance inclusive recreation and conservation goals.
- Facilitate and promote integrated and creative solutions to support our changing climate.

This plan provides an integrated and balanced approach to the conservation of natural lands and agricultural resource priorities, as well as the needs and desires of our community over time.

We understand that our approach, projects, programs, and priorities will evolve as we address the goals outlined in this plan. During a time of change, being nimble and adaptive is one of the core attributes upon which our land trust is built.

Our organization is the sum of our parts and is stronger because of our varied partners, engaged community supporters, and staff. We are well-positioned to increase our impact and effectiveness for immediate and long-term conservation initiatives.



Area of focus wheel: Cows in Lynch Canyon: Lori Auker, Child with Kite: Dave Reider, River Otter: Tom Muehleisen, Managed Fire: Tom Muehleisen, Youth Working in Watershed: Solano Resource Conservation District, Open Space: Tom Muehleisen, Kids in Field: Natalie Dumont



Karlyn H. Lewis

The Challenge Ahead

- Our region is projected to add 2.5 million people between 2021 and 2050. Thousands of acres of farmland are threatened by development.
- There are areas of Solano County where people have little access to nature, while they face increasing stress to their health and well-being.
- An increasing number of species are at risk, including the red-legged frog and Calippe Silverspot Butterfly.
- Impacts from a changing climate are increasingly severe every year. From multi-year droughts to catastrophic wildfires, these changes threaten our agricultural economy, community safety, roads, neighborhoods, and quality of life.
- Today's youth face mounting challenges of isolation, anxiety, hunger, and cultural unrest. Schools are witnessing a decline in education performance and engagement.



Tom Muehleisen



Tom Muehleisen

“There is something so hopeful about land conservation. We are working together for something that will outlast us, to benefit countless people besides ourselves.”

“I feel an urgency to conserve the essence of Solano County, while there’s still time.”

– Marianne Butler
Solano Resource Conservation District
Environmental Education Director
and mother, Fairfield, CA



Samuel Adams



Kuo Hou Chang



Kuo Hou Chang

A Clear Call for Action

Imagine what it will be like when the lands that matter most in Solano County are conserved.

That was the focus of community discussions and conversations with local families, partners, and land trust supporters.

Conversations ranged from who will benefit from future conservation work and who has been left out to how we build upon the extraordinary work already accomplished. We explored with renewed vigor and focus how to tap into current and future opportunities.

Clearly, our region faces many challenges, yet opportunities abound.

Collectively, we recognize that now is the time to be bold, innovative, and intentional in conserving the lands that comprise the essence of Solano County. We are expanding on this belief by committing to ensure that all people can benefit from this connection.

The interconnectedness of land, people, and health has never been more visible, and we have never been better positioned to create positive change in our community.

To succeed, land protection and related benefits must be recognized as central to our county's identity.

Balancing development with the conservation of land and water throughout every region of our county is core to our strategic plan, mission, and partnerships.

The good news is that the opportunities are here:

- Local farm and ranch families are asking for our assistance.
- Community groups are requesting that we partner with them to create or improve places for people to share the benefits of nature and local food.
- Local governments and tribal organizations are investing their time and resources.
- Our state and region understand that the window for climate action is now.

We are inspired by these opportunities—but we must act now to support and build on our community's long-term commitment to saving and caring for special places.

Together, we will need to accelerate our efforts to meet the challenges, not just for today but for future generations.



Solano Land Trust's Principles of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion

Diversity: We believe that only by embracing and engaging all people in community conservation can we make the benefits of land more accessible to all.

Equity: We believe that to preserve land in Solano County in perpetuity for the benefit of our community and the world, we must address historical and societal imbalances that have impeded an equitable playing field for people of all backgrounds, abilities, orientations, and beliefs.

