



**FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS  
ABOUT THE CARR LAKE PROJECT  
2023**

**1. Why is Big Sur Land Trust involved in Salinas?**

Big Sur Land Trust 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. Founded in 1978, Big Sur Land Trust's legacy includes conserving over 40,000 acres in Monterey County. Over the last decade we have recognized the need to expand our geographic focus to serve the county's diverse communities and provide places where both people and nature can thrive. Big Sur Land Trust's first "community-based conservation" project in the Salinas area was Marks Ranch. The Land Trust acquired Marks Ranch in 2007 and transferred a large portion of the property to Monterey County Parks to expand Toro County Park.

Over the past eight years, we have built partnerships with youth-serving organizations in the Salinas Valley, such as CHISPA, Girls' Health in Girls' Hands, the Epicenter, North Monterey County High School, and Sol Treasures to create meaningful nature-based experiences for youth that encourage self-exploration and a conservation ethic. More than 1,250 youth in Monterey County have experienced Big Sur Land Trust's outdoor camps at our Glen Deven Ranch property in Big Sur and at Marks Ranch. Big Sur Land Trust has also partnered with the City of Salinas and Salinas community organizations to host "Take It Outside, Salinas!" at Natividad Creek Park.

**2. What is Carr Lake?**

Carr Lake is an approximately 480-acre seasonally dry lakebed in the center of the City of Salinas. Currently, Carr Lake is agricultural land that is entirely surrounded by the City of Salinas. Historically, these lands were home to indigenous tribes of California. Beginning in the 1920s Carr Lake has been owned and farmed by three families.

**3. When did Big Sur Land Trust acquire property at Carr Lake?**

In January 2017, one of the three families - the Ikeda family - sold its 73-acre property to Big Sur Land Trust. The Hibino and Higashi families continue to own and farm their Carr Lake properties.

**4. Why is Carr Lake ecologically significant?**

Before Carr Lake became farmland, it was the largest of seven lakes that captured water from an upper watershed beginning at Fremont Peak, the summit of central California's Gabilan mountain range. Water then flowed for more than 10 miles through a magnificent network of creeks and wetlands to Monterey Bay.

Historically, Carr Lake fluctuated between being a shallow lake and swampy wetlands.

Three major creeks – Gabilan Creek, Natividad Creek, and Alisal Creek – naturally flowed through Carr Lake. A Reclamation Ditch was built in 1917 to drain the series of lakes and marshy areas to make the land suitable for agriculture. Jesse D. Carr was one of the landowners at the time reclamation efforts began. He ultimately sold his land to farmers.

The three creeks that once flowed through Carr Lake were converted into drainage ditches with outflow from the lake conveyed by the Reclamation Ditch. Because of that, Carr Lake functions as an important component of a regional flood control system. Water is conveyed by the Reclamation Ditch into Tembladero Slough which drains through the Old Salinas River Channel into Moss Landing Harbor and ultimately the Monterey Bay Marine National Sanctuary. With development surrounding the Carr Lake basin on all sides, these creeks and the Reclamation Ditch no longer have sufficient capacity to convey runoff from large storm events and there is a history of flooding in the project's vicinity.

**5. What is Big Sur Land Trust's Carr Lake project and what is the benefit to city residents?**

Big Sur Land Trust's goal is to convert the 73-acre property into a multi-benefit green space that will be transformative for the city and its residents. Carr Lake is in the heart of the city and offers a central, easily accessible location for a new park. Since the 1970s, city leaders and community members have called for Carr Lake to serve as the "central park" for Salinas. In the City of Salinas, only 283 acres of the land is dedicated to neighborhood and community parks. There are just 1.7 acres of parkland per 1,000 people – far below the median of 4.65 acres per 1,000 people for urban communities with similar population density. The national average is about 10 acres per 1,000 people.

In 2003 the City of Salinas commissioned the creation of a broad Vision Plan for a multi-benefit Carr Lake Regional Park to address the vast need for parklands, as well as flood management and water quality improvements. Big Sur Land Trust's acquisition of this property at Carr Lake is the first step towards that aspiration.

