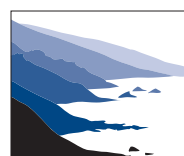


*Photo of Ferrini Ranch
by Matthew Pendergast*

FALL/WINTER 2025

LETTERS FROM THE LAND

A Newsletter for Supporters of Big Sur Land Trust



BIG SUR
LAND TRUST
For the lands you love



A LETTER FROM OUR PRESIDENT/CEO

Jeannette Tuitele-Lewis

This summer, I joined hundreds of conservation leaders from across the country at “Rally,” the national land conservation conference hosted by the [Land Trust Alliance](#). The teams who gathered there share a simple yet profound belief that the work we do is meant to last forever. During a session on using prescribed burns for wildfire mitigation, I was struck by how this thoughtful, regenerative process mirrors the essence of our mission. Land trusts, by nature, take the long view. **We care for the land today so that it may thrive tomorrow, and for generations beyond our own.**

The concept of acting today for a distant future, following the belief that “the true meaning of life is to plant trees under whose shade you do not expect to sit,” captures the heart of Big Sur Land Trust’s work. **Every acre protected, every trail maintained, every youth inspired, represents a promise**—a promise that our lands here in Monterey County will be cared for in perpetuity.

I was reminded of this promise at the grand opening of [Ensen Community Park](#) this summer, a celebration that had our community bursting with pride and gratitude. Seeing families from Salinas gather to celebrate this new park, to see children play and elders

walk the paths that now can be enjoyed by everyone, was a moving testament to what community conservation can achieve. We were especially honored to share the opening ceremony with the [Ohlone-Costanoan Esselen Nation](#), whose blessing grounded the day in deep respect for the ancestral lands upon which this park now flourishes. And our work at the park continues. **As Phase Two of Ensen Community Park takes shape, the 67-acre wetland restoration area is already beginning to tell a story of renewal.** Soon, native plants will bloom, birds and pollinators will flock to the new habitat, and residents will enjoy a space that both restores the land and strengthens our connection to it.

The vision emerging at [Ferrini Ranch](#) is equally exciting, as we work with [Trust for Public Land](#) to permanently protect the land while working with local partners to imagine a regional hub for conservation, community programming, and the careful stewardship of the land along the Highway 68 corridor. **This landscape is a place where people and wildlife coexist**—where conservation and community can thrive side by side. It’s the kind of work that defines who we are as an organization: intentional, hopeful, and deeply rooted in place. Our [Youth & Family Programs](#) also continue to bring our mission to life in the most meaningful way—by connecting young people to nature and helping them build a deep love of land. These experiences ensure that the next generation understands both the importance and the joy of caring for the natural world.

The conservation partnerships, the restored habitats, the children who stand beneath a mighty redwood for the first time, are all parts of the story of belonging. Together, we are building a legacy that will endure, and that is rooted in care, community, and the belief that forever truly matters.



WHAT THE LAND HAS EXPERIENCED

We often think about land as just what it brings to us in the present time. A joyful day; a place to share; photos, moments and connections to remember. But all land has a history that precedes us and will live on after us. It experiences things we can best appreciate if we stop to consider its past and its future. Ferrini Ranch has experienced tectonic movement, native stewardship, and ranching families alongside footfalls of animals seeking food and mates and the ever-growing lights of cars and civilization. Nearby wildlife cameras located in the underpass connecting Ferrini Ranch with Fort Ord, along with field surveys, provide some insight into wildlife experiences: more than 400 wildlife detections have been recorded including mountain lions, bobcats, foxes, badgers, and deer. What will it experience in the future with its preserved wildness, biodiversity, and ecological resilience?