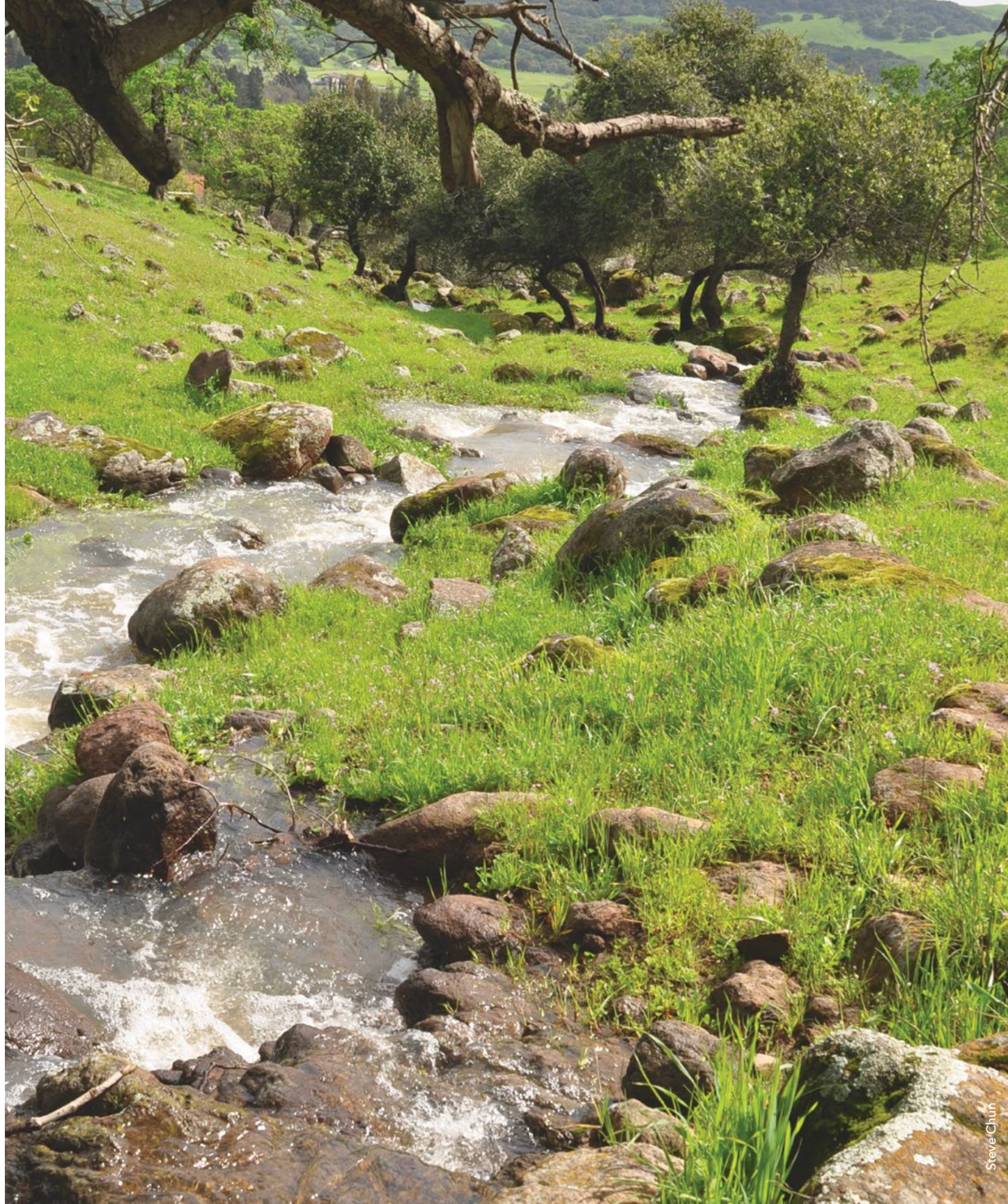
Inclusion: We are committed to engaging, listening, learning from, and removing barriers for all communities to be welcome and included in our board, staff, docents, partners, visitors, landowners, and all aspects of our planning and decision-making.



“Restoring creeks, encouraging water recharge, and planning for extreme weather helps wildlife and our community as a whole.

“Our ranch is part of the larger landscape, connected to our neighbors by Putah Creek. When the creek is healthy, wildlife spills into our orchards, supporting the biodiversity of birds, insects, and plants that in turn protect and nurture our organic walnuts and olives.”

– Craig McNamara
McNamara Family Sierra Orchards



Caring for the Land, Conserving Wildlife Habitat

With the accelerated loss of wildlife habitat, the next several years will undoubtedly play a pivotal role in the health of our natural environment.