Transformation of Big Sur Land Trust's Carr Lake property will include:

1. Neighborhood park featuring children's play area, BBQ areas, basketball courts and much more.
2. Restoration area featuring restored natural habitat to benefit plants, animals and improve water quality with public access and recreational trails throughout.

**6. What is Big Sur Land Trust doing with the property currently? How does Big Sur Land Trust pay for maintaining the property during this time?**

Big Sur Land Trust is implementing an interim stewardship plan for the property that includes continued agricultural use, residential leases and building maintenance. Lease income goes into stewardship funds to maintain property and buildings. As a nationally accredited land trust, Big Sur Land Trust is required to establish a dedicated stewardship fund. We will gladly accept donations! As described below, we also conduct a variety of community engagement activities on the property.

**7. What process has been used to ensure community engagement in the project design? Who has participated?**

Big Sur Land Trust is committed to engaging community members in a process that assures the voices of Salinas residents are central to determining a vision and establishing priorities for long-term development of parkland on the property. Big Sur Land Trust also believes this approach better ensures a sense of collective ownership and long-term success for shared outdoor spaces especially in an urban environment.

Big Sur Land Trust and our community partners have established a Carr Lake Partners Group to help guide the community engagement process. Organizations involved include Building Healthy Communities, Center for Community Advocacy (CCA), CSUMB's Habitat Stewardship Project, Monterey County Health Department, Community Housing Improvement and Planning Systems Association (CHISPA), the Urban Arts Collaborative, Motivating Individual Leadership for Public Advancement (MILPA), Local Urban Gardeners, the Epicenter, BAKTUN 12, Alisal Center for the Fine Arts, the Alisal Community Arts Network, the Action Council of Monterey County, and City of Salinas (Parks and Recreation, Community Development and Public Works). The Partners Group meets regularly to discuss the project and provide input.

The Center for Community Advocacy (CCA), an organization that works with farmworkers and low-income working families, has led the efforts to carry out community outreach for the project, including door-to-door outreach and community presentations. CCA and Big Sur Land Trust work together to lead Carr Lake site tours for residents interested in learning more about Big Sur Land Trust, the project, and how they can further be involved.

Big Sur Land Trust has also partnered with Habitat Stewardship Project, a program associated with CSUMB's Watershed Institute, to create a ¼ acre Native Plant Restoration Demonstration Garden on the project site. Over 1,000 volunteers, including residents and students from local elementary, middle, and high schools, have contributed their time in helping establish and maintain this native plant garden. The Native Plant Restoration Demonstration Garden has become a center for community engagement and has garnered a strong sense of community ownership.

In early 2018, Big Sur Land Trust held a Community Visioning and Planting Day at the project site with an attendance of over 120 residents. Residents in attendance toured the site, learned about the project and provided future park vision ideas. This Community Visioning and Planting Day was followed up by five Park Design community meetings in 2018 and 2019. During these meetings, nearly 250 residents were engaged in informative presentations about the project site followed by activities where they were able to draw ideas directly on project site maps and identify park design features that they wanted to incorporate into the design. Additional meetings took place in 2021 and 2022 which focused on the design of the skate spot, multi-use court and playground. Since then, we have many events on the site including tours and planting days, where residents can learn more about the project. Over 5,000 individuals have been engaged in learning, volunteering or have participated in a community meeting, planting day and/or site tour, with about 90% of these being Salinas residents.

**8. What is the status of the project?**

Neighborhood park design plans are 100% complete and design plans for the habitat restoration area are 90% complete. Construction of the neighborhood park is anticipated to begin in late November of 2023. Big Sur Land Trust is now working with community to choose a name for the new 73-acre park and open space. If you would like to suggest a name for the park please go to [bit.ly/CarrLake\\_Naming](https://bit.ly/CarrLake_Naming).

