



**BIG SUR**  
**LAND TRUST**  
For the lands you love

## New Nature Connections with The Bird School Project at Marks Ranch

“Kids outside. It’s an incredibly good thing!” That’s how Todd Farrington, BSLT’s director of community programs, describes how it felt to host groups of seventh graders at Marks Ranch during March with The Bird School Project. Kevin Condon, director of The Bird School Project, adds, “Big Sur Land Trust put their mission of removing barriers to access into action. We’re always looking for partners to expand and customize students’ experiences. Partnering with BSLT and the Pacific Grove Museum of Natural History’s Watershed Guardians project made these outings just that much more amazing!”

The Bird School Project has primarily been providing schoolyard experiences during science classes. They teach the importance of being aware of your environment, giving kids a chance to practice science skills including observation, while being curious and asking questions through the context of birding. However, partnerships like these also give the kids a chance to experience new places like Marks Ranch or our Carr Lake Park Project with young professional youth leaders.

Seventh graders from Harden Middle School in Salinas visited our historic ranch on five occasions. The first trip happened on the day the County lifted the mask mandate so there was an added layer of new experiences for students. As kids departed the bus, Kevin noted that they weren’t talking much. He also observed that “most of the kids’ body language showed they were uncomfortable getting on, or even near, the ground.” But as the day progressed and they roamed through wildflowers to different learning stations, they were willing to look more closely at where they were. Some laid in the field, picked up insects, or at least gathered around in great curiosity to see what creatures or flowers surrounded them.

Jessica at The Bird School Project also noted that, “Students appreciated that they had free time. They enjoyed the activities, and during lunch they were laughing and having lively conversations. Some went off to explore and were excited to climb a nearby hill. Something so simple meant so much after all the isolation and uncertainty.”



Photo by Kevin Condon

In typical fashion, when the trips ended, many students said something like, “Even though it was a lot of walking, it actually wasn’t boring.” High praise from a young teen! But the team also overheard many enthusiastically surprised comments when kids realized that Marks Ranch is part of their hometown.

Todd wraps it up with, “Our goal is to instill in these youth that they belong here. They are meant to be in relationship with the wildflowers, birds, and grasshoppers – and we want them to come back with their families. This is our managed access approach at its best. Our supporters are not just protecting the lands we all love, you are giving youth meaningful experiences in nature. You’re showing them that by having gentle impact on the land, they will be rewarded with powerful experiences they cannot find anywhere but in the wild outdoors.”

## Next Phase of Design is Underway for Our Carr Lake Park Project in Salinas

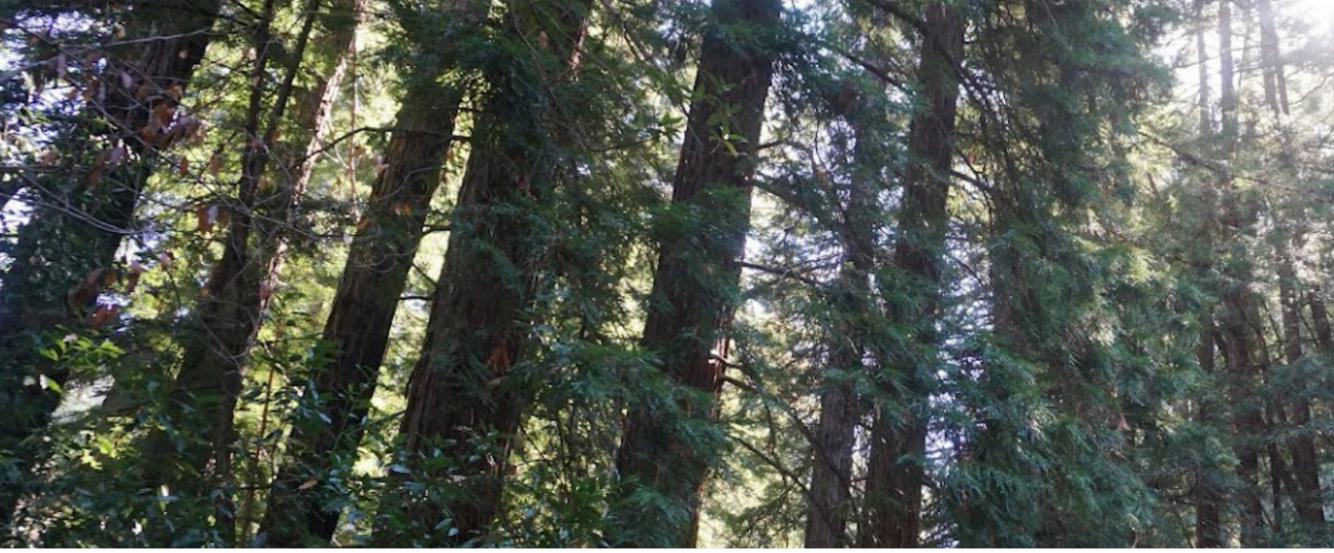
After getting the go-ahead from the city of Salinas late last year, we’ve moved into preparing 75% design plans for the neighborhood park at our Carr Lake site. We’ve also applied for federal and state natural resource agency permits for the project.