The good news is that endangered birds, such as the Tri-colored Blackbird, are finding refuge in protected places, like our land trust's community lands, including Rush Ranch Open Space and local farms and ranches.

These birds and other wildlife will do even better when the lands owned by our land trust are enhanced for wildlife, water retention, and adaptation to extreme weather.

Land conservation in a changing climate, coupled with accelerating development pressure, necessitates an integrated approach.

Whether backyards for birding or vast open spaces for farming and wildlife, there are incredible opportunities for us, as a community, to conserve and enhance the lands and waters that wildlife depend on.

Your support will enable a three-pronged approach to:

- Conserve an additional 5,000 acres, allowing wildlife to migrate, find refuge, and thrive. Much of the land will remain in the hands of local families who manage the land to benefit wildlife and grow food.
- Restore and care for the lands we own, such as King Ranch, Jepson Prairie Preserve and Lynch Canyon Open Space, to support wildlife, climate resilience, and improve water quality and recharge.
- Promote and share our innovative and science-based land stewardship practices to inspire and facilitate nature-based climate solutions and wildlife habitat improvements on land owned by local families, community groups, and government agencies.

Our job, collectively, is to take action while there's still time.



The Challenge Ahead

Considered to have some of the most imperiled overall biodiversity of any state in the contiguous U.S., California is losing plants and animals at an alarming rate.

- Almost three billion birds have been lost across North America in the past 50 years (a decline of about 1/3 of all birds). California's birds are no exception.
- According to the National Audubon Society, habitat loss and the changing climate are key factors driving the decline of birds.
- Weather extremes are forcing wildlife to migrate and seek places of rest and recovery as they try to adapt to changing conditions and habitat loss.



Sarah Nolan



Yumi Wilson



Tracy Ellison



Sarah Nolan

“Solano County is blessed with a rich diversity of soil types present in varying microclimates. We can grow almost anything.”

“Whenever possible, prime agricultural lands should remain as such. We should not be timid in this regard.”

– Rich Collins
Solano County Farmer



Lori Auker



Jordan Knippenberg

Investing in Farms, Ranches, and Local Food

Solano County is home to some of the best farming soils in the country.

These productive lands are part of our heritage, economy, and way of life. They also mean our community's farmers and ranchers can produce the fresh food and wine that help define our county.

The rolling hills dotted with cattle and sheep and fields of grapes, sunflowers, corn, and tomatoes are part of what makes our region a great place to live.

Yet these lands are more at risk than ever. Once the land is paved over, the farms and special places you love aren't coming back.

The good news?

Local farmers and ranchers want to conserve their lands to grow food. They deeply value healthy soils, clean water, and farming practices that will succeed as our climate changes.

We have a choice, and we are choosing action. We hope you will join us.

Your support, as well as that of the community, can ensure that over the next five years, local families who want to

conserve their land voluntarily can do so—and thousands of acres of at-risk agricultural lands, including vineyards, orchards, and cattle ranches, will be available to grow food forever.

Examples of what you'll make possible:

- Conserve local farms that produce fruits and vegetables rather than losing them to development.
- Connect youth with local farms through field trips, paid internships, and scholarships to Rangeland Camp.
- Assist local family farmers and ranchers to tap into climate-smart practices to become more sustainable, reduce water needs, minimize fire risk, and help with groundwater recharge.
- Increase awareness and support for local farms and ranches by highlighting local markets, providing opportunities for people to connect to food at the neighborhood level, and donating local food to community groups.



Facing the Challenges Ahead

- California is losing 50,000 acres of farmland per year. That's over 100 football fields of productive land each day.
- We recognize that healthy communities need to balance growth and land and water conservation.
- We need to ensure that we meet our community's needs for quality housing while also protecting farms and ranches, wildlife habitat, and the recreational areas that sustain who we are.

Addressing these challenges won't happen by chance. It will only happen with the compassion, vision, and hard work that has defined Solano Land Trust and all those who care.



“Young people are finding more ways to get involved but don’t know where to start. We must work with people of all ages and help them understand what’s at stake. Change must happen now.”