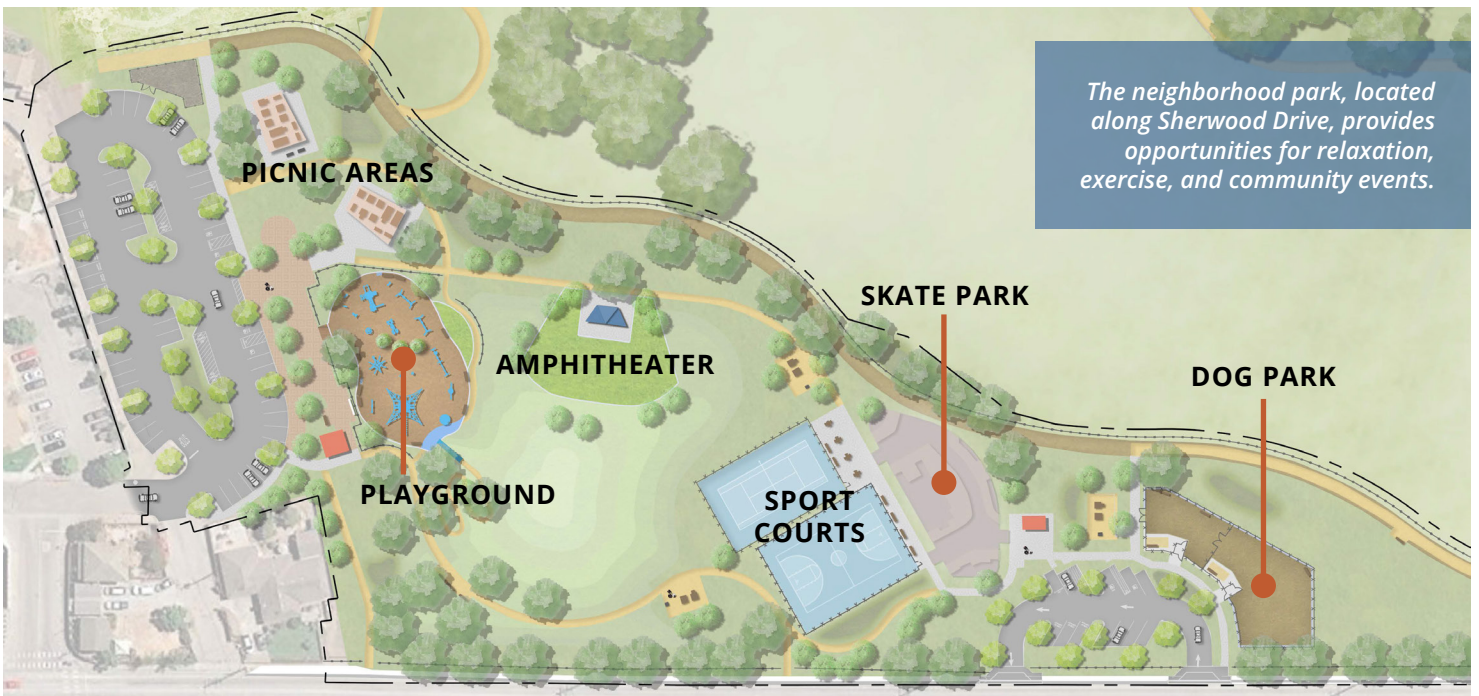
Read more about Ferrini Ranch on [page 13!](#)

CELEBRATING WITH SALINAS

Grand Opening of Ensen Community Park



Photo by Bradley Dunbaugh



"I just cannot express my excitement about the idea that the people of Salinas, the children of Salinas, will come here, and they will all know that this is where they live."

ARMANDO QUINTERO
DIRECTOR OF CALIFORNIA DEPARTMENT
OF PARKS AND RECREATION

Photo by Matthew Scott



Sunday, August 17 was an unforgettable day at the grand opening of the neighborhood park at [Ensen Community Park](#) in Salinas. **We had 1,500 visitors join us to celebrate!** All corners of the park were buzzing thanks to our exhibitors, activity leaders, and community partners. Visitors enjoyed Zumba, folklorico dancing, pickleball lessons, and dog caricature drawings.

The audience at the amphitheater grass witnessed a land blessing with the Ohlone/Costanoan Esselen Nation. Then, the history and significance of this park were shared through the words of Jeannette Tuitele-Lewis (BSLT), Joel Hernandez Laguna (CCA), Mayor Dennis Donohue, Councilmember Gloria De La Rosa, Senator John Laird, Dominic Dursa (Office of State Assemblymember Robert Rivas), Gloria Sandoval (CNRA), Armando Quintero (California Department of Parks and Recreation), Amy Hutzler (Coastal Conservancy), Dr. Jennifer Norris (Wildlife Conservation Board), and Colleen Bailey (Salinas Valley Chamber).

