

# BEAR YUBA LAND TRUST

## 2020-2024 STRATEGIC PLAN

*Protecting Open Spaces and Wild Places Since 1990*



## **MISSION**

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*Bear Yuba Land Trust exists to **protect** and **defend** the working and natural lands of the Bear and Yuba River Watersheds and **empower** healthy, resilient communities through nature access and education.*

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## ***A MESSAGE FROM CO-EXECUTIVE DIRECTORS ERIKA SEWARD & ERIN TARR***

Bear Yuba Land Trust (BYLT) is an accredited land trust that is one of 94 community-based land trusts in California and over 1,700 land trusts nationwide. BYLT works alongside its regional, state and national allies to facilitate land transactions that conserve natural and working lands and open space, as well as create and enhance opportunities for public access through trails and outdoor recreation, for the benefit of all.

As we embark upon three decades as an organization, BYLT finds itself at an important juncture. Health, water and climate protection are no longer just environmental issues, but human and civil rights issues. With over 60% of California's developed water supply coming from the Sierra Nevada Watershed, we must value our role in this interdependent circle of life with great care, urgency and resolve. As an organization, BYLT is essential to the success of a community that is known for its rural quality-of-life and easy access to high-quality environmental and recreational assets.

Our mission guides us to protect the natural world and create opportunities for access to nature through trail connectivity and education. But what is nature? We define nature as the phenomena of the physical world including plants, animals, the landscape, and other features and products of the earth, as opposed to humans or human creations.

Climate resilience has emerged as one of the most important goals to strive for in the work we do. Resilience is the response of nature to a change or disturbance where the landscape or species maintains its essential function, identity, and structure, while also maintaining the capacity for adaptation, learning, and transformation. In the 2020-2024 Strategic Plan, we have placed significant emphasis on Strategic Focus Areas, based on the idea that protecting and restoring the most resilient lands will provide multiple benefits to our ecosystems and communities. The extended conservation benefits will further enhance those goals.

Land protection and management are inextricably linked. Our primary goal is two-fold: to protect AND defend the Bear and Yuba River Watersheds. To be in a position to address this ambitious environmental vision, the organization must transform.

As leaders and seekers of innovation, we are confident that, with your continued commitment as landowners, members and volunteers, ***all is within reach.***

Together, we will embrace these incredible challenges and opportunities head on with optimism, strength and shared purpose. Please rise with us to *Protect the Places We Love, Forever.*



Erika Seward  
Co-Executive Director



Erin Tarr  
Co-Executive Director



## Executive Summary

The 2020-2024 Strategic Plan will guide BYLT in reaching its overarching goal for the coming years, which is to *continue **building a sustainable organization** as we **strategically grow our conservation footprint** and **deliver a valued public benefit** to our local and downstream stakeholders.*

By 2024, BYLT intends to **expand its conservation footprint** by 20,000 additional acres in its four Strategic Focus Areas, resulting in over 35,000 acres protected through acquisition and conservation easements held in the Bear and Yuba River Watersheds.

By 2024, BYLT will continue to **ensure public access to nature** by acquiring additional land to act as public nature preserves and expanding the use of trail easements to create non-motorized routes for connectivity throughout the community.

By 2024, BYLT will **secure long-term financial health** by bolstering its current cash flow and widening its network of sustainable funding sources. It will seed further fee-based conservation services and grow both its donor/member base and giving levels throughout the service region and beyond. It will continue supporting a proposed tax initiative providing public investment in watershed restoration, land protection and recreation while expanding its participation in mitigation programs such as the Oak Woodland Conservation Fund.

**Direct beneficiaries** of the organization's increased financial health will be the

- BYLT Resiliency Fund, which supports eight months of operating expenses
- BYLT Conservation Opportunity Fund, which provides funds for the protection of critical lands
- BYLT Trails Stewardship Fund, which supports long-term trail maintenance and enhancements
- BYLT Stewardship Fund, which provides sufficient funding for land stewardship and legal defense costs of conservation easements in perpetuity
- BYLT Endowment Fund, which represents funds donated as endowments with various donor restrictions

In the coming years, **BYLT will empower**

- community health and resilience through community conservation planning
- a culture of stewardship and preservation through education and experiences
- conservation relevance through membership, advocacy, and awareness

Underpinning these many ambitious initiatives will be an ever-increasing **organizational capacity and effectiveness** through BYLT's people-first approach.

Fulfillment of these goals will position **BYLT in the forefront** of urgent regional programs to repair and maintain Northern California's ecosystems and sustainable food supply. An ambitious, forward-looking strategic plan that guides action and requires metrics for success is critical if we are to **build watershed resilience** and mitigate the impacts of wildfire and climate change.

The mission guiding BYLT's Strategic Plan is

*to **protect and defend** the working and natural lands of the Bear and Yuba River Watersheds and to **empower healthy, resilient communities** through nature access and education.*

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## **II. STRATEGIC PLAN FRAMEWORK**



## **The Organization**

For 30 years BYLT has become ingrained in the fabric of our community as a protector of open spaces and wild places and a provider of expanded access to nature through our trail projects and outdoor recreation opportunities and education. Today we face new challenges of permanently protecting the most essential lands in our region and collaboratively creating a community resilient to climate change impacts. We will reach these goals by working with our local government, nonprofits, state and federal agencies, foundations, landowners and individuals to embrace a future where strategic land conservation can protect basic community needs in perpetuity. From access to land for farmers to sustain local food security to ensuring sustainable forestry insulates the community from catastrophic wildfire impacts and loss of critical habitats, BYLT's work is vast, important and doesn't end there.

Our team consists of a committed Board of Directors composed of experts in fields necessary to fulfill our mission and a current staff of 9 who work daily to conserve land, steward the trails and lands under our care, and reinforce the relevancy of our work through strong advocacy and community engagement. Generous member supporters and volunteers are the backbone of this work. Over the next 5 years we intend to solidify the foundation of BYLT and elevate our profile through enhanced organizational effectiveness and financial growth that includes strong cash flow, the building of operational reserves, and the enrichment of current and future endowment funds. We also will have the capacity to support these goals through Membership and Volunteer Management and the hiring of two additional conservation and development staff.

## **Overview of the Strategic Plan**

This Strategic Plan is to be used to guide decisions and investments made by BYLT for the next five years (2020 - 2024). The Plan sets goals, creates decision-making criteria, identifies strategies, and defines the resources needed to pursue this important work. The range of variables that could affect elements of the Plan are diverse and include economic uncertainty, catastrophic events, policy changes that impact funding, and other unknowns. Given this shifting landscape, the plan must be viewed as a guide and not as a tactical, step-by-step manual. Our mission, vision and guiding principles inform all decision-making as we define new programs and determine the depth of our impact.

This five-year Strategic Plan contemplates the future of our service area and organization, as well as defines where we must focus our resources to be most effective. This Plan asks for an annual evaluation of progress toward goals and documenting of changes in course based on current conditions. This data will be valuable for internal governance and management decisions and to report progress to those who will invest in our programs and organization.

## **The Way Forward**

This Plan is intended to contribute an important, clarifying vision to engage environmental stewardship, guide action and empower stakeholders with a common, achievable set of goals within BYLT's service region.



# III. WHO WE ARE



## Mission

*BYLT exists to protect and defend the working and natural lands of the Bear and Yuba River Watersheds and to empower healthy, resilient communities through nature access and education.*

## Vision

*BYLT envisions a future in which:*

- Strategic conservation is the foundation for a harmonious, resilient community of people and wildlife.
- Strategic conservation and watershed enhancement are the catalyzing forces that lead to the greatest impact for protecting wildlife habitat, sequestering carbon from the atmosphere and providing access to nature for all.
- Sustainable recreation projects and opportunities enhance and expand the public's access to nature, fostering a deep appreciation for natural resources and a desire to serve as stewards of the land.
- Sustainable development and climate change mitigation serve as viable tools for land use and environmental planning; through careful planning and utilization of every opportunity to implement nature-based solutions, smart growth is achieved.
- Local and regional community members stand united in our shared mission by:
  - joining the Land Trust through volunteering or providing financial support of programs and operations;
  - donating conservation easements, trail easements and/or fee title ownership of lands to BYLT;
  - investing in conservation finance efforts to acquire and/or secure conservation easements, trail easements and/or fee title ownership;
  - and helping fund maintenance of these projects through contributing to the Stewardship Funds.
- Advocacy and education efforts alert downstream constituents to the significance of the Bear and Yuba River Watersheds in the health and wellbeing of rural and urban populations throughout California, thus inspiring funding, support, effective policy making and mindful action.
- As a thriving nonprofit, our programs are fully supported each year with a strong positive cash flow; the BYLT Resiliency Fund serves as a reserve account to cover six months of operating expenses and our endowments are fully funded.
- BYLT is a trusted, environmental leader that drives meaningful and lasting change.

## Guiding Principles

The **quality of our work** is more important than the quantity of the projects we take on. It is focused, refined and strategic.

**Truth, transparency and accountability** are at the center of our operations, communication, outreach activities, fundraising, reporting and fiscal management plans.

**Long-term, forward thinking ensures community resilience** benefits are a part of each project we invest in.

We **embrace innovation and advances in technology** to enhance our organizational effectiveness and programs.

**Financial decisions are based upon their ability to build a sustainable organization** in order to honor commitments and uphold our legal responsibilities to monitor and protect the lands and trails entrusted to us.

We maintain a **non-partisan commitment** to our work; the transactions we facilitate benefit the donor, seller, and the community as a whole. We create mutually beneficial situations for all involved.

We honor **justice, equity, diversity, and inclusion**; our Board, Staff, members, volunteers, supporters and donors reflect a wide range of political, social and economic backgrounds from rural California and downstream communities.

We **invest in the professional development of Staff** and remain current with the latest science and information.

We strive to **engage in and facilitate community dialogues** to better understand the needs of those we serve. We are vital partners in decision-making and planning that creates a healthy, resilient region.

**Collaboration is critical to success**; we foster partnerships with agencies, nonprofit organizations, landowners, recreationists and businesses to further our mission and the goals of the state of California.