– Bella Connerley
Climate Transition Intern



Increasing Land, Water, and Community Conservation in a Changing Climate

When you pause and look around, the impacts of extreme weather are clear.

While the climate has always been changing, there is no known time in human history when it has changed this rapidly.

From multi-year droughts, high temperatures, and catastrophic wildfires, we know we need to take action. Add to that the terrible air quality and the erosion caused by rising seas and heavy rains, and people understand this is threatening our agricultural economy, wildlife, community safety, and quality of life.

Even the trails and public lands that so many people love and depend on for their community's well-being are facing more historic washouts as trails, roads, and culverts, to the tune of millions of dollars, need to be upgraded and repaired.

Yet there is hope.

Nature-based climate solutions like trees, wetlands, grasslands, rain gardens, and parks can make a significant difference.

Growing evidence shows that farms and ranches can play an essential role in slowing down impacts from devastating weather events by enhancing soil health and incorporating renewable energy to benefit farm and ranch viability.

A critical part of this work involves building common ground with community leaders across the county to foster a shared understanding of the urgency to work together to ensure Solano County thrives as our climate changes.

You are now part of a larger effort to make a difference. In the coming years, you'll be part of the team to:

- Inspire hope and action across our community to prepare for and minimize the impacts of climate change.
- Partner with premier researchers like UC Davis and San Francisco Bay Natural Estuarine Research Reserve to test innovative land management practices and demonstrate nature-based solutions on our protected lands.
- Support community members, youth and schools, municipal leaders, wildlife managers, farmers, and ranchers to find and promote strategies and related funding.

Conservation means taking a long view. So, too, does climate action.

We must act in a timely, innovative, practical, and integrated manner. It's not easy, and some of our past assumptions about how to address this crisis will need to change. We look forward to learning together.



“My friends and I are worried about climate change. What is the future that we will inherit?”

– Lydia Kim
Young Leaders Focus Group



Nicole Braddock

Youth Matter and Nature is Critical

Numerous studies have shown the positive impact of nearby natural areas on community health, especially children and elders.

Regular outdoor experiences as part of school and educational enrichment programs have been documented to reduce attention deficit disorder and reduce anxiety.

Importantly, play is a central context for social and emotional development in early childhood.

Nature can provide opportunities for engaging and interactive exploration where students have regular access to inspiring places in nature and the out-of-doors to learn and play.



Natalie Dumont

“There is a pressing need to get more students outside to experience hands-on learning, and to connect with nature and each other as part of their educational experience.”

– Lisette Estrella Henderson
Solano County Superintendent of Schools



Samuel Adams

Empowering Youth as the Future of Conservation

As we look to the future, today's youth face significant challenges. They understand they are living in a time of enormous change.

Schools across the country are grappling with student hunger, increases in attention deficit disorder, mental health challenges, and a growing sense of anxiety, isolation, and despair.

Teachers, too, are facing burnout and feeling the urgency to try new approaches to reengage students so they can reach their potential as the future leaders we need them to be.

Solano schools are no different.

Research has confirmed what you already intuitively know. Exploring, playing, and learning in nature can dramatically enhance and reinforce indoor classroom learning and significantly improve academic success and social skills. As we address post-Covid challenges, these experiences are more important than ever.

School leaders and educators are interested in getting more kids outside but need a partner, like Solano Land Trust, to make that happen.

That's why our land trust, like other land trusts across the country, is investing in schools, youth experiences, and families.

We have a window of time to assist Solano youth when they need us most. Over the next five years, we will focus on the following:

- Remove barriers for kids who are not currently benefiting from field trips to see the special places in Solano, including local marshes, rolling hills, and oak woodlands.
- Raise funds to cover the costs of buses, providing age-appropriate curriculum, and youth enrichment programming.
- Ensure kids in our community have meaningful access to nature parks and nature-based programming in their communities.
- Facilitate the design of existing and future local and regional parks to support Science, Technology, Engineering, Art, and Math (STEAM) education and build the resilience kids need to thrive.

Our community recognizes that what once was considered a "nicety" is now considered as a necessity.

Access to land in fun, interactive, restorative, and community-oriented ways has never been more critical for today's youth and their future as leaders who care. You can help make that happen.



