



Strategic Plan

2021-2025





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MISSION:

The mission of Ventura Land Trust (VLT) is to permanently protect the land, water, wildlife and scenic beauty of the Ventura region for current and future generations.

LAND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT:

The Ventura Land Trust acknowledges that it is working to conserve the unceded ancestral lands of the Chumash Peoples. We pay respect to the Chumash Peoples past and present, honor their stewardship of this land throughout the generations, and recognize that colonization has left a lasting negative impact on the land and the Chumash Peoples. We cherish the responsibility of stewarding the land we protect on behalf of our community, current and future, and its natural inhabitants. We embrace our responsibility to learn from and protect Chumash cultural and traditional connections to the land.

VISION:

Ventura Land Trust (VLT), a community-based nonprofit organization, believes that preserving open space and providing responsible public access enhances the economy, quality of life, and public well-being of Ventura and surrounding communities. With local partners, VLT works to protect the natural beauty of our area. VLT builds trails, restores habitat, plants trees, cleans up our rivers, and helps to educate our community about the vital importance of natural habitat and ecological systems. Ventura Land Trust envisions a Ventura with more trails, more hiking, more biking, and more opportunity to enjoy natural areas. VLT envisions more preserved open space that balances the protection of wildlife and the environment. Working with willing landowners, land is either protected via acquisition or through a land conservation agreement.

VALUES:

The work of Ventura Land Trust is inspired by the passion of its directors and members to ensure that present and future generations are able to view, steward, and recreate in the hillsides, waters, and canyons of this beautiful region. We pursue this passion mindful of seven core values:

- **EDUCATION:** We educate the public on the values of open space, ecological health, and biodiversity for the sustainability and long-term prosperity of our region.
- **INTEGRITY:** We work with integrity to ensure our long term credibility and to merit our members' and donors' trust.
- **COLLABORATION:** We work collaboratively with organizations, community members, and public institutions to fulfill our mission.
- **COURTESY:** We foster a culture of courtesy and respect within our organization and in our preserves.
- **DIVERSITY:** We serve a diverse, vibrant community, and value the myriad of perspectives that diversity brings.
- **PERMANENCE:** We take our promise of stewarding our lands in perpetuity seriously; our actions reflect our intent to protect and care for these lands forever.
- **RESPONSIBILITY:** We hold a deep sense of accountability to our community, to our staff and volunteers, and to the natural inhabitants of our lands.



Conservation

Goal 1

CONSERVATION – Protect open space in Ventura County for the benefit of current and future generations.

- ✿ Update VLT’s “Interest Area” and acquisition plan, guided by key factors, such as climate change and resiliency, habitat preservation, wildlife corridors and open space connectivity.
- ✿ Conduct biological and cultural surveys of VLT properties.
- ✿ Develop preserve management plans, including specific plans for habitat restoration, fire management, and encroachments.
- ✿ Establish a dynamic framework for how VLT addresses and is impacted by homelessness.
- ✿ Provide conservation management of properties throughout Ventura County on a contractual basis.
- ✿ Maintain a culture of sustainability within the organization.



Optimization



Goal 2

OPTIMIZATION Right-size VLT to better fit the recent rapid growth of its land portfolio and pay off recent acquisitions.

- ✿ Complete two current capital campaigns, prioritizing debt retirement.
- ✿ Expand staff roster according to organizational goals and needs.
- ✿ Bolster and fortify fundraising capabilities and procedures.
- ✿ Improve financial management procedures.
- ✿ Develop robust fundraising plans for future acquisitions.



Durability



Goal 3

DURABILITY – Increase VLT’s capacity, making it a more robust organization with sturdy policies, procedures, and people to help prepare it for the future.

- ✿ Increase scale of the organization to align with the size of VLT’s holdings.
- ✿ Build the VLT stewardship endowment to ensure adequate resources for ongoing stewardship, restoration, and legal defense needs.
- ✿ Maintain full accreditation with the Land Trust Alliance Accreditation Commission, and complete re-accreditation in 2024.
- ✿ Improve governance processes, including board development, with an eye toward diversity and inclusion of different ages and cultural groups.
- ✿ Develop long-term financial planning and management policies and procedures.