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A teal-tinted photograph of a serene forest landscape. In the foreground, three children are seen from behind, standing on a grassy bank and looking across a calm lake. The lake's surface is still, reflecting the sky and the surrounding trees. In the middle ground, several dead tree trunks protrude from the water. The background is filled with a dense forest of tall evergreen trees under a sky with scattered white clouds. The entire image is framed by a thin white border.

# **IV. STRATEGIES & GOALS**

## ***PROTECT:***

**20,000 additional acres of lands in Strategic Focus Areas by 2024**

### **Our Region**

The Sierra Nevada foothills and mountains are home to a globally unique array of natural resources, diverse wildlife, varied working landscapes and world class outdoor recreation.

Our region encompasses 1,000 square miles or 640,000 acres. Over 15,000 acres are under permanent protection through BYLT's efforts over the past 30 years. However, today there is a new urgency to our work. Climate change, increasing population and increasing land values require strategic focus as we work to create a resilient environment for generations to come. We have developed a new, proactive approach to our work. Our Strategic Focus Areas speak to the diverse landscapes, land uses and goals for conservation and outdoor recreation in these unique areas.

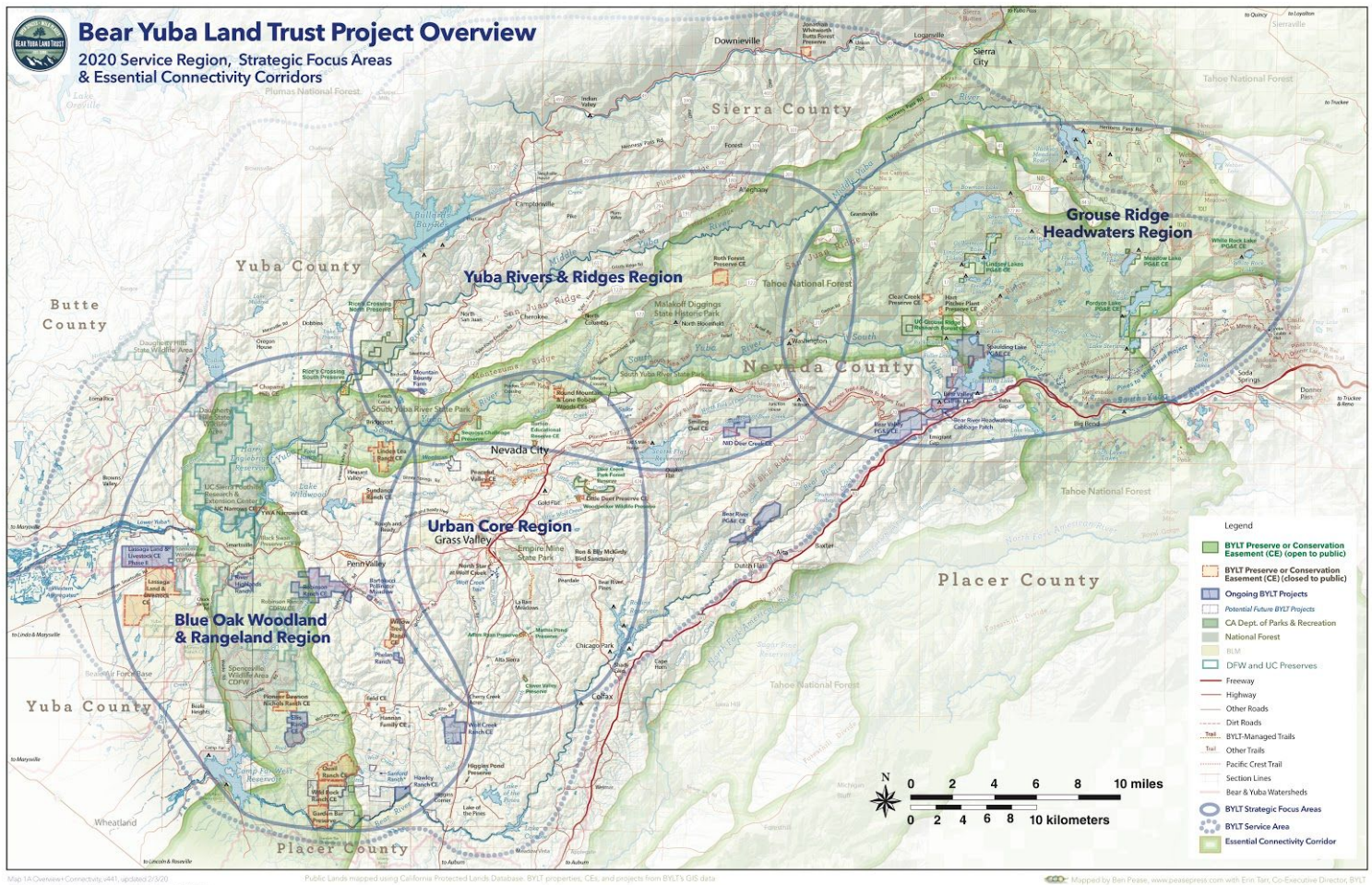
### **Strategic Focus Areas**

Nevada County is blessed with many diverse landscapes. The blue oak woodlands and rangelands in our western region have very different conservation values, threats of conversion and ecosystem services than the high Sierra Nevadas in the east. In addition, work within the urban areas of Grass Valley and Nevada City have very different strategies and goals for conservation and access to nature. For this reason, we have developed four Strategic Focus Areas (SFA) which hold high value for conservation, restoration and/or outdoor recreation. We believe that these SFA's deserve our heightened attention over the next five years. We will further define the strategies for reaching goals within each SFA in our Strategic Conservation Greenprint which is expected to be completed in 2021. An overview of the purpose, threats, goals and funding needs are outlined for each SFA. More detailed prioritization and strategies will be outlined in the Strategic Conservation Greenprint.

Throughout our service region, we will continue to evaluate all incoming projects to determine available capacity and resources to pursue projects outside of the established SFA.

There is a great deal of information from state agencies that helps to strategize our land conservation efforts based on existing research. Data found on the Biological Information and Observation System (BIOS) from the California Department of Fish & Wildlife and CalTrans identifies migration routes and least cost options for reaching their goals given limited resources. In the pages that follow, there is more information regarding our efforts to prioritize based on state data.





The California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW) and CalTrans created an online mapping tool called BIOS which determined a range of maps defining natural landscape blocks, animal migration routes, development threats and ultimately, the Essential Connectivity Network (ECN). Three of the four Strategic Focus Areas are included in the ECN which runs north to south from the Bear River, along the blue oak woodland belt north to the Yuba River and turns east at the South Yuba River, through the Yuba Rivers and Ridges region extending into the Grouse Ridge Headwaters.

The ECN shows a statewide network of 850 relatively intact Natural Landscape Blocks (ranging in size from 2,000 to 3.7 million acres) connected by 192 Essential Connectivity Areas.

The purpose of this map is to focus attention on large areas important to maintaining ecological integrity at the broadest scale. Natural areas excluded from this broad-brush ECN can therefore not be “written off” as unimportant to connectivity conservation or to sustaining California’s natural heritage (CDFW BIOS).

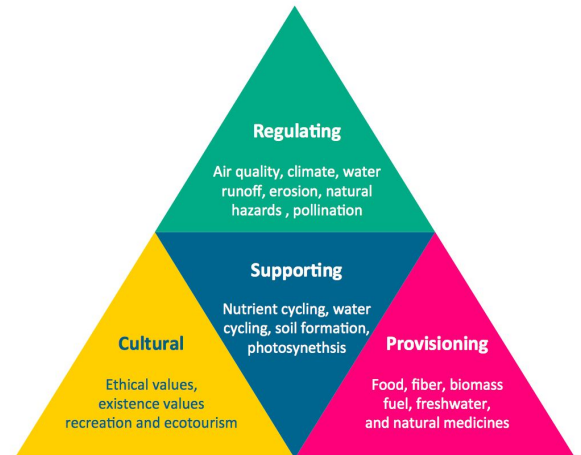
## Extended Conservation Benefits

The value of land conservation and restoration have been studied and are being quantified resulting in two concepts, **Ecosystem Services** and **Natural Climate Solutions (NCS)**. BYLT will use the framework of these two systems to determine ways to maximize the benefits that each project provides, both economically and ecologically.

### ECOSYSTEM SERVICES

Ecosystem services are the benefits that nature provides people. The Millennium Ecosystem Assessment, a major UN-sponsored effort to analyze the impact of human actions on ecosystems and human well being, identified four major categories of ecosystem services: provisioning, regulating, cultural and supporting services. Within each of the four categories are specific benefits.

These services are now being quantified and markets are being created to expand options to make conservation projects more feasible. BYLT will work towards utilizing the emerging markets which are compatible with the mission. Current ecological commodity types include:



- **Carbon markets** - reward the landowner of stewardship of ecosystem's atmospheric regulation services specifically, the absorption of carbon dioxide from the atmosphere;
- **Water markets** - provide payments for nature's hydrological services - primarily the filtering of water through wetlands;
- **Biodiversity markets** - create an incentive to pay for the management and preservation of biological process as well as habitat and species; and
- **Bundled payments** - secure all or a combination of carbon, water and biodiversity species. Bundled payments also include those in which the ecosystem service payment is built into the price of the product, such as certified timber or certified produce.

### BEAR YUBA LAND TRUST AND ECOLOGICAL COMMODITIES

**Carbon Market: Robinson Ranch Conservation Easement** is a 1,596 acre agricultural conservation easement funded through the California Climate Investments initiative generated from the CA Cap and Trade Auction. The intention of this program is to reduce greenhouse gas emissions through eliminating development in valuable agricultural areas.

**Water Market: Higgins Pond Preserve** near Lake of the Pines is a mitigated wetland where the developer of the Cascade Crossing subdivision was required to protect its habitat values. BYLT receives annual distributions from the neighborhood assessment fees for continued monitoring and management of the pond and wetland.