Photo by Bradley Dunbaugh

"This park shows the power of community and partners coming together to break down barriers and create a space for health, connection and belonging for all."

GLORIA SANDOVAL
DEPUTY SECRETARY FOR ACCESS
CALIFORNIA NATURAL RESOURCES AGENCY



BIG SUR LAND TRUST CROSSWORD

Stumped? Turn to page 14 for the answer key!



Hikers enjoying stunning autumn views from Glen Deven Ranch, October 2025.

YOU CAN FIND MOST OF THESE ANSWERS IN THIS NEWSLETTER!

Down:

2. Name of 73-acre park at Carr Lake and Indigenous word for blackberry.
3. Big Sur Land Trust was founded in 197_.
5. This team of Big Sur Land Trust staff works collaboratively with other organizations, landowners, and volunteers to maintain, improve, and sustain our landscapes.
8. The ranch purchased in December 2024 by Trust for Public Land and currently being stewarded by Big Sur Land Trust.
11. A piece of undeveloped land connecting two habitats so wildlife can move safely between them.
12. This group of volunteers keeps the Big Sur International Marathon finish line litter-free in April. (*Hint: what color are eco-friendly activities?*)
15. These long-legged, freshwater birds will be likely visitors of the new restoration area in Salinas.
17. The abbreviation for the Carmel River "Floodplain Restoration and Environmental Enhancement" Project.

Across:

1. Race for ____ ____ is our largest annual fundraising event where participants can experience conserved lands not usually open to the public.
4. Big Sur Land Trust purchased and transferred 3 acres of land to the City of Monterey in 1987 to create this popular beach park.
6. 5,105-acre ranch and nature preserve near Arroyo Seco and Greenfield that protects critical wildlife habitats.
7. 860-acre Big Sur property that hosts hikers and outdoor youth camps.
9. This beautiful preserve is home to Monterey County's largest redwood tree.
10. The number of creeks that once flowed naturally through Carr Lake and into Monterey Bay.
13. A stretch of this local creek was conserved in 1993 and is now part of Ishxenta State Park.
14. This property used to host an egg production business.
16. Native plant our volunteers have helped us plant at 14-across for migrating monarch butterflies.
18. Invasive plant our volunteers help remove at Martin Dunes.



NEW LOOK!

A REFRESHED FORMAT FOR OUR NEWSLETTER!

Same great stories, now in a magazine you can flip through at your own pace—ideal for coffee breaks or quiet moments.

WHEN FIRE HEALS

How Prescribed Burns Can Protect Local Nature and People

When the Soberanes Fire tore through the Santa Lucia Mountains in 2016, it left behind a scar felt far beyond the 132,000 acres burned. Fifty-seven homes were lost, a bulldozer operator tragically died, and the firefight became one of the costliest in U.S. history. For weeks, Monterey County residents watched the smoke rise, wondering where the flames would head next. That fear of losing lives, homes, and beloved landscapes remains a powerful reminder that severe fire is not an abstract threat. It is real, and it is personal.

Fortunately, there is another story emerging across California, one rooted not in destruction but in care. **A growing movement is bringing back good fire, the intentional and carefully planned use of prescribed burns to reduce fire risk and support ecosystem health.** Using fire as an important tool is by no means new. Indigenous peoples have stewarded these lands with good fire for millennia, using it to promote culturally important plants, open habitat for wildlife, and maintain the resilience of the landscape. While cultural burning and prescribed burning are distinct practices, both recognize fire as a natural and beneficial force when applied with knowledge and purpose.

Many of California's native ecosystems evolved with occasional, low-intensity fire.

Some plants, such as manzanita, are fire-adapted, and depend on the heat from fire or chemicals in smoke or charred wood to germinate seeds. Yet California's Central Coast historically burned only every few decades, usually when lightning struck. Today, human-caused fires often lead to high-intensity fires, disrupting natural cycles and putting both

people and ecosystems at risk. Decades of fire suppression have compounded the problem by allowing vegetation to accumulate into dangerous fuel loads.

