

BIG SUR
LAND TRUST

For the lands you love

2026 GRATITUDE REPORT
Returning Every Year



Native California Poppies at Martin Dunes
Photo by Bradley Dunbaugh



Martin Dunes
Photo Credit: Big Sur Land Trust

Dear Friends,

This year, I've found myself returning to a simple but powerful idea: when we care for the land, we care for each other.

Because of you, 2025 was a year of meaningful progress for Big Sur Land Trust (BSLT). Together, we protected and restored the landscapes that define this region while expanding access to nature for thousands of people across our community.

Your support continues to make so much possible. Today, we are co-stewarding more than 5,000 acres alongside local tribes and have supported the return of 84 acres to Indigenous communities; we maintain 43 miles of publicly accessible trails that connect people of all ages to the outdoors; and over the years, nearly 2,000 young people have participated in our programs focused on nature, leadership, and discovery. At the same time, we are expanding community spaces like [Ensen Community Park](#), bringing green space and opportunity to thousands of families.

But beyond these numbers are the moments that stay with us — a young person experiencing the outdoors for the first time, a family finding connection and belonging in a shared space, a community coming together to restore and care for the land we all depend on. This is the impact you make possible.

At BSLT, our work is grounded in partnership — with communities, volunteers, and Indigenous leaders who have stewarded these lands for generations. Together, we are not only protecting special places but also building a more inclusive and resilient future for our region.

As we look ahead, the need for this work continues to grow. From climate resilience to equitable access to nature, we are committed to meeting this moment with urgency, care, and collaboration.

I am deeply grateful for your partnership. Your support reflects a shared belief that healthy lands and healthy communities go hand in hand — and that together, we can ensure both for generations to come.

With gratitude,

Jeannette Tuitele-Lewis
President/CEO
Big Sur Land Trust



Photos by Bradley Dunbaugh

Volunteer Photographer & Hike Leader — Bradley Dunbaugh

The entire BSLT team is deeply grateful for the time and dedication of our volunteers. Their unwavering commitment of expertise, energy, and enthusiasm have made an impact in every aspect of our work.

We are sincerely grateful for the time and talents of **Bradley Dunbaugh**, an active volunteer with Big Sur Land Trust since 2022. A photography enthusiast, Bradley's stunning images of the land, people, and wildlife supported by BSLT often grace our print and online publications. Bradley is also a much-loved leader in our guided hikes program, and has lent his expertise to our administrative functions as well. With a background in operations and business efficiency, Bradley helped BSLT establish the processes we use today to evaluate and mitigate risk and safety issues.

“The work BSLT has done in partnering with so many organizations for the acquisition, protection, and rewilding of Monterey’s lands cannot be overstated. Much of what we have access to and take for granted today would not exist if not for the actions of this small but mighty nonprofit.”

— Bradley Dunbaugh



Ferrini Ranch: Acquisition, Climate Signal, and Looking Ahead to 2026



Ferrini Ranch
Photo by © Kip Evans

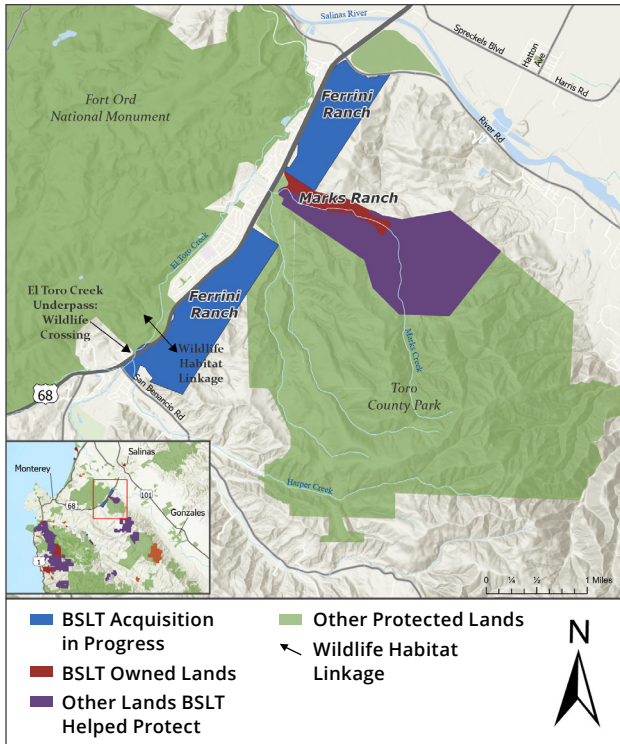
The permanent protection of [Ferrini Ranch](#) represents a defining moment for one of the most visible and ecologically important landscapes on California's Central Coast.