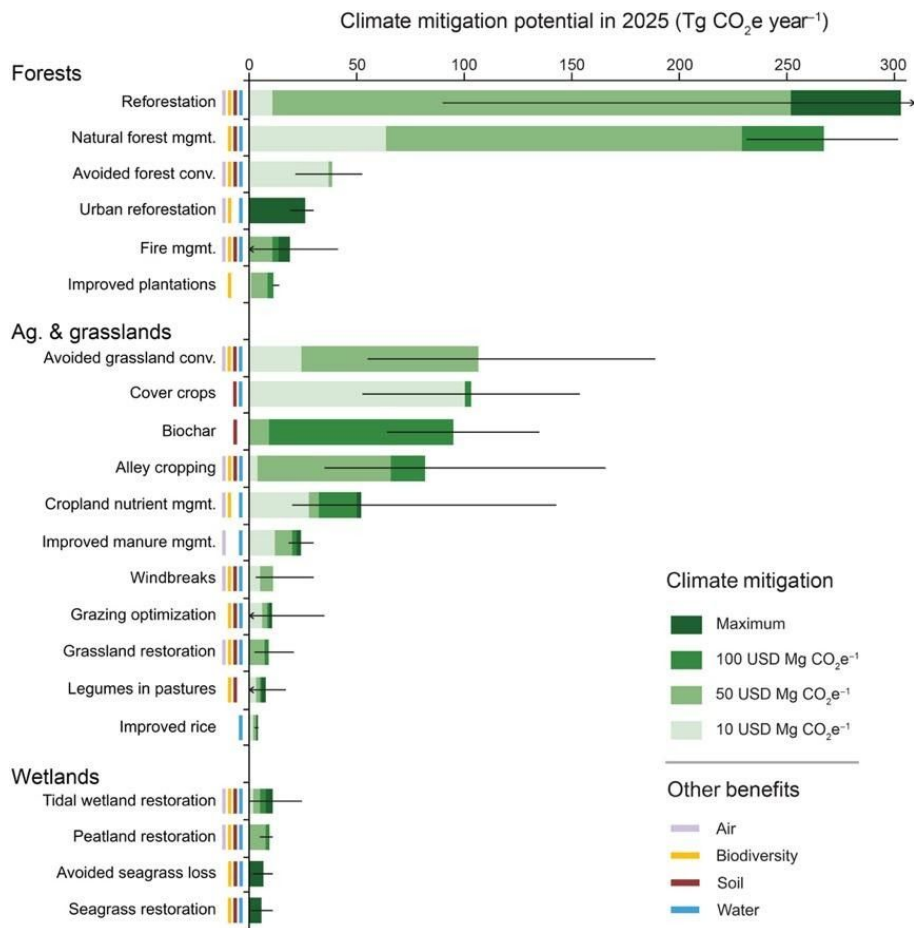
**Biodiversity Market: BYLT's Oak Woodland Conservation Fund** is an in-lieu fee option where project proponents can choose to pay into the Fund when impacting regulated landmark Oak trees and groves in Nevada County. BYLT pools these funds for conservation and restoration projects which protect similar habitats.



## NATURAL CLIMATE SOLUTIONS

Natural climate solutions are conservation, restoration and improved land management actions that increase carbon storage or avoid greenhouse gas emissions in landscapes and wetlands across the globe. The Nature Conservancy (TNC) and partners have developed 20 proven conservation and restoration methods that can be implemented with the goal of being low cost and high impact to increase the realistic ability to scale these practices.

Land restoration and regeneration projects will occur on fee title preserves through grant, foundation and donor funds as well as with volunteer groups or partnering nonprofit organizations. Conservation easement restoration projects will be administered through our Stewardship Assistance Program (see page 25). Every project will be viewed through the lens of natural climate solutions with goals of being replicable and low-cost so these practices can be easily expanded.



**Natural Climate Solutions** are proven ways of storing and reducing carbon emissions in the world's forests, grasslands and wetlands. Better stewardship of the land also has impacts on other critical environmental, social and economic benefits which are less understood. These solutions are available immediately, are scalable and can transform key sectors of the global economy, such as forestry and agriculture.

## Strategic Focus Area: BLUE OAK WOODLAND & RANGELAND

### REGIONAL PRIORITY: BEAR TO YUBA RIVERS PROTECTION AND CONNECTION PROJECT

#### CONSERVATION GOALS

- Protect 10,000 acres of blue oak woodlands
- Protect 20 miles of river and stream corridors
- Restore riparian buffers
- Implement nature based solutions on conserved lands
- Implement regenerative agricultural practices

-

The blue oak woodland belt stretches north to south through the western foothills of the Sierra Nevada range. The blue oak woodlands hold the most animal diversity of any widespread habitat type in California, providing habitat for over 330 species of bird, mammal, reptile and amphibian and it is under the most threat of conversion from residential development.

Research shows that conserved landscape blocks consisting of at least 50,000 acres will provide the greatest overall benefits for climate change resilience. Within this SFA, conservation achievements by BYLT, Placer Land Trust, Trust for Public Land, California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW) and Department of Defense (DOD) have nearly accomplished this goal. Proactive and strategic conservation and close partnerships with state and federal agencies, conservation partners and landowners will help us reach our goal of protecting an additional 10,000 acres in this SFA in the next five years.

#### THREATS

Blue oak woodlands are one of the most imperiled habitats in all of California. They have been hardest hit by development and continue to be highly threatened. Less than 1% of this landscape is protected from development, and this habitat lies within commuting distance of rapidly growing cities such as Sacramento and Reno. Land trusts play a key role in regions where high development pressure and high ecological values intersect, like the Blue Oak Woodland and Rangeland SFA.

#### RESTORATION POTENTIAL

Improve soil biodiversity, Restore floodplains, invasive plant and animal management, wetland restoration, pasture management, silviculture

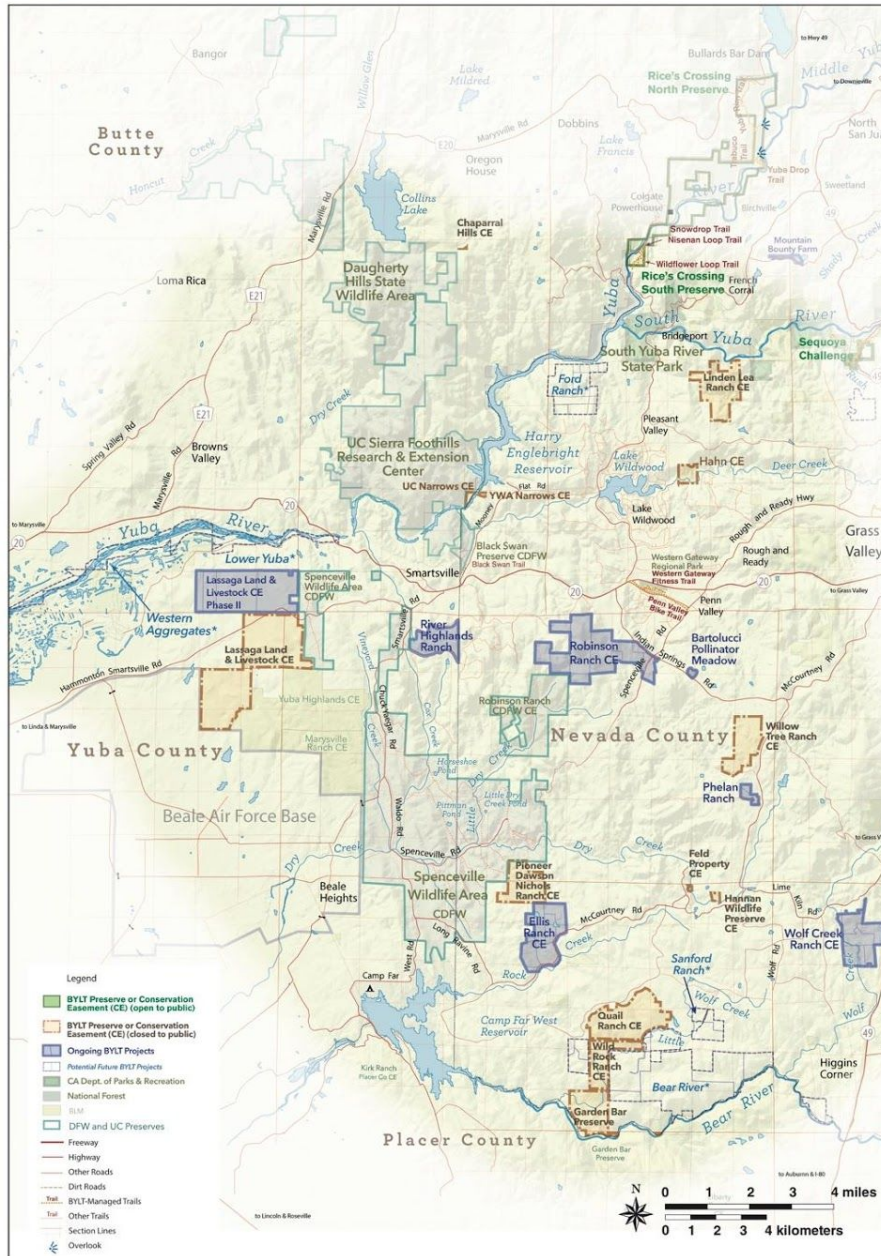
#### FUNDING TARGETS

Acquisition	\$15 million	Recreation	\$1 million
Restoration	\$3 million	Management	\$500,000



## Blue Oak Woodland & Rangeland Region

2020-2024 Projects



Map 3 Blue Oak Woodland & Rangeland v431, updated 1/15/20  
300 dpi raster PNG v431 shown @ 270 dpi  
Public Lands mapped using California Protected Lands Database.  
BYLT properties, CEs, and projects from BYLT's GIS data.

