Protecting Rural Farms: A Land Trust Tradition

Since its inception two decades ago, Bear Yuba Land Trust has made a commitment to preserve local farm lands. With six agricultural easements totaling 3,472 acres and the recent acquisition of a 652 acre working cattle ranch on the Bear River known as Garden Bar Preserve, the Land Trust’s commitment to farm and ranch land is stronger than ever.

“A well-managed ranch is good for the land. Ranches are worth saving,” said Marty Coleman-Hunt, executive director for BYLT.

“In addition to being a traditional and valued way of life in our community, competent cattle ranching makes elegant ecological sense. Cattle ranching protects open land and supports wildlife,” she added.

On Sept. 22, during BYLT’s 11th Annual Stars at North Star benefit, a “Back to the Land” dinner featuring a gourmet meal prepared using 90 percent locally grown food was hugely popular by gala attendees. Food from two farms located on Land Trust properties were featured during the event – Nevada County Free Range Beef and The Food Love Project.

For several years, Farmer Amanda Thibodeau, has run The Food Love Project, an educational farm located on the Land Trust’s Burton Homestead just outside Nevada City. Thibodeau is the Farm to School Program Manager for Sierra Harvest and helps hundreds of school age children connect with nature by teaching them where their food comes from during Farm to School field trips and a summer farm camp.

“We live in an area where not everyone has access to enough sun, land or experience to grow their own food. The Food Love Project is a place where people can come and engage in the experience of planting and harvesting and get a feel for the joy of fresh food.

continued on page 3
It’s not every day you get to see the future. This month, our BYLT extended family was enlarged with the birth of two baby girls – Juniper Shirley Mayer and Lyla Blue Kikendall. Their moms Cathy Shirley and Erin Tarr comprise our land stewardship team and both are doing well, enjoying some time off with their new daughters. It’s just a coincidence that they became pregnant within a week of each other. I must say it was delightful seeing them deftly moving over perennial native grasses at Linden Lea Ranch and through the 100-foot Douglas firs at the McDermott-Crawford Family Forest these last nine months, with their sweet, growing bellies. Because of the work Erin and Cathy do these new children will enjoy the wilds of these landscapes, forever.

It’s also because of the generous support the Land Trust receives from our community that we can continue the protection of our treasured landscapes.

This has been a very good year for conservation. The Land Trust successfully purchased the 652-acre Garden Bar Preserve and protected it as a permanent, local working cattle ranch. We are committed to raising grass fed beef to be sold in local markets. At the same time we are working to protect a Little Wolf Creek floodplain habitat for the endangered California black rail. We worked to restore the mixed-conifer forests of two urban parklands – Woodpecker Preserve on Banner Mountain and Adam Ryan Preserve in Alta Sierra, each containing public trails to appreciate the nesting Pileated woodpeckers, Common gray foxes hunting for mice and western gray squirrels collecting acorns for the coming winter.

When I walk through nature with a child I think about how much has disappeared in my own lifetime, and I wonder what the world will be like when they are my age. I know that Erin and Cathy think about this too, with hope that our caring community will work together to protect the land that sustains our lives and our livelihoods here.

Welcome Letty Litchfield

Letty Litchfield joined the BYLT board earlier this year and is a great addition to the team.

“I see the work of the Land Trust as critical to creating and maintaining thriving sustainable communities. My aim is to continue to support and contribute to collaborative work that protects and restores habitat to increase fish resilience,” she said.

Letty has more than 23 years of experience in Civil Litigation. She practiced for several years with a Sacramento law firm before opening her own law practice in the mid 1990s.

Letty lives in Yuba County in a historic home built in 1856 on a small farm. She has worked on salmon and steelhead restoration and conservation easement efforts on the lower Yuba River and has served as a board member with the Yuba River Preservation Foundation and the Tsi-Akim Maidu Tribe. Working with the Tribe and Yuba County, Letty helped establish a native plant garden in the County-owned Sycamore Ranch Park.