Prescribed burns offer a tool to reverse that trend. Unlike mechanical thinning or grazing—methods that BSLT has used effectively in the past—fire consumes fuel directly and removes thick thatch that smothers native wildflowers.

Burning can promote biodiversity, support culturally significant plants, and help meet state goals for restoring fire to fire adapted landscapes. New technology such as the Burn Bot, a remote-controlled machine that applies precise, contained fire while cooling the ground behind it, is making the practice even safer and more adaptable.

There are many compelling examples of how prescribed fire has reduced risk. At San Vicente Redwoods in Santa Cruz County, a prescribed burn completed in early 2020 helped lower fire severity of a project area when the CZU Lightning Complex Fire swept through only months later. The difference on the ground was clear evidence that good fire can create real protection for nearby communities.

Big Sur Land Trust has not yet used prescribed burns on our properties, but our land managers know that a larger set of tools leads to better stewardship. As we work to care for both the land and the people of Monterey County, prescribed fire offers a powerful opportunity. It can reduce danger, increase resilience, and help our landscapes and our communities thrive.



Photo of the Soberanes Fire by Michael Troutman



Photo of the River Fire regrowth in Marks Ranch by JC Navarro Solis

ENSEN COMMUNITY PARK RESTORATION:

Trails, Wetlands, and Wildlife Habitat

Construction of [Phase 2 of Ensen Community Park](#)—the 67-acre restoration area—is officially underway and on track for completion by summer 2026. This ambitious effort is transforming land once drained for agriculture into a vibrant landscape where wetlands, wildlife, and community recreation can prosper together.

To recreate the historic wetland that existed here more than a century ago, crews moved and shaped over 172,000 cubic yards of soil. That's about 50 Olympic-sized swimming pools worth of soil! The newly contoured terrain now includes elevated ground for 1.7 miles of intertwining trails as well as basins that will hold ponds and slow-moving waterways. Three new bridges totaling 240 feet in length stand ready to carry walkers and runners across the restored channels.

Dirt lies exposed for now, but the landscape won't remain bare for long. Planting will soon begin, including more than 2,000 pounds of seed, 6,000 native plants, and 100 trees carefully selected for the seven distinct habitat types being created. Visitors will eventually see trees like box elder and Western sycamore, colorful flowers like California poppy and sun cups, and even some more unusually named species such as spreading rush and tufted



hairgrass. They may also spot our state grass, purple needlegrass.

Once complete, the restored floodplain will offer 62 acres of habitat, from wetlands to grasslands. This revitalized environment will provide refuge for migrating birds, breeding space for native frogs, and shaded corridors for wildlife seeking relief in summer. The redesigned waterways will slow storm flows, help recharge groundwater, and filter water on its journey toward Monterey Bay. Meanwhile, the growing wetland plants will capture carbon dioxide, contributing to regional climate resilience.

When construction wraps up, the property will be transferred to the [City of Salinas](#) and opened to the public. Big Sur Land Trust will continue to steward the habitat, for the success of the restoration and for the enrichment of the entire community.

Want a deeper look at the species shaping this restored landscape?

Just send a quick note to info@bigsurlandtrust.org and we'll share the full list.

2,000 POUNDS OF SEED— LOCALLY SOURCED, OF COURSE!

Collected from local wild landscapes, including
BSLT preserves like Arroyo Seco and Basin Ranch.