Map by Ben Pease, [www.preserviss.com](http://www.preserviss.com)  
with Eric Tan, Co-Executive Director, BYLT

### ECOSYSTEM SERVICES

Groundwater recharge  
Water quantity/quality  
Temperature decrease  
Wildlife habitat  
Carbon sequestration  
(soil/above ground)

### NATURAL CLIMATE SOLUTIONS

Avoided grassland conversion  
Conservation of agricultural land  
Silviculture  
Indigenous leadership  
Soil health  
Riparian restoration  
Regenerative agriculture  
Groundwater sustainability  
Fire management and Firewise practices

## Strategic Focus Area: GROUSE RIDGE HEADWATERS

### REGIONAL PRIORITY - CHECKERBOARD PROTECTION

#### CONSERVATION GOALS

- Protect 5,000 acres of checkerboard lands
- Expand protection of Bear River headwaters
- Encourage outdoor recreation opportunities
- Purchase forestlands with only the highest conservation and recreational values
- Expand prescribed fire onto private lands to reduce emissions and increase carbon storage

High in the Sierra Nevada Mountains, around 9,000 feet exist alpine lakes, aspen groves, lodgepole pine and juniper trees which stand atop the granite boulders and bedrock at the headwaters of our main waterways, the Bear and Yuba Rivers.

These are fire-adapted habitats, meaning they have evolved with regular fire regimes. Wildlife corridors follow the rivers and waterways. The forests provide natural resources and for the last 170 years, they have also provided economic resources such as gold, water and timber. These lands hold high value for recreational activities; BYLT currently protects these uses on nearly 4,000 acres with nearly 5,000 acres in progress of headwaters lands through work with PG&E and private landowners. Outdoor recreation in the form of backpacking, hiking, swimming, fishing, hunting, off-highway vehicle use, camping, water sports, biking and equestrian uses dominate the landscape in the summer months.

Headwaters habitat has the highest percentage of public lands, mostly owned by the United States Forest Service (USFS) and Bureau of Land Management (BLM) but also includes public land holdings by Pacific Gas and Electric (PG&E) and Nevada Irrigation District (NID). But our headwaters suffer from fragmentation due to past land use designations. The unique checkerboard pattern, of public and private land ownership, was created in 1863 as the Transcontinental Railroad was being constructed. As an incentive for private companies to continue building over the treacherous Donner Summit region, the federal government gave them every other square mile of land along a 20 mile corridor. In later years, timber companies purchased 75% of this land. We plan to begin working with local timber companies and other private landowners to conserve the checkerboard landscape for continued sustainable harvesting and expansion of outdoor recreational values.

#### THREATS

Due to a decreasing market for timber and increase in an interest for residential second-home development, these lands have become threatened with subdivision and development. Further development will greatly impact animal migration routes and habitat values. In addition, conversion to housing decreases carbon storage and increases emissions.

Wildfire is a major threat to our headwaters. While the landscape has evolved with fire, overstocked forests now make the threat intensified. Catastrophic wildfire would impact water quality, wildlife habitat and recreational values directly.

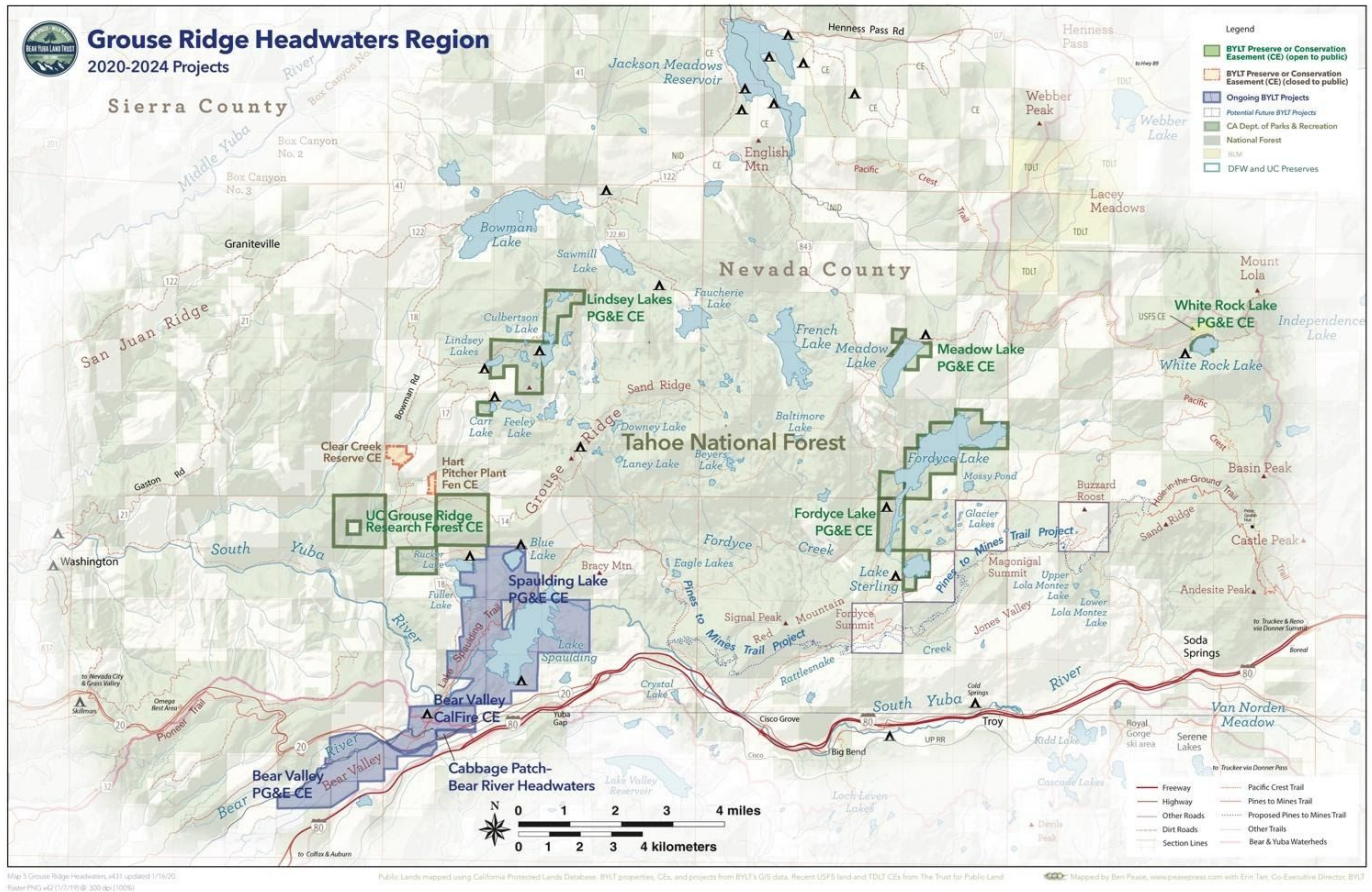
#### RESTORATION POTENTIAL

Improve wildlife habitat, Montane meadow restoration, reforestation, ingress/egress shaded fuel breaks, prescribed fire

#### FUNDING TARGETS

Acquisition	\$3 million	Restoration	\$1 million
Recreation	\$1 million	Management	\$1 million





## ECOSYSTEM SERVICES

- Carbon storage
- Water quality
- Endangered species protection
- Outdoor recreation
- Clean air
- Increase biodiversity

## NATURAL CLIMATE SOLUTIONS

- Avoided forest conversion
- Forest conservation
- Indigenous Leadership
- Improved forestry
- Reforestation and restoration
- Sustainable wood demand
- Fire management and Firewise practices

## Strategic Focus Area: YUBA RIVERS & RIDGES

### REGIONAL PRIORITIES - LANDSCAPE PLANNING AND PUBLIC LAND EXPANSION

#### CONSERVATION GOALS

- Target land surrounding currently protected areas for landscape scale conservation
- Outreach to private landowners on the benefits of conservation easements
- Identify priority landscapes for protection and work with local community on management goals
- Protect important farmland

-

This Strategic Focus Area was named for the ridges - Montezuma, Harmony and San Juan - which lie above and between the Middle and South Forks of the Yuba River. This region has a rich and vibrant history stretching back to when the Nisenan were the main residents. After 1850, the landscape became busy with pioneers searching for gold. Malakoff Diggins State Historic Park, the largest hydraulic gold mine in California, is located here. Today timber, agriculture and arts are embedded deeply in the culture of this SFA. We will work to advance community resilience by providing affordable access to land for farmers, creating buffer of land protected for wildlife corridor and public access to nature. Fire breaks along roadways and around developed areas to reduce wildfire risk is high priority and we will support these efforts however we can.