Big Sur Land Trust completed a preliminary set of designs for the project, which have obtained city approvals. On May 28, 2021, the City of Salinas released the project's required CEQA (California Environmental Quality Act) document for public review and comment. On Wednesday, August 4, 2021, the Salinas Planning Commission unanimously recommended approval of the project to the city council (including site plan review approval, a zoning change to "Park" and a General Plan amendment). After the Planning Commission vote, the project came before the city council for a final vote on September 14, 2021, and again received unanimous approval. Community partners and Salinas residents attended the meetings to advocate for the project in person and additional support came in the form of 1,560 petition signatures and 254 letters from residents supporting our project!

**9. Can I visit the property?**

As farming is still underway on the property we are providing managed public access only through Big Sur Land Trust-hosted events or Center for Community Advocacy (CCA) resident-engagement activities. One of these resident-engagement activities include guided tours of the Carr Lake property. To take part in one of these tours, contact Big Sur Land Trust or CCA staff for more information.

**10. Will the property be turned into a lake?**

We recognize that many residents, when they think of Carr Lake, may have a vision of a large, recreational lake. However, historically Carr Lake fluctuated between being a shallow lake and swampy wetlands. Because water quality improvement will be a key objective for the site, restoration will likely result in scenic and functional water features like wetlands and small ponds as habitat for wildlife. Features that would support water sports (e.g., boating and fishing) are not feasible but we have designed the trails and boardwalks to withstand the frequent small floods we expect will continue each winter.

**11. What will the park look like?**

The funding Big Sur Land Trust received for the acquisition of the 73-acre property requires conservation outcomes such as public parkland and open space, habitat restoration, trails, flood management, and water quality improvements. Design features have thus been informed by these required outcomes, resident ideas gathered through the design process, and scientific studies.

Big Sur Land Trust's robust community engagement process resulted in a set of preliminary designs that directly reflect input we heard from residents who attended meetings in 2018 and 2019. As a result of this input, the community park will feature trails, children's play area, skate spot, basketball court, BBQ areas and more. Two parking lots will serve the park with easy access from Sherwood Drive. The restoration area of the park will bring back natural creek

and wetland habitat that existed historically but was altered for agricultural use. The restoration area will feature all-weather surface trails to support walking and exploration of the site. Landscaping will be used to create natural safety buffers between the edge of the park and traffic along Sherwood Drive. Trees will be trimmed up and plant vegetation will be chosen to prevent dense vegetation and to maintain clear sight lines throughout the park and restoration area.

**12. How big will the park be? How does that compare to other parks in Monterey County?**

The future park will be 73 acres. Located in Salinas, Natividad Creek Community Park is 55.2-acres, Closter Community Park is 7.0-acres, and the Salinas Sports Complex is 62.9-acres. In Monterey, El Estero Park Complex is a 45-acre city-wide multi-use recreation area, and Veteran's Memorial Park is a 50-acre park.

**13. Have you addressed safety concerns?**

We have worked directly with local residents to design the park and during that process have been mindful of the issue of public safety. With a goal of enhancing public safety for park visitors, the park design provides open site lines and minimizes visual obstructions to discourage encampments and facilitate regular monitoring. We understand this concern and will do our best to address it.

**14. Who is going to own and maintain the property long-term?**

Big Sur Land Trust purchased the property with the intent of developing a park in collaboration with the community and the City of Salinas. Discussions are in progress with the city leadership to plan for the eventual transfer of the park property to the city, with an understanding that Big Sur Land Trust will work with the city to ensure that there are resources to supplement the city's existing parks budget and ensure successful management and operations of this new park over the long term. Funding from public agency grants and private foundations will support final design and construction costs. Big Sur Land Trust will also be considering setting up an ongoing stewardship fund for the site to engage community support.

**15. If I want more information or wish to be notified of community meetings, who do I tell?**

Please send an email to: [info@bigsurlandtrust.org](mailto:info@bigsurlandtrust.org) with "Carr Lake Project" as the subject line or go to Big Sur Land Trust's website at <https://bigsurlandtrust.org/carr-lake-salinas/>