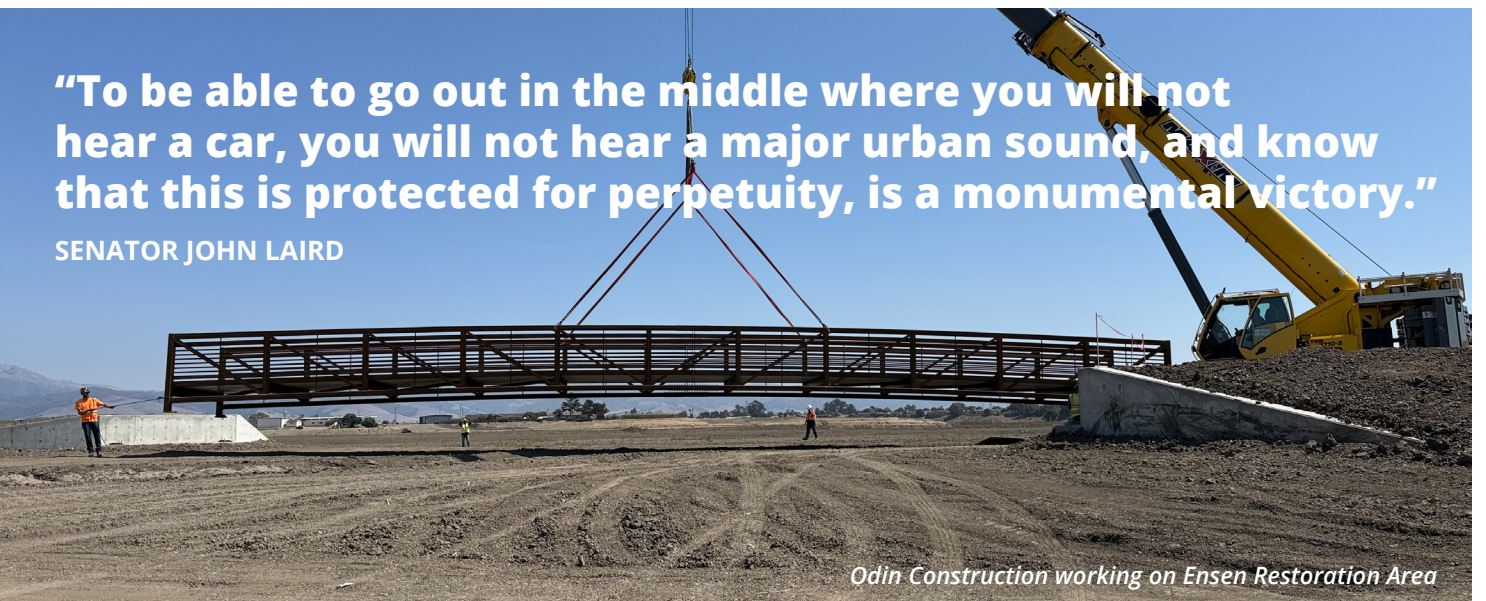
Photo by Matthew Scott



Photo by Matthew Scott

**“To be able to go out in the middle where you will not
hear a car, you will not hear a major urban sound, and know
that this is protected for perpetuity, is a monumental victory.”**

SENATOR JOHN LAIRD



Odin Construction working on Ensen Restoration Area

OPEN DOORS TO NATURE

Partnerships that Build Confidence and Connection

Many young people in Monterey County do not have easy access to the joys found in nature. Some communities simply don't have public parkland nearby for kids to play in green open spaces. For many youth—especially those who are BIPOC, LGBTQIA+, (im)migrant or first-generation citizens, foster youth, or from low-income households—the outdoors can feel distant or unwelcoming.

Big Sur Land Trust is working with community partners to change this. Together, we have created programs that help young people feel at home outside and discover a love of the land.

This year, Big Sur Land Trust offered programs for young people of many ages. Elementary school students enjoyed field trips with hands-on nature activities that sparked curiosity. Day camps and overnight camps gave youth and their families the chance to explore forests, coastlines, and creeks while building friendships and confidence.

The youth leadership program created new pathways for teens who wanted to go further. These students took part in



Wonder begins small... sometimes right on your fingertip!

"It made me feel like an adventurer! It also made me feel like a scientist."

TANAV, 11, SEASIDE



Fifth graders explored the wonders of the redwood forest at Mitteldorf Preserve, discovering how curiosity and science go hand in hand.

outdoor recreation, learned about conservation work, and explored possible careers. Local college students studying conservation also gained real-world experience on BSLT preserves.

These programs are possible because of strong relationships with organizations that serve communities who often lack access to outdoor spaces. Partners include the [Center for Community Advocacy](#), [CHISPA](#), [The Epicenter](#), [Community Partnership for Youth](#), Martin Luther King Jr. School of the Arts, and [Girls' Health in Girls' Hands](#). These groups help connect the Land Trust's programs with youth who benefit from them most.

These partnerships open doors and lower barriers. They help young people feel welcomed, supported, and excited to explore. Many participants return year after year, and even become leaders who guide others.