#### THREATS

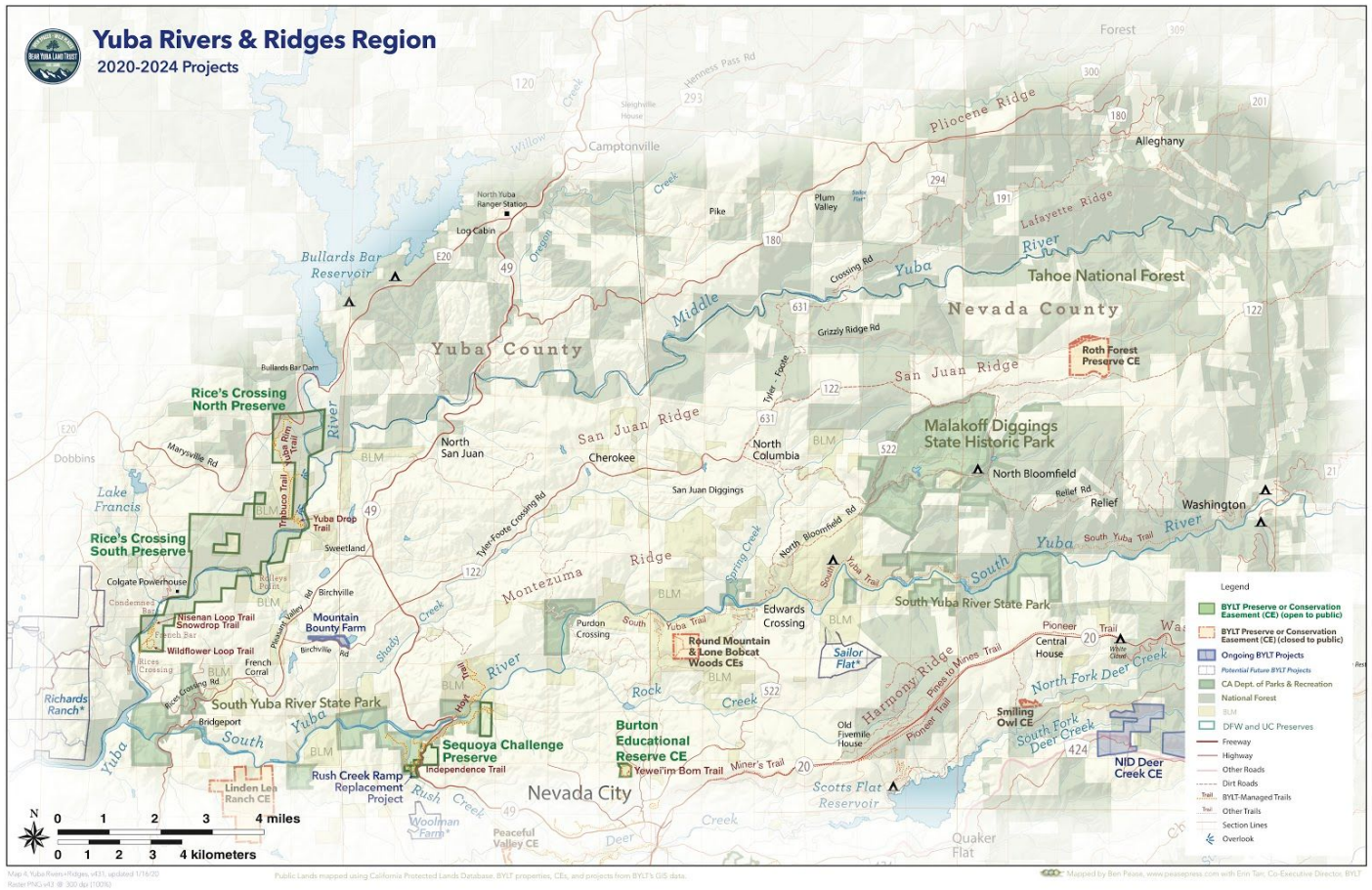
Wildfire is a major threat to the communities found within the Yuba Rivers and Ridges SFA. This landscape has evolved with infrequent wildfire, so to say it is harmful to the conservation values would be wrong. Wildfire becomes a threat when human life, structures or livestock are in its path. Fire suppression efforts have continued to increase each year due to an extended fire season caused by a changing climate. The scope and behavior of recent wildfires in Northern California, such as the Tubbs or Camp Fires, have shown that many communities do not have adequate evacuation plans. This is the case on the San Juan, Harmony, and Montezuma Ridges as well as the Middle and South Yuba River canyons where the checkerboard of public and private lands exists increasing risk to human life and structures.

#### RESTORATION POTENTIAL

Sustainable wood demand, Fire management and Firewise practices, demonstrate / support good forest management and fire risk reduction strategies

#### FUNDING TARGETS

Acquisition	\$1 million	Recreation	\$300,000
Restoration	\$200,000	Management	\$200,000



## ECOSYSTEM SERVICES

Carbon sequestration  
Farmland protection  
Wood products  
Water quality/quantity  
Clean air

## NATURAL CLIMATE SOLUTIONS

Forest conservation  
Avoided forest conversion  
Indigenous leadership  
Improved forestry  
Reforestation and restoration



Strategic Focus Area: URBAN CORE

REGIONAL PRIORITIES - TRAIL MASTER PLAN AND COMMUNITY CONSERVATION PLANNING

CONSERVATION GOALS

- Community Conservation projects
- Advocacy of smart growth and community resilience
- Increase trail easements to protect and expand public access to trails and open space
- Encourage outdoor recreation opportunities

The Urban Core region includes the cities of Grass Valley and Nevada City and the surrounding County of Nevada landscapes generally found between 1,200 and 2,500 feet in elevation. There are also several outlying communities that are growing, especially along southern Hwy 49 in the area of Higgins Corner/Lake of the Pines, and the western Hwy 20 in the Penn Valley area. The region lies in a transition zone between two habitat types: the Sierran mixed-conifer and the oak-foothill pine ecosystems. Approximately 14,000 residents live in this rural community (situated sixty miles north of Sacramento and 90 miles southwest of Reno) because of their appreciation of the natural world and respect for the wildlife which attracts over 900,000 visitors annually.

To date, BYLT has built and maintains over 45 miles of trails with 25 miles of trail in progress including the highly ambitious Pines to Mines Trail that will connect Western and Eastern Nevada County, from Truckee to Nevada City. Five BYLT fee title preserves are located within this high visibility and recreational region. Promoting infill, smart growth and affordable housing, farmland protection and urban greenways drive the vision in this strategic focus area. Engagement is highly concentrated here, providing opportunities to educate the community en masse about the importance of environmental stewardship and climate impacts.

**Trail Easements** are a powerful tool which ensure that public access through private lands persist in perpetuity. Through careful planning and landowner communication, BYLT is able to connect important trail routes to businesses and schools as well as create new commuter pathways.

BYLT continues to work with the cities of Grass Valley and Nevada City and the Counties of Nevada and Yuba to create non-motorized recreational opportunities that protect pockets of habitat and expand overall trail and transportation connectivity to (1) improve public health, safety, and access to nature; (2) enhance community amenities, tourism and the local economy, and (3) provide environmental benefits including the reduction of vehicle miles traveled.

THREATS

Threats to this region include loss of agricultural land, loss of native habitat and loss of access to nature. The biggest threat to our local ranchers and farmers is access to land. Protection of farmland and rangeland protects local food security and deters suburban sprawl. In addition, urban regions are threatened with more extreme temperature increases due mostly to pavement and building materials which capture and retain heat for longer periods of time.

RESTORATION POTENTIAL

Pollinator and demonstration gardens, wetland restoration, Firewise practices, trail connectivity and enhancements

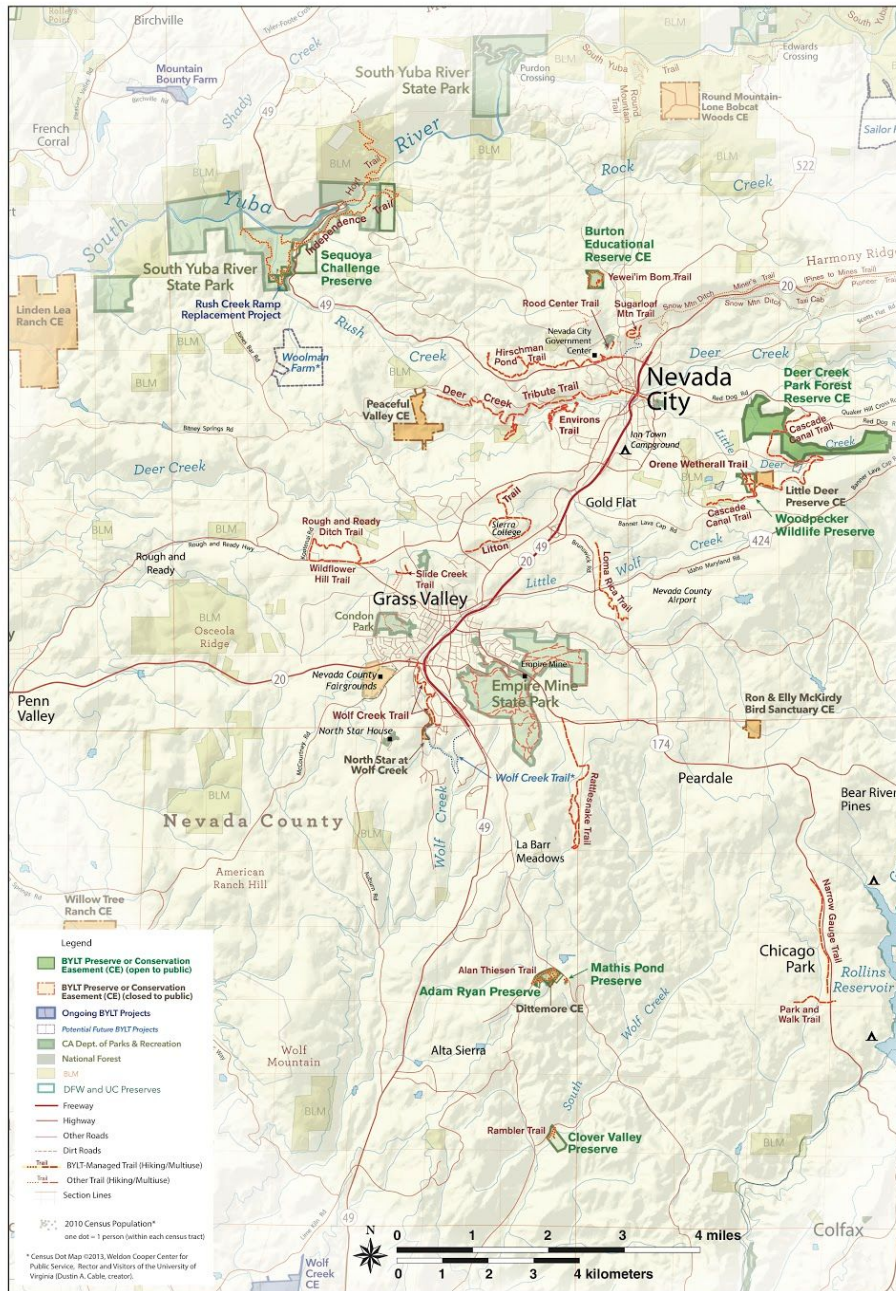
FUNDING TARGETS

Acquisition	\$2 million	Recreation	\$1 million
Restoration	\$1 million	Management	\$300,000





## Urban Core Region 2020-2024 Projects



### ECOSYSTEM SERVICES

Public Health and Safety  
Public Access  
Clean Air  
Tourism and Outdoor Recreation

### NATURAL CLIMATE SOLUTIONS

Wetland and habitat conservation  
Avoided habitat conversion  
Indigenous leadership  
Soil health  
Food production and waste  
Urban greenways and green infrastructure

## **DEFEND:**

35,000 acres through preservation of conservation values and investment in high impact carbon sequestration and climate adaptation strategies

Our efforts to defend the conservation values we have been entrusted with is of the utmost importance. Additionally, we seek to pursue innovative approaches to land management, climate adaptation, mitigation and resilience in order to defend our quality of life, most basic needs and natural resources for the enjoyment of all.