"I thought that I would learn about local farms and nature parks during the internship. I wasn't expecting to get a job offer from it, but I did."

"I'm glad I did it."

– Student
Climate Transition Internship



Laura Livadas



Di Holokahi



Samuel Adams



Samuel Adams



Solano Land Trust



Michael Gene Stewart

“We believe that when people have meaningful experiences outdoors their quality of life, health, and social wellbeing improve, and in turn, their communities become stronger and more sustainable.”

“Everyone deserves the opportunity to enjoy time outdoors because when people connect with nature we all benefit.”

– Sue Frost
Solano Land Trust
former board president

Providing Welcoming Places to Experience Nature

Imagine a time, not too far in the future, when every community in Solano County has safe, interesting, and beautiful ways to experience nature.

For some, that might be neighborhood or regional nature parks where you can relax on a bench to watch the sunset, share a Sunday afternoon meal with family, or wander with friends down a path lined by purple lupine and brilliant orange poppies.

For others, it often means accessing trails for running, hiking, and biking—traversing miles of challenging terrain and experiencing the exhilaration of being outside on a crisp fall day.

Sadly, there are those who rarely or never get to experience the wonder of nature.

Some live too far away. Others don't feel safe or welcome in these spaces or find themselves challenged to navigate parking areas, trails, or signage. And still, others who rely on wheelchairs or mobility assistance have few accessible nature parks they can visit.

Access to nature has long been considered therapeutic to older adults and youth. Yet, many parts of our county have limited accessible outdoor walking trails and picnic areas. We know this has left many people behind.

**We are already taking action.
But it's just the beginning.**

Together, we can ensure our community has greater access to trails and nature parks that are:

- Meeting people where they are, creating new special places in areas with little access to nature.
- Accessible and welcoming to a wide variety of visitors.
- Close to homes, community centers, and places where people gather.
- Learning landscapes; providing opportunities for school children and people of all ages to thrive.

When our community looks to the future, it sees a place that integrates healthy lands and waters, healthy people, and a commitment to each other. Solano Land Trust is poised to make that vision a reality.



Extraordinary Opportunities

The success of Jepson Prairie Preserve and the newly enhanced Patwino Worrtla Kodoi Dihi Open Space Park are examples of what we can do together.

The time is right.

- There is widespread agreement for the need to establish special places for the health and well-being of people from all walks of life.
- Hundreds of volunteers, partners, donors, tribal representatives, and community members are coming together to transform and restore existing parks to benefit nature and people.
- With the support of many, we are expanding our team to create community spaces that welcome and connect people to each other and nature in a manner that is meaningful to them.



*"I've lived here for 30+ years.
What an incredible gift
Patwino Worrtla Kodoi Dihi
Open Space Park is! It's even
more beautiful than I imagined
and now I get to look back on
the Rockville Hills and so
much more!"*

– Shaheen Khan-Takeuchi
mother, lifelong Solano resident





Jasmine Westbrook-Bajrskov



Tom Muehleisen



Nicole Braddock

“As a lifelong member of the disabled community, it is important to me to feel included. Having a space like the All People’s Trail is a wonderful addition to our community and I hope it will make more people feel included and more comfortable and safe being outdoors.”

– Kathryn M. Caretti, Esq.
Vallejo



Creating the Change We Wish to See

The past 35 years have provided us with an opportunity to reflect and celebrate our extraordinary success as a community-based land trust—and to focus on the challenges and opportunities ahead.

Like you, we recognize that now is the time to be bold, innovative, and intentional in conserving the lands that comprise the essence of Solano County.

Our commitment to farms, ranches, natural areas, and wildlife runs deep.

Yet we are also prioritizing conservation efforts that serve and connect those who may not have experienced these lands and special places in meaningful ways.

We look forward to working with people from all walks of life and the generous and committed landowners who care for and cherish the land to conserve Solano County's way of life and heritage.

We know this effort cannot be accomplished alone.

After hundreds of conversations and thousands of hours of work on the land, we are confident that what may seem daunting on any given day is possible with the generosity, commitment, and compassion of people like you.

To be effective, we must expand our efforts to provide timely, thoughtful, and responsive programs and partnerships.

We believe the land can connect all people, plants, and animals it touches.