By creating safe and inviting outdoor experiences, Big Sur Land Trust and its partners are inspiring a love of land across generations—and helping youth discover they belong in nature.

IMPACT OF 2024-2025 YOUTH & FAMILY PROGRAMS



The six high school students from this year's Youth Leadership Series went backpacking, pulled invasive species, supported outdoor camps, and engaged the community. Along the way, they discovered that true leaders help everyone rise and be their best selves.

11 DAY PROGRAMS

SERVED **137** YOUTH PARTICIPANTS
AND **23** ADULT FAMILY MEMBERS

3 OVERNIGHT CAMPS

SERVED **30** YOUTH PARTICIPANTS
AND **6** ADULT FAMILY MEMBERS

"Some things that I have learned are how redwood trees are all connected and they share a nutrient system in a way. That means when one tree isn't getting enough nutrients, they all give that tree some. I feel like this is also how me and my community are connected to land. We all lean on each other when we need it the most. When we're struggling with something, we always have someone to support us when needed."

KELSEY, 16, SALINAS

**6 YOUTH LEADERS
(AGES 16-18)**

LOGGED **850+** HOURS OF SERVICE
AND TRAINING ON THE LAND

**12 FEMALE-IDENTIFIED
PEOPLE (AGES 18-29)**

PARTICIPATED IN OUR FIRST ANNUAL
YOUNG WOMEN'S LEADERSHIP IN
CONSERVATION OVERNIGHT CAMP



FERRINI RANCH: AT THE INTERSECTION OF LANDSCAPE AND LEGACY

Written by Tony Hirsch

Photo by Bradley Dunbaugh

[Ferrini Ranch](#) has always been—and could always be—a vital landscape for people, wildlife, and the planet. Its beauty punctuates travel between Salinas and Monterey, while its ridges, creeks, woodlands, and grasslands help connect the wild, unprotected areas between the Santa Lucia range and Fort Ord National Monument into one continuous ecosystem.

For millions of years, the land that is now Ferrini Ranch has been part of the evolution of the Salinas Valley, with a heritage in supporting Indigenous and ranching families and wildlife. Big Sur Land Trust (BSLT) and [Trust for Public Land \(TPL\)](#) are actively collaborating to ensure the continued sustainable evolution of the land on a permanent basis.

Keeping the land wild not only opens more pathways for people to create lasting memories from the land's restorative beauty, but also ensures it remains a safe and essential corridor for wildlife. Today, species that include bobcats, mountain lions, foxes, badgers, and deer depend on its access points and underpass to safely find mates, resources and environments. Protecting this network of over 20,000 acres of linked animal habitats prevents dangerous encroachment into human habitats and

enables the safety of nearby neighborhoods and highways, reducing community risks and vehicle collisions.