The act of protecting important lands and securing trail easements is the first step toward BYLT's contribution to creating a resilient community. Ensuring our forests and farmlands are sustainably managed and kept in production to meet the growing demand for natural resources and creating safe non-motorized routes for recreation and commuting further enhance our goals.

### **I. CONSERVATION VALUES**

BYLT takes every precaution to protect the conservation values and agreements which we have been entrusted with. Through regular monitoring and management of our lands and trails we stay closely connected to these places. There are a variety of ways we ensure conservation values are defended including:

- a. **DRAFTING OF EASEMENTS/AGREEMENTS:** Drafting of conservation and trail easements, as well as fee title acquisitions, will take into account a world impacted by long-term effects of climate change and thereby remains flexible in approaches to protecting the conservation values of each property. Through incorporation of climate resilience language into land protection work and conservation planning we will ensure our resources are not expended on unnecessary amendments to adjust for unknown climate change impacts.
- b. **TERRAFIRMA DEFENSE INSURANCE:** In 2011, the Land Trust Alliance (LTA) formed Terrafirma to help land trusts defend their conserved properties from legal challenges. Terrafirma is owned and operated by 528 insured member land trusts. This national initiative demonstrates land trusts' commitment to take seriously their responsibility to ensure the permanence of their conservation work. BYLT maintains a yearly membership with Terrafirma for all properties in our care.
- c. **CONSERVATION EASEMENT MONITORING:** Through thorough annual monitoring and regular communication with landowners, we attempt to reduce the likelihood of conservation easement violations. Our Annual Monitoring Program will continue to strive to improve in efficiency and effectiveness through adopting new technologies. For example, drone monitoring will be implemented on properties where efficiency and effectiveness in conservation easement monitoring would be enhanced, according to internal policy.

#### **Featured Program: STEWARDSHIP ASSISTANCE PROGRAM**

BYLT will implement Natural Climate Solutions (NCS) through our Stewardship Assistance Program (SAP) and continued enhancement of fee title preserves. In 2018 BYLT piloted the SAP which allows staff to work with conservation easement landowners to seek funding or work with volunteer groups to complete important restoration projects on their lands. Each year a limited number of landowner projects are chosen. The goal is to increase resilience through active management and utilization of NCS.

## II. OUR BASIC NEEDS

Smart growth strategies and principles support basic community needs - like food, water, and shelter - and create better places to live with an enhanced quality of life. BYLT is committed to resilient community planning through community conservation (see page 29) and employing innovative land management and restoration practices that sequester carbon, improve water and soil quality and provide resilient climate and community solutions in the following areas:

### a. **FOOD: PROMOTING AND PRESERVING LOCAL AGRICULTURAL**

Agriculture plays a vital role in securing a just and stable future for our communities. Local foods protect the environment, improve access to healthy food, revitalize neighborhoods, and boost local economic opportunities.

- i. **Farmland Preservation** - California loses approximately 40,000 acres of farmland each year. Conservation of working farmland has multiple benefits including protection of healthy soils to sequester carbon and their ability to grow healthy, local food to sustain our community. BYLT's goal, through the Forever Farms Program (see page 27) is to increase farmer access to affordable land to encourage permanence and investment in the land, through conservation easements or by using a Buy, Protect and Sell model.
- ii. **Managed Grazing** - To feed a growing population and protect forests from deforestation for fresh farmland, restoring abandoned cropland and pastureland is key. Improved grazing can be very good for the land and sequester one-half to three tons of carbon per acre.
- iii. **Regenerative Agriculture** - This practice enhances and sustains the health of the soil by restoring its carbon content which results in improved productivity of crops. The benefits are simple and far reaching. Farms are seeing soil carbon levels rise from a baseline of 1 to 2 percent up to 5 to 8 percent over ten or more years. This can add up to 25 to 60 tons of carbon per acre.

### b. **WATER: IS LIFE**

Water management faces challenges. Climate pressures will make it harder to store water for droughts, manage flood risk and protect freshwater ecosystems, as well as provide the necessary supply for growing populations. Adaptation strategies and conservative use will be critical for long term sustainability of our most precious resource.

- i. **Wetland and meadow restoration** - Implement Natural Climate Solutions to restore functions of the vital ecological and hydrological functions these features provide
- ii. **Collaborate with Water Agencies** - Further conservation goals working closely with Nevada Irrigation District, Yuba Water Agency, the Sierra Water Work Group and watershed stakeholders

### c. **SHELTER: THE BUILT ENVIRONMENT**

The built environment is unavoidable and must be considered part of our comprehensive conservation planning efforts. Man-made structures, features, and facilities support growing populations where people live and work. With leadership and innovation, BYLT has the ability to influence smart growth and green infrastructure that integrates land use and transportation investments (i.e. curbing development into critical habitat areas and promoting in-fill and smart growth) and supports the reduction of emissions while improving the quality of life of communities.

- i. **Mitigation** - Proactively cultivate relationships with developers and county planning departments to offer BYLT mitigation plans and services, including the Oak Woodland Conservation Fund
- ii. **Smart Growth Strategies** - Work with the county planning departments and local developers to educate them on critical wildlife habitats, community connectivity and public access to nature; advocate for eliminating development in flood risk areas, wetlands, and other critical wildlife habitats

### III. OUR LOCAL ECONOMY

Protection of working lands derives multiple benefits for our region. By working with ranchers, farmers and foresters we help to safeguard our local economy, conserve important resource lands and maintain generations of tradition. By protecting these lands, BYLT can play an active role in the sustainable management of these special places forever.

#### a. FOREVER FARMS PROGRAM

Agricultural lands comprise approximately 40% of BYLT's service area. The lower foothills are dominated by expansive ranches that support livestock and wine grapes. Further up in elevation, smaller farms scattered along country roads produce a wide diversity of vegetables, fruits, flowers, livestock, and other commodities.

Agriculture is an important pillar of the economy in our region. Including timber, agricultural production in Nevada County was valued at \$25.6 million in 2018. However, when combined with the "multiplier effects" of this production, such as the local spending of agricultural businesses, suppliers, and their employees, agriculture's economic contribution jumps to \$33.4 million. Furthermore, the value of the ecosystem services that local farmland provides—including scenic beauty, wildlife habitat, wildfire protection, carbon storage, and other values—has been estimated to be between \$420 million to \$1.203 billion per year. (Nevada County Crop Report, 2018).

In keeping with our mission to protect working lands as well as natural lands, BYLT has thus far protected 6,600 acres of family farms and ranches from non-agricultural development forever by purchasing the development rights from the landowners using agricultural conservation easements. But there is much more to be done.

In the Sierra foothills, the needs of local farmers are changing. Today's farmers are finding it more and more difficult to secure long-term access to land. The supply of properties with suitable soil, terrain, and size is limited. Pressure to subdivide and develop land is growing. Long-term lease agreements are hard to negotiate. Onsite housing for farmworkers is often not permitted. And land prices are out of range for new farmers.

To address these challenges, a local *Land for Farms* workgroup was formed in 2019. Comprised of nonprofits with an interest in farmland protection, including BYLT, Sierra Harvest, and Nevada County Grown, as well as the BriarPatch Food Co-op, and other stakeholders, the workgroup collectively developed the idea to establish a "Forever Farms" program in the region. The Forever Farms program will be an ambitious campaign to get more agricultural lands protected in perpetuity using a suite of acquisition tools, including:

**Agricultural Conservation Easements.** This is the tool BYLT has used thus far for agricultural land protection. BYLT purchases just the development rights and the land remains in the farmer's or rancher's ownership.

**Buy/Protect/Sell.** Using this tool, agricultural property is purchased in fee, protected through an agricultural conservation easement, and then resold to an incoming farmer. This is a means of protecting land that is for sale and vulnerable to being converted from agricultural use.

**Buy and Hold.** This involves acquisition of vulnerable properties in fee, holding title to those properties, and providing long-term, low-cost leases to agricultural producers. Lease revenues are used for taxes and other land management expenses.

Modeled after similar programs in other areas, the Forever Farms Program will be led by BYLT, with Sierra Harvest and BriarPatch providing support with promotion, fundraising, coordination, matching farmers with farmland, and other needs.

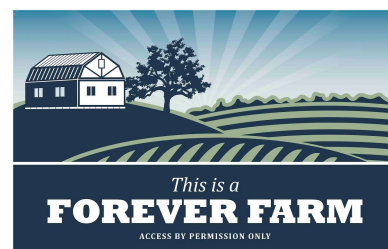


## A Big Step for BYLT

The rollout of the Forever Farms Program campaign will be a major effort in 2020 and marks a big step for BYLT. The program will involve capital campaigns to raise funds directly from the community for specific agricultural properties. Until now, fundraising from the community has not been for specific properties but for the organization as a whole.

Additionally, BYLT is stepping up in terms of being willing to own, manage, and lease land, and the buildings and infrastructure that may be on that land. This is new territory for the organization and will be embarked upon gradually and with caution; but the willingness to take on this responsibility speaks to the elevated capacity and commitment of the organization to protect working landscapes.

The Forever Farms Program was first made public in December of 2019 and has quickly generated positive community support. The program offers a powerful means to serve our mission while building our membership and donor base. Several farm and ranch prospects have already been identified, with negotiations underway with some of those landowners. A capital campaign to acquire one of those farms will roll out in 2020. Four thousand agricultural acres already protected by BYLT qualify for the program with Forever Farms signs being erected this year.



### LINDEN LEA RANCH

Thanks to the landowner, this farmland is permanently protected by a conservation easement held by Bear Yuba Land Trust.



## Increased Visibility

*Conservation Easement signage is an effective method of notifying the public of who is responsible for the development and maintenance of a particular project, reinforce an important message for the Land Trust, increase our presence, attract potential members, supporters and future easements. The signs also provide recognition to property owners for their commitment to conservation.*

## b. FOREVER FORESTS PROGRAM

Forested lands make up more than 50% of our service region and timber products were valued at nearly \$4.5 million in 2017. These forests are diverse and range from the mixed-conifer and hardwood forests in the Wildland Urban Interface (WUI) to the high alpine forests surrounding mountain lakes and meadows. Forest health is a primary goal for the Sierra Nevada region through multiple ordinances and bills which have been passed in recent years.