The interconnectedness of land, people, and health has never been more visible, and we have never been better positioned to create positive change in our community.

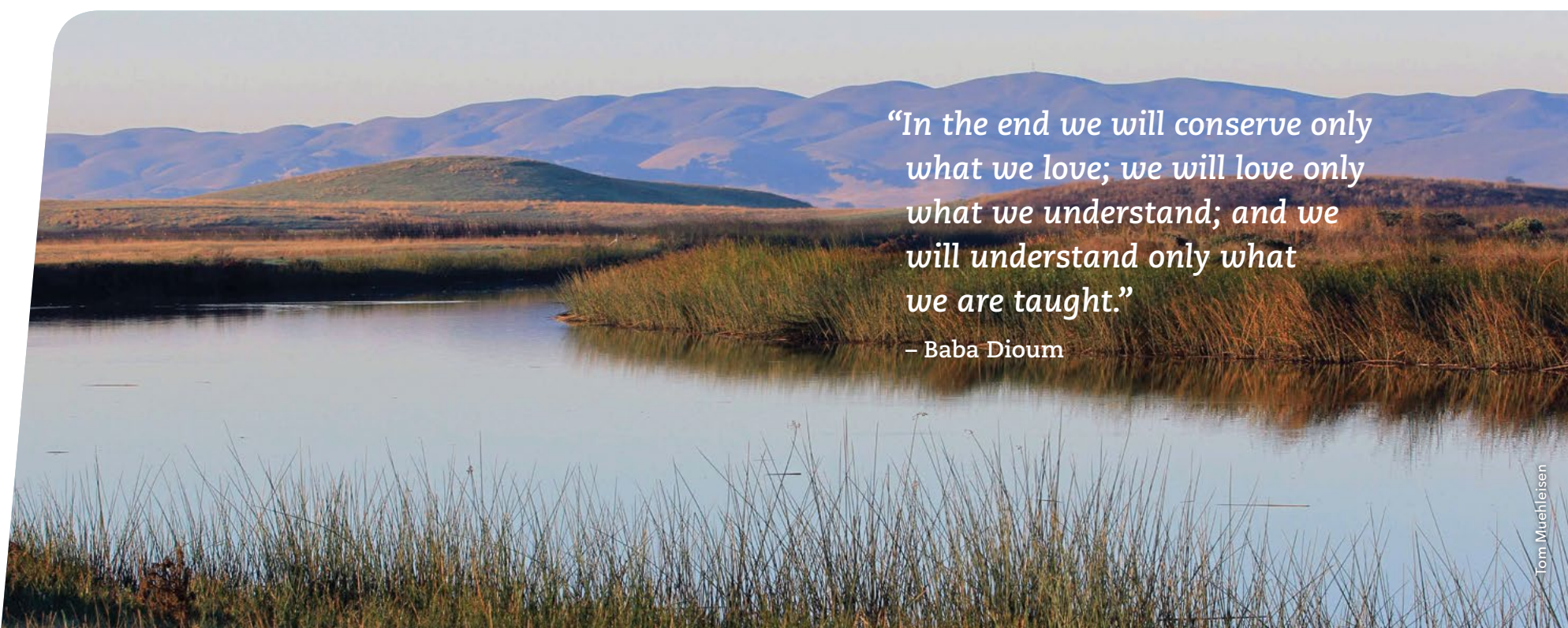
Join us in whatever way feels right to you to ensure that this place we call home will retain what we love the most.

The next five to ten years will define Solano County for generations to come.

“There comes a time when you realize that the opportunities to make conservation meaningful to more people far outweigh the challenges of doing so.

“Change starts with us, in partnership with many. We know that together, we need to be the change we wish to see.”

– Nicole B. Braddock
Solano Land Trust Executive Director



*“In the end we will conserve only
what we love; we will love only
what we understand; and we
will understand only what
we are taught.”*

– Baba Dioum



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“When I slow down, and consider all that’s going on in the world, I realize how fragile Solano County’s waters, fields and orchards, wildlife habitat, and community places are—and how much they mean to me. My life is enriched every time I experience Solano’s outdoors.”

– Tom Muehleisen
retired law enforcement, Solano Land Trust volunteer, wildlife photographer