Letty showed Quarter Horses as a youth and raised cattle in her adult years. For the past 21 years she has had a passion for racing Outrigger canoes all over the world. Since 2012, she and her sister annually kayak the entire 72-mile shoreline of Lake Tahoe.
Because it is open to the public, people can really feel ownership of it. Often at our U-picks, we have children bringing their parents to the farm and showing them around. The kids have come on field trips and feel comfortable and excited when they come back,” Thibodeau said.

Rancher Jim Gates, owner of Nevada County Free Range Beef, grazes his cattle on property known as Linden Lea, 760 acres of conserved Blue Oak woodland, Ponderosa Pine forest and ranchland owned by Anna Reynolds Trabucco and Bill Trabucco. The property found off of Bitney Springs Road also includes nearly 1 ½ miles of riparian corridor on Kentucky Ravine Creek.

Currently, the ranch supports grazing, beekeeping, and a 160-acre timber plantation. The Trabuccos donated a conservation easement on their ranch allowing for a variety of uses on the land while restricting future residential subdivision. The purpose of the easement is to keep the land in productive ranching and farming use forever, something important to Anna whose roots run deep in Nevada County.

“Having witnessed way too much California ranch, farm and wild land turned into subdivisions and strip malls—that is, land changed from productive uses into consumptive ones—it was clear to both of us that this large ranch was a good opportunity to protect what was here,” said Bill Trabucco.

Without this kind of long term vision, farms run the risk of being lost forever.

**Disappearing farmland**

Between 1982 and 2007, more than 23 million acres of U.S. agricultural land were converted to developed land, with each state losing significant areas of farmland, according to a 2010 survey of agricultural lands by the U.S. Department of Agriculture. California ranked among the top three states losing farm land the fastest.

“More than 75 percent of the West’s winter range and migration corridors for wildlife are found on private land. National parks, forests, monuments and wilderness areas are simply not sufficient to keep wildlife populations healthy. Wetlands, river corridors, ponds, lakes, historic sites and scenic vistas are also found on private ranch land. Yet ranchers are typically not compensated for providing many conservation services,” Coleman-Hunt said.

Agricultural easements ensure land will be used for farming in perpetuity. By preserving open space and subsequently halting development threats, landscapes are kept intact for future generations and will ensure a local food supply. In the Bear and Yuba watersheds, ranching has been a way of life for generations and BYLT is dedicated to keeping this tradition alive and well.

“I can see Bear Yuba Land Trust actively connecting a new generation of farmers with land to steward and cultivate. In the future, BYLT has the capacity to do great work for our community by preserving and improving farmland as well as providing a chance for more agricultural opportunities for new farmers in this area,” Thibodeau said.

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*Amanda Thibodeau, The Food Love Project*

“**The nation’s best and most productive agricultural land is disappearing the fastest,**” said federal authors of the report.

At the same time, a nationwide trend shows land trusts across the country are working harder to keep farms and ranches viable. In a National Land Trust Census 13 years ago, Land Trust Alliance reported that farms and ranches represented 46 percent of all lands that land trusts protect. By 2010 that figure had grown to 61 percent.

In the year ahead, folks at Bear Yuba Land Trust are looking into innovative ways to expand its agricultural reach.

Along with Linden Lea and Garden Bar, BYLT has secured agricultural easements on a number of ranches in the most agriculturally productive parts of Nevada County, including: Quail Agricultural Easement, Pioneer Dawson Nichols Ranch, Wild Rock Ranch and Willow Tree Ranch.

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A Year of Great Treks

Wow! 2013 turned out to be our most ambitious Treks program ever. We scheduled almost 70 outings this year – from the North Star Mine property locally to the Geology of the Sierra Buttes in the Lakes Basin to the Van Norden Meadow at Donner Pass – we've been everywhere! Almost 900 people attended these rich and varied outings – led by some of the most interesting people in the county.