The past paradigm of suppressing all fires paired with decreased logging and minimal active management have resulted in unnatural conditions and unsafe levels of flammable brush and overstocked forests. In addition, development has increased throughout the forested regions making fire suppression more difficult and costly. These factors combined, create dangerous conditions that put human life, wildlife habitat, water quality and recreation destinations at risk.

The Forever Forests Program aims to protect working forests which are dedicated to sustainable timber harvesting for continued wood products and forest health. Local timber companies, water utilities and other landowners will be pursued within the SFA's to expand conservation of critical lands. The goals are to protect water quality and wildlife habitat while promoting sustainable management practices to keep these lands productive. Ecosystem Service Markets and Natural Climate Solutions will also be explored to maximize carbon storage and climate change mitigation.

## EMPOWER:

### I. COMMUNITY HEALTH & RESILIENCE THROUGH COMMUNITY CONSERVATION PLANNING

With the increase of climate change impacts, we must understand the nexus of community and climate resilience in order to create a just, sustainable and healthy future. BYLT is uniquely positioned as a community leader to prepare for environmental challenges by enhancing and facilitating community capacity to plan and implement resilience projects and improve the protections afforded by natural ecosystems through these investments.

**Community Conservation Planning (CCP)**, an approach to land conservation that puts people at the center to improve our collective quality of life, is responsive to community needs and specific to each community and land trust

**OBJECTIVE:** Create a CCP tool, guided by the Land Trust Alliance Community Conservation framework, for the identification of community assets and priorities that BYLT is equipped to address, beginning with the following:

#### a. BUILD A STRONG, RURAL ECONOMY THROUGH AGRICULTURE AND OUTDOOR RECREATION

- i. Support farming and industries that depend on farming by protecting farmland from conversion and facilitating access, leases and purchase of land for future farmers
- ii. Foster and enhance outdoor recreational opportunities and amenities; attract tourism and industry

#### b. PROMOTE SHARED RESPONSIBILITY FOR OUR COMMUNITY'S GOOD

- i. Honor shared social values through advocacy and participation with local groups
- ii. Teach community members, especially the youth, to be good environmental stewards
- iii. Promote diversity, equity and inclusion; community resilience is the glue that binds

#### c. SAFEGUARD OUR ENVIRONMENT BY CONSERVING NATURAL RESOURCES AND OUR QUALITY OF LIFE

- i. Foster good health for all; people and wildlife need clean air, water, and soil
- ii. Enhance the quality of life for all who live, work and play here through parks and open space
- iii. Protect from sprawl and overdevelopment by keeping open spaces around cities and towns for parks, farming and natural habitat

#### d. PRIORITIZE OUR CULTURAL HERITAGE THROUGH PRESERVATION AND THE ARTS

- i. Honor and include the Nisenan tribe and their deep traditions and distinct ways of life in land conservation and cultural land management plans
- ii. Increase awareness and advocacy of the importance of land conservation through storytelling, content and art installations on trails and preserves

**DESIRED OUTCOMES:** Utilize the tool to identify community conservation projects and diversified funding support

#### **Community Conservation Case Study: BURTON HOMESTEAD AND ITS EVOLUTION OVER THE YEARS**

38 acres of land, known as Burton Homestead Preserve, was donated to BYLT in 1997 by Nevada County librarian Francis Burton and continues to serve as an outdoor classroom and home to 4 Elements Earth Education (4EEE). In 2010, the Food Love Project was established on the property by farmer Amanda Thibodeau and is a vibrant educational farm for Sierra Harvest providing farmer-intern training, 80+ varieties of vegetables, and hands-on learning for thousands of children each year. In 2019, BYLT transferred ownership to 4EEE and retained both a conservation and trail easement to ensure the land will not be developed and public access remains.

## **II. PUBLIC ACCESS TO NATURE BY ACQUIRING, BUILDING, AND MAINTAINING 50+ MILES OF TRAIL EASEMENTS AND 12 NATURE PRESERVES**

**OBJECTIVE:** Embrace trail leadership and support local trails initiatives that increase access, improve local economies and support sustainable recreation through a world class trail and preserve system

### **a. CREATE AND MAINTAIN EXCEPTIONAL NAVIGATION TOOLS THAT PROMOTE ACCESS AND USE**

- i.** Develop a standardized BYLT Trails and Preserves Wayfinding Guide that establishes design standards for signage, kiosks, fixtures and visual communication elements
- ii.** Update BYLT Maps for placement at trailheads and for sale online and in-store; create a mobile app

### **b. IDENTIFY AND PRIORITIZE HIGHLY USED ACTIVE TRANSPORTATION CORRIDORS AND COMPLETE A TRAILS MASTER PLAN THAT ACCOUNTS FOR CLIMATE IMPACTS AND ACTIVE, MULTI-USE**

### **c. ESTABLISH CRITERIA FOR NEW TRAILS, CONNECTIVITY AND THROUGH-COMMUNITY TRAILS**

- i.** Identify actions to preserve habitat connectivity and reduce fragmentation, including retrofitting existing transportation infrastructure that are current barriers to trail connectivity
- ii.** Develop guidelines that incorporate the increased role of biking and walking in reducing fuel dependency, connecting communities, and providing evacuation and safe routes
- iii.** Work with real estate developers to incorporate open space and trails in existing and new developments

### **d. DEVELOP COMPREHENSIVE TRAILS FUNDING STRATEGY TO OFFSET NON-GRANT FUNDED ACTIVITIES**

- i.** Ensure our work is duly compensated for the construction and ongoing maintenance in Nevada City, Grass Valley, and the Counties of Nevada and Yuba through fee for service agreements and subsidies, as well as trail users via public funding and donations

### **e. BUILD CAPACITY BY GROWING A ROBUST TRAIL ADOPTERS AND AMBASSADORS PROGRAM**

- i.** Develop standardized practices, volunteer training and oversight, monitoring protocols, recordkeeping and volunteer recognition with contributions provided by trail users, neighborhood associations and businesses within a 3 mile radius of each trail

### **f. REINFORCE BYLT OUTDOOR RECREATION LEADERSHIP THROUGH ADVOCACY AND AWARENESS**

- i.** Support increased sustainable recreational access and use for all ages and abilities through our work with the Sierra Consortium and similar organizations, agencies, nonprofits and community partners, as well as through organized treks and excursions with partners and affinity groups
- ii.** Build and grow the *BYLT Celebration of Trails* through an annual event, campaign and content
- iii.** Foster a conscientious trail user community through communication that supports the benefits of public health, safety, and etiquette

**DESIRED OUTCOMES:** Increased trail use, connectivity and relevance, an increase in membership and donor base, engagement with the Outdoor Industry, media recognition, partnerships, perceived leadership and progress towards sustainable funding support through a tax initiative

### III. A CULTURE OF STEWARDSHIP AND PRESERVATION THROUGH EDUCATION + EXPERIENCES

**OBJECTIVE:** Provide authentic, memorable, high quality educational content and experiences through a diverse array of mediums while raising visibility of BYLT and awareness of conservation issues; extend reach and strengthen community health and resilience by deepening human connection to nature

#### The BYLT Brand

*BYLT recently underwent a brand refresh that sets the tone: fun, approachable, bold, and purpose-driven. The style and brand voice is woven throughout a dynamic, integrated content mix that engages donors, members, landowners, volunteers and the community in order to promote BYLT and conservation priorities.*

- **Daily social media** content posts with high engagement and reach over time
- **Bi-weekly newsletters** that reinforce fundraising and program objectives that link back to the BYLT website
- **Twice yearly publications**, *Celebration of Trails* and *Celebration of Lands*, offer in depth news and information and serve as a fundraising tool for twice yearly campaigns
- **Podcasts** provide quarterly short-form content for news, storytelling, member events and special engagements
- **Weekly to monthly articles and releases** pitched to traditional and online media, blogs and endemic outlets
- **Print Collateral** is promotional and informational in nature highlighting membership benefits, events and more

#### a. BUILD UPON FIRST YEAR SUCCESS OF *IN THE FIELD* SERIES

- i. Host compelling guest speakers three times per year for members and guests, covering a range of conservation topics that are recorded as a podcast and shared with the masses
- ii. Expand to include Fireside Chats as the summer extension, open to all
- iii. Develop consistent branding and plan to grow reach
- iv. Align with notable influencers to distribute and share content

#### b. GROW PARTICIPATION OF BIOBLITZ CITIZEN SCIENCE YOUTH EDUCATION SERIES AND SUMMIT

- i. Partner with Sierra Streams Institute and the Nevada County School District for field trip excursions
- ii. Secure grants, CSR and business sponsorship funding to sustain and enhance this program
- iii. Invite disadvantaged and urban communities beyond Nevada County; provide scholarships

#### c. BRAND OFFERINGS AND EXPERIENCES THAT REINFORCE COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS, AGENCY RELATIONS AND SUBJECT MATTER EXPERTISE, SUCH AS:

- i. *Nisenan Stories* - tales of the native people of our lands will be introduced as part of the Rice's Crossing South interpretive panels; we will continue to grow our partnership
- ii. *Nature Rx Series* - showcase health benefits and outdoor recreation, partnering with Dignity Health
- iii. *California Native Plant Society* - expand upon docent led trek series identifying plant species

#### d. DEVELOP OPPORTUNITIES TO SHOWCASE LAND AND STEWARDSHIP PROJECTS AS EDUCATIONAL OUTREACH THAT REINFORCE BYLT'S EXPERTISE, LEADERSHIP AND INNOVATION

- i. Guide Land and Trails Tours throughout the year for Board, Staff, Members and Major Donors
- ii. Host BYLT Native Plant Nursery community days for demonstrations or purchasing plants
- iii. Host pollinator garden workshops or birding
- iv. Host community trail day projects with experts in the field

**DESIRED OUTCOMES:** Engage downstream, youth and diverse audiences; increase reach, membership, funding



## **IV. CONSERVATION RELEVANCE THROUGH MEMBERSHIP, ADVOCACY + AWARENESS**

**OBJECTIVE:** Elevate the profile of BYLT's work and environmental significance of the Sierra Nevada region through outreach and engagement programs that communicate downstream benefits to the rest of the State, ultimately making a stronger case for conservation and member support.