BSLT, in partnership with Trust for Public Land, moved quickly to secure the 866-acre property along Highway 68 in Monterey County — land that had long been slated for a 185-home development. That proposed development would have fragmented a critical wildlife corridor, increased groundwater demand, and introduced additional wildfire risk into a highly exposed region.

The rapid acquisition was made possible through a bridge financing structure from the Community Foundation Santa Cruz County's Central Coast Climate and Conservation Action Fund, known as the "Strike Fund."

Thanks to this innovative approach, Ferrini Ranch was secured at a critical moment. In the months since, significant progress has been made toward permanent protection. **A remaining funding gap of approximately \$1.6 million** must now be closed to complete the transfer and ensure the land's future.

Ferrini Ranch's importance extends far beyond its size. Strategically located, it connects the Sierra de Salinas range



to Fort Ord National Monument and supports an active wildlife corridor beneath Highway 68. Its diverse landscape: oak woodland habitat, native grassland, seasonal drainage systems, and working agricultural land make it both ecologically rich and regionally vital.

Just as important, Ferrini Ranch functions as a living indicator of change. Its varied topography and exposure make it highly responsive to shifts in climate conditions, offering early insights into broader environmental trends across the Central Coast. Recent weather patterns underscore this role. As of early April 2026, California's

snowpack is significantly lower than in 2025 (~20% of normal per California Department of Water Resources). While total rainfall approached average levels, its distribution was uneven: light early precipitation followed by a concentrated series of late-season storms.

On the ground, this translated into uneven ecological results — lower elevations greened quickly, but dried faster; north-facing slopes retained moisture longer. At Ferrini Ranch, wildflowers bloomed earlier across the picturesque hills.

Looking ahead, projections suggest these patterns will intensify. Climate models indicate a shift towards more variable precipitation — fewer storms overall, but greater intensity when they do occur.

For Ferrini Ranch, this means rainfall is more likely to run off steep terrain rather

than replenish critical groundwater, potentially shortening the season of lush green grasses found in average rainfall years. Variability across the landscape will continue, with upper slopes retaining moisture longer while lower grasslands cycle more rapidly from green to dry.

Together, these dynamics position Ferrini Ranch as a powerful “early signal” landscape for the region. It offers a real time window into how climate variability is reshaping ecosystems — and how thoughtful stewardship can respond.

Completing the protection of Ferrini Ranch is more than preserving open space. It ensures that this landscape remains connected, resilient, and actively managed at a time when adaptability is essential. What is learned here will inform conservation strategies across the Central Coast for years to come.

Your support makes this possible.

[A gift toward Ferrini Ranch](#) directly helps close the remaining funding gap, securing payment protection and enabling long-term stewardship. Every contribution, at any level, plays a meaningful role in safeguarding habitat, maintaining wildlife connectivity, and advancing climate resilience.

For questions, inquiries or to schedule a meeting to discuss please contact:

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Martin Dunes: A Vital Coastal Landscape

Many people may not realize that BSLT protects not only forests, grasslands, and working lands, but also vital coastal sand dune ecosystems.

Spanning 125 acres and roughly 40 square miles, [Martin Dunes](#) is part of the Monterey Bay Dunes Complex, the largest coastal dune system in California. Located between the Salinas River National Wildlife Refuge to the north and the CEMEX Sand Plant to the south, the property serves as an important ecological link along the central coast. Its significance is underscored by the United States Fish and Wildlife Service, which has identified Martin Dunes as a priority restoration area. Since 2000, BSLT has owned and stewarded nearly 74% of the site, working to restore and protect this dynamic landscape shaped by wind, sand, and sea.