Community members attended an in-person meeting in April and a Zoom meeting in May to share their ideas for some elements of the six-acre neighborhood park including the “skate spot.” (A “skate spot” is a smaller version of a skate “park.”) We asked for input on the design of a multi-use court, as well as signage and art throughout the site. In the last meeting we shared what we’d heard in April about the dog park and play area designs. This input will be considered as the process moves forward.

Rachel Saunders, director of conservation, says, “We are grateful that the City of Salinas Library and Community Services Commission expressed great enthusiasm for the project at their meeting in June. We are now coordinating with our design team on how all the park elements fit together and how they relate to the 67-acre restoration area. We look forward to having 100% design plans by the end of August and starting to develop construction plans in early fall. We’ll be hiring a contractor in 2023 and anticipate beginning construction of the neighborhood park later that summer. It should take approximately twelve months to complete.”

We are waiting to hear back from the permitting agencies before we begin the final design process for the restoration project early in 2023. We are so grateful that community members continue to stay involved. Together we are all closer than ever to realizing our collective dream for a park in the heart of the city!





## Land & Legacy Society Spotlight: Amy Anderson and George Somero

*We are incredibly grateful to Amy Anderson and George Somero for supporting Big Sur Land Trust for 25 years and for being long-time members of our Land & Legacy Society! Recently, they shared their perspectives on why the Land Trust is part of their estate planning.*

Interested in learning more about our Land & Legacy society? Email Kate Mitchell Mehle at [kmitchell@bigsurlandtrust.org](mailto:kmitchell@bigsurlandtrust.org) or call her at (831) 886-7813.

### First, do you have a favorite spot on one of Big Sur Land Trust's nature preserves?

**Amy:** I suppose it might be the barn at Glen Deven Ranch. My string quartet played the dedication event there, after the ranch was bequeathed to the Land Trust by Dr. Seeley and Virginia Mudd. We had a great time and loved the way the barn felt. Great ambience and great acoustics! I've taken part in lots of good things that have happened there.

**George:** Mitteldorf Preserve is magnificent. My favorite spot is the spring on Headwaters Trail where Williams Creek originates – it's an oasis. WOW! I'd love to shrink myself to the size of a soil particle and look at the subterranean movement of water as the creek gathers momentum and flows to the sea.

### What has inspired your long history of giving to Big Sur Land Trust?

**Amy:** We mostly donate locally, to organizations that make our region and the world a better place. We're so fortunate to live in an area with a land trust, especially since it's the wonderful Big Sur Land Trust.

**George:** I resonate with the Land Trust's two principal focal points: land conservation (which is standard for such organizations), and their expanded vision for supporting healthy communities while providing all people access to conserved lands. The values driving BSLT have continued to strengthen over the years.

Speaking as a former board member with a long-term "insider's view" of the organization, Big Sur Land Trust has walked its talk for over four decades. We're working towards things on an enormous scale like our Carr Lake Park project and our Carmel River FREE project. We're collaborating with the County and community partners, while continuing to monitor thousands of acres of conservation easements. We also care for the nature preserves we own to keep their ecosystems thriving while providing safe access. When you put all of that together, it is a remarkable conservation effort and public service.

When we talk about healthy lands, healthy people, and healthy communities, that's not just a slogan. It's a powerful recognition of the importance of how we support these facets of public health. We're growing, we have more projects than ever and they are more geographically diverse than ever. Big Sur Land Trust is a well-recognized (and applauded!) national role model, particularly for our community service. Many land trusts are effective at protecting and caring for the land but we also give access – allowing human interaction on the land in a way that doesn't degrade it and getting young people to experience the benefits of being in wild places!