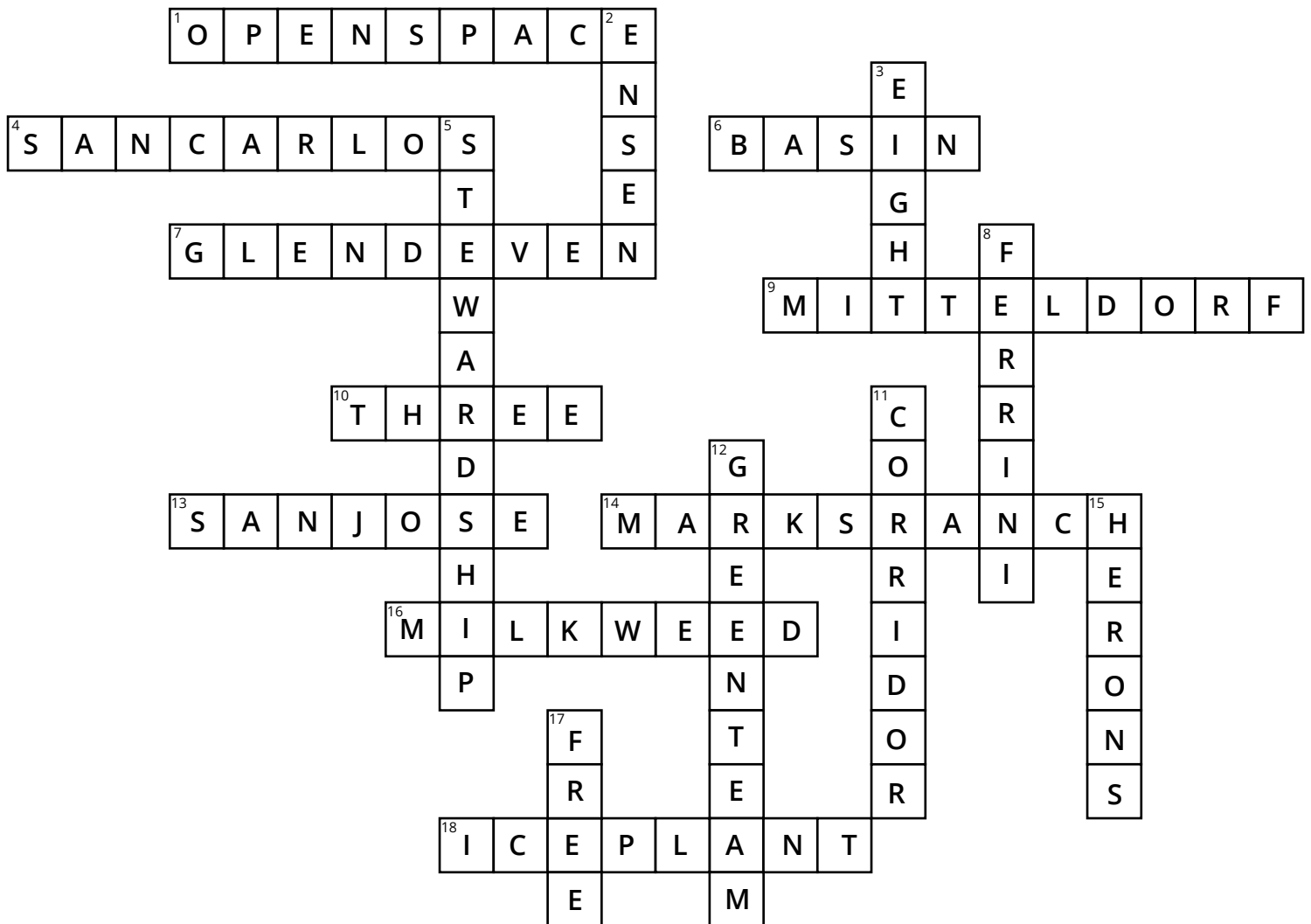
Management and protection of the land permanently will include maintenance of open grasslands, soil improvement, enhanced groundwater filtration, habitat preservation, and wildfire risk reduction.

In keeping with BSLT's mission to inspire love of land across generations, conserve our unique Monterey County landscapes, and increase access to outdoor experiences for all, there will be a robust community engagement process designed to bring together diverse voices regarding future management, ecological restoration and community programming.



Donate now to help us save Ferrini Ranch: bit.ly/donate-ferriniranch

CROSSWORD ANSWER KEY



THANK YOU FOR SHARING YOUR VOICE!

This August, **226 community members** helped shape BSLT's future by sharing their insights in our broad community survey. Your input is guiding our work in conservation, inclusion, and community engagement.

Big Sur Land Trust
509 Hartnell Street
Monterey, CA 93940
T: (831) 625-5523
www.bigsurlandtrust.org

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DONOR PRIVACY POLICY: Big Sur Land Trust will not sell, trade or share personal information or send mailings on behalf of other organizations.



Help protect and restore the lands we love from Ferrini Ranch to Ensen Park in Salinas, and throughout Monterey County—for all of us to enjoy.

Your donation helps Big Sur Land Trust—in partnership with the Trust for Public Land—care for the 869-acre Ferrini Ranch, a vital open space and wildlife corridor along HWY 68, connecting the Monterey Peninsula and the Salinas Valley.



Donate now at:
montereycountygives.com/bslt



**Saturday, May 9, 2026
Palo Corona Regional Park**

There will be five different outdoor trail courses for you to explore while you support the lands you love in Monterey County at our largest annual fundraising event. There is something for all ages and fitness levels, ranging from 1 mile to 35 kilometers!

Early bird registration open now—20% off until the end of the year at: bit.ly/ROS_2026