Engagement

Goal 4

ENGAGEMENT – Broaden and deepen relationships across the community while increasing the presence of VLT across the region.

- ✿ Fully open two hillside preserves, including public access.
- ✿ Develop plans for managing recreation within VLT preserves, with an understanding that conservation is our primary objective.
- ✿ Expand community programming and education so as to develop and cultivate the next generation of environmental stewards.
- ✿ Develop and cultivate a base of support in the community that is economically, racially, geographically, and culturally diverse. Cultivate and maintain relationships with community members, neighbors, governmental entities, and other leaders throughout the community.
- ✿ Foster a culture of diversity, equity, and inclusion within the organization.
- ✿ Create and implement an organizational branding and marketing strategy.



Letter from the Executive Director

The Ventura region is an incredible place - the scenic beauty of its hills, ocean, and agricultural spaces illustrate an incredible story of biodiversity and resilience.

Biological diversity (or biodiversity) refers to the health of an ecosystem and how well it is functioning. California is a “biodiversity hotspot,” one of the 25 most biologically diverse places on the planet, and the only one listed in North America. Ventura County is a particularly brilliant cradle of diversity within this hotspot.

We reside along the Pacific Flyway, a major migratory route for birds. Similarly, monarch butterflies often overwinter in our trees. The Ventura River and Santa Clara Rivers drain huge watersheds, providing life-giving water to wildlife and habitat for freshwater species, including endangered steelhead trout. The steelhead — a distant cousin of salmon — still shows up in small numbers in places such as Ballona Creek, Malibu Creek and three Ventura County rivers.

Other endangered or threatened species, such as Western pond turtles and red-legged frogs, also call these places home. In fact, 26 different endangered or threatened species are endemic to Ventura County, as are more than 1,800 types of native plants, 11 of which are endemic.

These wild, open spaces critical to the health and survival of native wildlife and plants are at risk. Preserving open space is an important strategy for protecting biodiversity, and connecting open space to create wildlife corridors is the next step.

The proximity of urban regions to wild, open spaces presents challenges and opportunities. Wildlife, especially large predators such as coyotes, bobcats, and mountain lions, need habitat and room to roam. Increasing urbanization compounds conflicts with wildlife, and fragmentation of their habitat. This fragmentation results in isolation of animal populations, leading to a loss of genetic diversity and inbreeding.



Connected open space gives wildlife the habitat and genetic fluidity they need to thrive.

Additional benefits of conservation include the protection of watersheds, better infiltration of rainwater to replenish aquifers, and avoidance of urban runoff (a phenomenon in which water runs off impermeable surfaces, such as asphalt and concrete, to the ocean, carrying trash, plastic, fertilizers, pesticides, oil and other contaminants with it).

Open space breaks up heat islands and serves as a tool in the battle against climate change. Healthy, native plant populations, including our majestic native oak trees, can sequester massive amounts of carbon. As our planet continues to warm, we will see major disruptions in weather patterns, sea levels, ocean currents, and more. The preservation of open space now is a lot like setting up a multitude of banks in which we can deposit the carbon already circulating in our atmosphere

Because of these reasons, and more, scientists and policy-makers are behind an initiative called 30x30. This ambitious plan

seeks to preserve 30% of our country's open space by 2030. But many scientists, including the esteemed biologist E.O Wilson, have maintained that 30% isn't nearly enough. In his 2016 book *Half-Earth*, he argued that number should be closer to 50%.

Which brings us to one last point: time in nature is good for us. In his 2005 book *Last Child in the Woods*, Richard Louv coined the term “nature deficit disorder.” It describes the growing disconnection between humans and nature. Kids today spend more time indoors and in front of screens than ever. This can be linked to a number of alarming trends, including spikes in obesity, diabetes, anxiety, and even near-sightedness! Our physical, mental, and emotional health benefit from time spent in nature. By preserving open space, and providing opportunities for people to recreate there, VLT is making our community stronger and its members healthier. Please join us in this effort.

Yours in nature,
Melissa Baffa
Executive Director

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