### What appealed to you about joining our Land & Legacy Society?

**George:** Big Sur Land Trust features prominently in our estate planning. It was a perfectly natural thing to do. We don't have any kids, so in planning our estate we looked at our values: environmental, cultural, and educational. Basically, our estate will be divided among these priorities. Being involved with the Land Trust for so many years, I have a deep appreciation of the quality and dedication of the staff. They share Amy's and my philosophy, they're motivated, and work well together. I feel that Big Sur Land Trust is going to have a great future, both in terms of what they'll do, and the fact that they have a wonderful staff and a good financial base to make it happen.

### How did you get involved with the board of trustees, George?

**Amy:** I can claim initial responsibility for George joining the board. In 2006, I knew he'd be retiring soon and might need something he felt strongly about to dig his teeth into. I was right – it's been a great experience for him!

**George:** Service on the board is rewarding. The people are knowledgeable and enjoyable with various life experiences. Say "yes" if you get invited! I'm now on the science and land management committee – the link between the two is largely in the context of climate change. We have to approach things differently as we address fire mitigation, restoration, or how intensely we graze the land. We've met with experts in rangeland and fire ecology and our dynamic quarterly meetings are very educational.

### What do you look forward to with Big Sur Land Trust?

**George:** I'm looking forward to the acquisition and protection of more land, with plans to transfer them to public entities. I'm excited about the addition of backpacking trips for our experienced youth campers. I want people to get the same benefits from nature that I did as a kid. You must be out on the land with all your senses engaged. I am inspired by our programs directed at kids, and the community at large. These offerings help people understand the benefits to both physical and mental health from the types of interactions with nature that our programs facilitate. We're clearly moving in the right direction.



Photo by Penny Parch

## What California's 30x30 Initiative Means for BSLT

The California Natural Resources Agency (CNRA) recently released its *Pathways to 30x30* document, outlining how the State will work to conserve 30% of its lands and near shore waters by 2030. It describes the initiative as seeking “to protect and restore biodiversity, expand access to nature, and mitigate and build resilience to climate change. This effort drives and aligns with broader state commitments to advance justice, equity, diversity, and inclusion, strengthen tribal partnerships, and sustain our economic prosperity, clean energy resources, and food supply.”

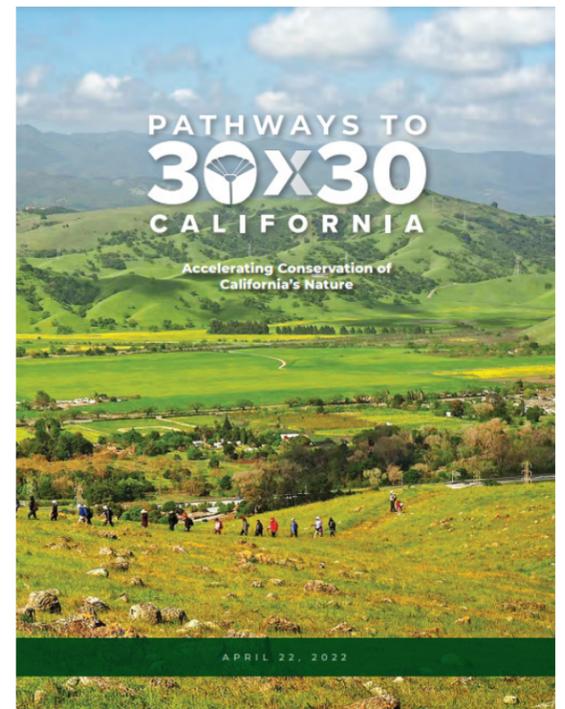
**In addition to our restoration work and consistent exploration into acquisition opportunities, Big Sur Land Trust has two major multi-benefit projects that directly support 30x30: our Carr Lake Park Project in the heart of Salinas and the Carmel River Floodplain Restoration and Environmental Enhancement Project (Carmel River FREE), in Carmel. It's an exciting time, and continuing support for these large scale, nature-based green infrastructure projects is needed to see them through.**

Our Carr Lake Park Project balances multiple needs as we'll be building a six-acre neighborhood park and restoring 67 acres of a natural flood basin. By increasing Salinas' park space by 15%, people will have more access to nature in the city. Restoring a more natural floodway means cleaner water will flow into Monterey Bay with improved filtration from new riparian habitat. We've already had amazing community engagement and commitment, and residents' sense of collective pride and ownership will continue to inspire ongoing care of this long-awaited park. The project is also an opportunity to connect residents and visitors with Indigenous Peoples' history and perspectives as well as immigrants' experience of working the land.