Treks ranged from easy to difficult. Our Treks for Health program, in collaboration with Sierra Nevada Memorial Hospital, ran summer to fall on the Hirschman Trail for those who wanted a slower pace and a shorter distance. Moderate hikers enjoyed the Train Tunnels at the summit and more fit and enthusiastic hikers signed up for the Castle Peak trek. Hikers enjoyed a good book and discussion in our bi-monthly Treks for the Mind reading group and others participated in informative lectures like the Mars Rover Armchair Trek. In addition, equestrians explored new areas of our community on horseback.

This year’s treks program included old standards like Table Mountain and returns to old favorites like Henness Pass. We offered a couple of new outings like the Art of Falconry.

We wish to extend a BIG Trail Thank You to all of the marvelous Trek Leaders who donate their time and expertise to make the BYLT Treks something special. Thank you, too, to all of the wonderful people who have participated in our outings program – you are the reason the program exists.

Upcoming Treks

Coming up are a couple more outings for the 2013 season.

First is our annual “Turkey Trek” held from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. on Friday, November 29, the day after Thanksgiving. This year we are featuring our newest community trail – the Deer Creek Environs Trail, a partnership with Sierra Streams Institute, the City of Nevada City, Sierra Nevada Conservancy, the Nisenan Tribe, the residents of Jordan Street neighborhood and BYLT.

Our last trek of the season will be an Armchair Trek on Tuesday, December 3 at the Gene Albaugh Community Room at the Madelyn Helling Library. We’ll be showing the not-to-be-missed movie “Greenfire: Aldo Leopold and the Land Ethic.” Local free-range beef rancher and board member of the Leopold Foundation, George Nolte will lead a discussion following the film.

The Shed Is Nearly Complete!

Thanks to the following volunteers who worked with Bill Haire to build the much-needed new equipment shed: Ray Bryars, Orval Choate, Bill Lawrence, Dale Peterson, Rob Martens, Art Anderson, Kevin Craig, Gerald Gates and Gene Haroldsen.

The 24 foot by 20 foot shed was built using recycled corrugated aluminum siding donated by Bill and Anna Trabucco. Designed to resemble the historic buildings on the North Star Mine property, the shed features electricity for power tools and lights plus water hookups. A garage door will allow a tractor to be parked inside.

Tim Colbert of Case Contracting provided electrical work; Steve Becker of Precision Design Builders provided General Contractor supervising work and David Wright of David Wright Associates offered his design expertise.

North Star Historic Conservancy and Bear Yuba Land Trust worked collaboratively on the project. The Conservancy provided building materials, design and the required permitting and the Land Trust provided volunteer labor.

Treks Coordinator Melony Vance
Ladybugs on the trail to Canyon Creek.

Every Friday BYLT staff led a walk to Hirschman Pond as part of the Treks for Health program.

The Full Moon hike in Spenceville Wildlife Area was well attended.

Hikers cool off at the South Yuba River on the New Rome Powerhouse Trek.

Wildflower walks at Table Mountain are always popular.

A couple hold hands during a spring trek at Table Mountain.
Dr. John and Allen Toussaint put on a stellar performance under the stars despite our first chill of autumn in the Sierra Nevada Foothills. It was a pleasure to work with Julie Baker and the talented staff at The Center for the Arts. More than 200 volunteers worked hard with grace day and night to create an event that concert-goers called “flawless.”

Thank you to event sponsors and donors: RW Baird, BriarPatch Co-op, Coldwell Banker, Living Wild, Gold n Green, Newmont Mining, Hanson Brothers, AAA Piano, Al Owens and Sierra Engineers, Christopher’s Catering, Foothill Flowers, Pete’s Pizza, KVMR, KNCO, The Union, Lagunitas Brewing Co. and Sierra Nevada Brewing Co.

Thank you local bands: Beaucoup Chapeaux, Earles of Newtown; Honeysweet and Leta’s Blues!

Rick Berry, Scot Woodland and Nicole Keene of Fox Walkers and Camp Director Corinna Kirkland-Kaplan helped create a phenomenal youth area complete with fire and rope making at our Celebration of Lands Tent.