Martin Dunes provides critical habitat for a number of federally and state-listed species, including the endangered Smith's blue butterfly and the threatened Western snowy plover, whose nesting success depends on carefully managed coastal habitat and removal of non-native plants. In spring, the dunes support a vibrant display of rare native plants such as Monterey spineflower, Monterey sand gilia, coast wallflower, and Menzies' wallflower, all of which rely on intact dune systems to thrive. At the same time, the property faces ongoing challenges, including invasive plant species like Iceplant, European marram grass and Great brome, as well as trespassing, litter, nest predation, and complex land management issues such as undivided ownership interests and an agricultural right-of-way for a 10-acre irrigation ditch.

To address these challenges, BSLT works in close collaboration with regional partners as part of the Snowy Plover Recovery Unit 4 Working Group, including the California Department of Fish and Wildlife, California State Parks, Point Blue Conservation Science, and the Monterey Peninsula Regional Park District. Together, these partners are helping to restore and safeguard Martin Dunes as a resilient coastal habitat — ensuring that this extraordinary landscape continues to support rare species and inspires conservation for generations to come.



Click this QR
code to learn
more about
Martin Dunes.

Our Supporters' Impact Over the Years

LAND CONSERVATION & STEWARDSHIP

- Since 1978, BSLT has conserved over **45,000 acres**.
- **+10,000 acres** under the care of BSLT's stewardship team, including **6 key nature preserves**.
- **7,000 acres** monitored across **36 voluntary land conservation agreements**.
- **29,000 acres** conserved and transferred to other groups, contributing to the creation or expansion of public lands.

PUBLIC ACCESS & PROGRAMMING

- **43 miles** of public hiking routes enjoyed by over **2,500 self-guided hikers** annually.
- **108 guided hikes**, serving over **1,400 participants**, since 2022.
- Nearly **2,000 youth** have participated in BSLT's nature camps, leadership training, and backpacking trips since 2013.
- **7,000 community members** have engaged in Ensen Community Park events and field trips since 2017.

VOLUNTEER & CITIZEN SCIENCE IMPACT

- Average of **3,500 volunteer hours** annually since 2022.
- Over **1,100 species documented** at our preserves from **7,900 iNaturalist observations**.
- **Over 780 service learner hours** this year and **3 interns**.

GREEN INFRASTRUCTURE PROJECTS

- **Carmel River FREE Project:** An extensive flood protection and riparian habitat restoration designed to prevent repetitive flooding of communities near the mouth of Carmel Valley.
- **Ensen Community Park: Increasing public parkland by 31%** in the city of Salinas with a 6-acre neighborhood park and 67-acre wetland restoration area.

GROWING PARTNERSHIPS

- Co-stewarding **5,000 acres** and returning **84 acres** to local tribes.
- Growing partnership with US Fish & Wildlife Services.
- Growing co-stewardship with the ranching community, significantly increasing grazing opportunities.

Interested in our financial report?
Visit bigsurlandtrust.org/financials

Thank You to Our Annual Corporate Partners!

To learn more and become a Big Sur Land Trust Corporate Partner, visit: bigsurlandtrust.org/sponsors/





From Restoration to Recreation: Ensen Wetlands on Track for 2026 Opening

Progress on restoration of the 67-acre Ensen Wetlands area at Carr Lake accelerated last year, and we hope to open the area to the public in late 2026. Volunteers have been helping us keep Ensen Community Park clean and welcoming. In December, 21 volunteers gathered to help us plant 30 native coast live oak trees and grasses in the area.



Click this QR code to learn more about the restoration project, and get involved at Ensen Community Park.



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Big Sur Land Trust (BSLT) is a non-profit organization with a mission to inspire love of land across generations, conservation of our unique Monterey County landscapes, and access to outdoor experiences for all.

Big Sur Land Trust is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization. Our Federal Tax Identification number is 94-2473415.