Carmel River FREE, our project near the mouth of the Carmel River, will also address several needs including flood management, access to parks, human and wildlife corridors and sustainable agricultural opportunities. We'll also be working with local tribes to retell their story of this land and the river that they hold sacred.

The threat of climate change requires that we act now. We must do all we can to help our natural and human-built environments adapt to climate change impacts. **We are so grateful to you, our supporters, who are stepping up to the challenge of meeting these imperative 30x30 goals.**

Thank you,  
*Jeannette Tuitele-Lewis*  
President/CEO



## Thanks to all Race for Open Space Participants, Supporters, Sponsors, and Partners!

Everyone who participated, supported, and volunteered at this year's Race for Open Space is a champion for Big Sur Land Trust's mission! Over 400 people ran, walked, and hiked at Glen Deven Ranch, Mitteldorf Preserve, Marks Ranch, or on one of our special Adventure Courses.

Between all of these stellar humans who found their wonder out on the lands they love and our generous sponsors, we raised \$69,000!

Though everyone's a winner in our book, you can find the top finishers in each of our Race for Open Space categories at [bit.ly/BSLT-ROS2022](https://bit.ly/BSLT-ROS2022). You can also see the winning photos.

As we begin planning next year's Race for Open Space, we are sending all our gratitude from our hearts to yours.

Thank you!





Mike (at left) leaning in to hear residents' feedback

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## Remembering Mike Bellinger

In March, when Mike Bellinger, principal and co-founder of BFS Landscape Architects, passed away, we lost an inspiring partner and friend. We have been working with BFS on the Carr Lake Park Project since 2018. After a competitive bid process, one of the reasons we chose BFS was Mike. His love of landscape architecture, his gentle and kind manner, his listening and problem solving skills, and his curiosity to understand what his clients – including the residents and other stakeholders – wanted to see, all translated to his deep passion for land stewardship. Mike and his firm were the best choice for designing this project because they really understood our commitment to community engagement and were excited by that collaboration. Many of us will always remember Mike at the community meetings at Sherwood Hall – leaning over tables, talking with residents about their ideas with enthusiasm and grace. His heart for his work and the people he served will shine through as the long-awaited dream of this park becomes a reality.



Conservation Excellence

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Photo by Emily Towne: Hadley Hargrove, Preserve Manager (left) with Danjela and her fellow service learners Santino Brown and Grant Ehlers

## Service Learners Give and Receive!

*CSUMB student Danjela Jozinovic is a wonderful example of the many service learners who contributed a total of 465 hours as stewardship volunteers, helping out with the Race for Open Space and many other projects. We cannot do this work without amazing students like her, who clearly have a heart for the lands we all love. We appreciate receiving this note from Danjela.*

I wanted to thank Big Sur Land Trust for allowing me to volunteer. I have learned more than I could have ever imagined. Every hike I went on, whether it was at Mitteldorf Preserve, Marks Ranch, or Glen Deven Ranch, was such an amazing experience. I thought I would share a special memory I had while volunteering at Mitteldorf Preserve with Hadley and the stewardship team. It was one Monday when we had to meet early in the morning to do some trail work and we worked all day long hiking, pulling weeds, laughing, and learning about all the plants in the redwood understory. I had to leave early to get to class on time and I had to walk back alone for about two miles. As I was turning to leave the group and started on my hike back to my car, I had a realization. When I first started to volunteer, I saw all the plants as the same. Now as I walked under the redwoods, I was able to identify and notice each plant as an individual. When finding an invasive plant, pulling it, and moving along the way – not only have I learned so much about all the plants but I now have a different perspective than I did before. This opportunity has shown me how much I do love to work outdoors and how important stewardship and education are. Because there is still so much for me to learn, I hope to keep in touch on future opportunities.

Thank you,  
*Danjela Jozinovic*