Local individuals and businesses donated 126 items for our Silent Auction. Everything sold and people went home with some great finds. Our Live Auction was also a success. Thanks to Auctioneer Zack Krone and Live Auction Organizer Stacey Konner. People had fun bidding on a South African safari, a half side of beef from Elster Ranch and outdoor adventure packages.

Our benefit art exhibit, “Inhabit: Art of the Land” was beautiful and showcased many talented artists thanks to organizer Alicia Funk who volunteered many hours before and after the show.

Chef Antonio Ayestaran created a superb feast featuring locally grown food during the “Back to the Land” dinner and gala. Gala attendees didn’t want to leave their tables! The event was so successful we hope to have more of these dinners celebrating locally grown foods in the coming year.

Support the Land Trust with Annual Year End and Holiday Gifts

With the holidays upon us there is no better time to support Bear Yuba Land Trust. We have a very big year ahead with a number of major projects in the works: Restoring Garden Bar as a working cattle ranch, acquiring Rice’s Crossing for public access to the Yuba River, conserving 10,000 acres of PG&E land in the Sierra Nevada and the construction of a 10-mile section of the Bear River Trail, plus sending hundreds of local kids to summer nature camp.

We can’t do this work without the community’s financial support. This is your opportunity to get involved and support nature education, land conservation that you value and the trails that you love.

For holiday gifts this year think Land Trust first. Choose t-shirts, trail card sets and memberships. They all make perfect stocking stuffers. By giving a basic level $50 membership or more your loved one will receive a Treks Pass (a $17 value) to be used in our popular trekking program. Members for five years or longer enjoy a lifetime Treks Pass.

“The choice between giving a fruitcake and a LT membership is an easy one for me. I give gift memberships to friends who care about nature and our beautiful regional landscapes. Most of my recipients are interested in the Land Trust, but are busy people who have had some inertia in joining themselves. I am just helping them along,” said Board Member Fran Cole.

“I really like giving memberships as gifts because they’re a multiple benefit gift. The person benefits from learning about what the Land Trust does and may participate in Treks or explore a trail built by the Land Trust. The LT benefits from having membership revenue and a new future supporter of its efforts to conserve lands and connect with the community. The LT is poised to launch great projects in the near future, and I want to share these with my friends,” Cole added.

Others, like Jack Stillens enjoy making big year end donations to the Land Trust. He’s been donating to the Land Trust since 2007.

"I think it is important to protect what little remaining undeveloped agriculture land we have left. In addition, the IRS allows me to donate Required Minimum Distributions from my IRA tax free to non-profits," Stillens said.

Besides land stewardship, BYLT works hard to build and maintain many popular local trails. This coming year will be an exciting one as we work with more local farms and ranches and expand our reach partnering with community organizations.

Great Turnout at Art Reception

On Oct. 4 BYLT held an art reception at Nevada City Winery in downtown Nevada City. Alicia Funk helped organize a great art show – “Inhabit: Art of the Land” that included original work from 11 local artists. Mike Sneggs, Gail Lipson, David Wong and Paul and Karouna Thompson were on hand to talk about how the landscape inspires their work. All sales from the art show benefit BYLT.

Groups Celebrate Trail Opening

The next day, Sierra Streams Institute led a celebration of the opening of the new Environs Trail, part of the Deer Creek Tribute Trail system. Nevada City Mayor Sally Harris gave an eloquent speech about the importance of local trails and BYLT’s Trail Coordinator Bill Haire spoke about the challenges of trail building. Nevada City Rancheria Secretary Shelly Covert sang a Nisenan song.
Join us in our commitment to the land. Please recycle this newsletter.

Get off of the couch, grab your family, and hike off your Thanksgiving dinner with the Bear Yuba Land Trust “Turkey” Trek!

Deer Creek Environs Trail
FREE COMMUNITY TREK

Friday, November 29th • 10 am – 2 pm

For directions and more information, go to www.BYLT.org or call 530-272-5994 ext. 200

Pick up your free trail map from BYLT in front of Harmony Ridge Market at South Pine & Spring Streets in Nevada City. Stop in Harmony Ridge Market and get a FREE hot coffee.