### **a. ELEVATE MEMBERSHIP PROGRAM FOCUSED ON MANAGEMENT, RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION**

- i.** Launch of new membership tiers in 2019 outlined clear benefits with dues increases, revitalizing the program: all donors and volunteers will be categorized, business participation raises community visibility
- ii.** Hiring of Membership Coordinator in 2019 focuses effort and attention on daily management, communications, cultivation of relationships and recruitment
- iii.** Conversion from eTap to Salesforce will allow for ease of database management, reporting and access
- iv.** Active recruitment will occur monthly through targeted group presentations and community engagement; twice yearly membership drives (March, October) raise awareness in community

### **b. DEVELOP AN ADVOCACY PROGRAM TO INCREASE THE PACE AND SCALE OF LAND CONSERVATION**

- i.** Leverage proximity to Sacramento to build relationships with congressional leaders and state agencies in order to educate policy makers, share the stories of the Land, and capture funding for projects/programs
- ii.** Monitor and support yearly legislation and state efforts to make sure laws that protect air quality, water quality and natural resources are drafted, obeyed and perpetuated
- iii.** Participate in City and County governance meetings; identify Boards and Committees of significance where BYLT Leadership can play an active role in furthering conservation
- iv.** Host annual land tours for elected officials, decision and policy makers, and community leaders

### **c. DEVELOP BYLT "VOICES OF CONSERVATION" COMMUNICATIONS BUREAU THAT DELIVERS THOUGHT LEADING TESTIMONIALS AND PRESENTATIONS IN SUPPORT OF LAND CONSERVATION**

- i.** Create and schedule annual calendar of presentations and tabling opportunities with community partners, local/affinity groups, nonprofits, expert panels, and more
- ii.** Create an influencer program for social media content sharing and advocacy
- iii.** Leverage talents, connections and leadership of Board and Committee Members to broaden reach

### **d. LAUNCH BYLT YOUTH CONSERVATION CORPS (YCC) TO ADDRESS THE IMPACTS OF CLIMATE CHANGE AND IMPROVE ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH**

- i.** Service corps members, comprised of students and recent graduates, will receive volunteer and internship credit through work that focuses on sustainability, nature access, restoration, and environmental leadership as a means to engage the public
- ii.** Assignments may include tabling, trail maintenance, restoration, data collection, surveys, collateral distribution, trail ambassadorship and in-office support
- iii.** Key partners: California Council of Land Trusts Training and Apprenticeship Program, Land Trust Alliance, Sierra College, Sierra Business Council, Sierra Nevada Alliance, Sierra Consortium, School Districts

**DESIRED OUTCOMES:** Increase in membership and donor base, funding from different sectors, a diverse and representative group of Board and Staff members, media recognition, political support, partnerships and perceived leadership

## **SUSTAIN:**

### **I. INCREASED ORGANIZATIONAL CAPACITY AND EFFECTIVENESS**

Organizational development is a planned effort to improve an organization through effective use of resources by aligning strategy, leadership, functions, systems, processes, culture and structure toward accomplishing goals.

In the next five years, the most significant impact to the organization will be the growth in acres conserved and trail miles constructed. The staff needed to manage project development, acquisition, monitoring, management and fundraising to support these efforts will need to grow accordingly so that all opportunities are assessed and captured, when desired, and that our lands and trails continue to thrive.

The Board of Directors has remained the same size, 10-15 members, since its early days when a robust volunteer committee process managed land activity. As staff has assumed all technical and tactical responsibilities of the organization, program committees have focused more on governance and high level decision making.

**OBJECTIVE:** Identify ways to increase organizational capacity and effectiveness through the growth of efficiencies, skills, and talent recruitment focused on knowledge of science, philanthropy and real estate as well as influential connections to facilitate strategic relationships.

#### **a. “PEOPLE-FIRST” MANAGEMENT APPROACH CELEBRATES THE DIVERSE BACKGROUNDS, TALENTS AND EXPERIENCES OF OUR PEOPLE: STAFF, VOLUNTEERS, BOARD AND COMMITTEE MEMBERS**

- i.** Create a just, inclusive and equitable environment through policies and procedures that make BYLT an attractive and fun workplace where people thrive through clear purpose and growth opportunities
- ii.** Foster an environment where voices are heard, skills are enhanced and connections are leveraged
- iii.** Cultivate a culture of leadership and innovation through transparent and empowered decision-making and the development of staff and Board members
- iv.** Ensure a depth of talent strengthened through career growth and succession planning
- v.** Update Employee Handbook each year; encourage employees to exercise benefits provided

#### **b. ENHANCE CAPACITY THROUGH FOCUSED RECRUITMENT, PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT, PARTNERSHIPS AND VOLUNTEER MANAGEMENT**

- i.** Develop and cultivate a highly functioning Board of Directors
  - 1.** Identify needs and prospects through newly revitalized Board Development Commitment ensuring a diverse representation of all segments of the community and skills that further the mission and strategic goals of the organization
  - 2.** Empower Board Members by providing education and informational sessions at Board meetings and access to workshops and seminars focused on conservation
- ii.** Transition all BYLT Committees to high functioning work groups that build capacity for the organization through a solid grasp of responsibilities, Committee Chair leadership and structured agendas and work plans; each Board member serves on one committee
- iii.** Actively manage and enhance the Volunteer Program, through Volunteer Coordinator position, in order to grow capacity and community visibility
- iv.** Continue to implement and enhance newly created volunteer categories and handbook
- v.** Maintain and grow volunteer database; continually identify needs and skills
- vi.** Provide regular trainings that support volunteer time and talents
- vii.** Value volunteer participation through incentives, recognition and social events

- c. IDENTIFY AND STRENGTHEN PARTNERSHIPS AND COLLABORATIONS THAT COMPLEMENT IN-HOUSE COMPETENCIES AND PROVIDE OPPORTUNITIES FOR THE SHARING OF RESOURCES**
  - i. Active participation in member groups - Land Trust Alliance, California Council of Land Trusts, Sierra Cascade Land Trust Council, etc. - provides learning and networking opportunities
  - ii. Continue to explore shared costs with nearby land trusts and local/regional organizations
- d. DEVELOP A DEEP BENCH OF TRUSTED, PROFESSIONAL, AND TALENTED CONTRACTORS**
  - i. Fill the staff capacity gaps and provide specialized support for projects and programs in the areas of conservation law, real estate and finance, graphic design, social media and content management, transactional work, land restoration and ecosystem market development.
- e. EMBRACE TECHNOLOGY AND INNOVATION IN EVERY DECISION AND SYSTEM, ORGANIZATION-WIDE**
  - i. Identify tools that enhance performance and efficiencies for recordkeeping, database management, reporting, evaluation and programs
  - ii. Look towards best practices of our peers; lean on advice and support
  - iii. Be a beacon for others; communicate successes that will push the limits of conservation, governance, and programs in order to lift up communities and industries
  - iv. Measure program impact through consistent and regular evaluation of successes and challenges

**DESIRED OUTCOMES:** Increase in membership and donor base, funding from different sectors, a diverse and representative group of Board and Staff members, media recognition, political support, partnerships and perceived leadership



## II. LONG TERM FISCAL HEALTH THROUGH IMPROVED STRONG CASH FLOW AND DIVERSE, SUSTAINABLE FUNDING SOURCES

Fundraising streams, including earned income, need to grow with a balanced and healthy revenue allocation across the board shifting away from the more than 50% public support we depend on. Although charitable donations have remained consistent and strong over the past five years, the organization has not developed a diversified revenue model beyond public support, limited earned income and grant funding. Currently, public support is too high as a proportion of BYLT's revenue mix which causes instability to the seasonality and unpredictability of donor behavior.

**OBJECTIVE:** Aggressively pursue diverse and sustainable funding to build capacity and a solid foundation in order to keep pace with the five-year growth trajectory and sustain a healthy organization

### FIVE YEAR GROWTH TRAJECTORY

- Increase land footprint from 15,000 acres to 35,000 acres
- Increase miles of trail from 45 to 50+ miles
- Increase program and service capacity
- Increase investment portfolio from \$1.3M to \$1.8M in six managed accounts
- Increase staff size from 6.8 FTE (full-time equivalent) to 9 FTE employees

#### a. INCREASE GIVING LEVELS FROM EXISTING DONORS AND MEMBERS

- i. Realize gains from active management of the newly launched membership structure in 2019
- ii. Develop donor management strategies to move members into higher tiers of giving
- iii. Create target asks for one time gifts from major donors to support sustainable funding goals

#### b. DEVELOP MITIGATION AND CONVEYANCE OUTREACH CAMPAIGNS TO CAPITALIZE ON CANNABIS REGULATIONS AND PLANNING PERMIT COMPLIANCE

- i. Promote the Oak Conservation Fund in Nevada and Yuba counties; pursue local government funding

#### c. DEVELOP AN ACTIVE GRANT SOLICITATION AND MANAGEMENT SYSTEM

- i. Track current and upcoming grant opportunities across public agencies and foundations so that untapped revenue sources for programs are pursued in a strategic manner to maximize funding options for important projects.

#### d. LEVERAGE PROGRAM FEES AND INNOVATIVE LAND USE MONETIZATION STRATEGIES

- i. Promote The Stewardship Assistance Program to landowners for the contracting of restoration project services including project management, implementation and administration services
- ii. Promote pollinator gardens and meadows which have been successfully established on BYLT land and through private contracts
- iii. Use leases on fee title lands for grazing, timber management, hunting, recreational activities and other land-related activities.
- iv. Contract and consulting services will increase by 50% to include drone monitoring, restoration, mapping services and other mission-related tasks.

**e. PRIORITIZE INCREASED PASSIVE REVENUE TO SUPPORT MONTHLY OPERATING EXPENSES**

- i. Focus social media content and monthly member and volunteer communications on promotion of merchandise sales, employer match, conversion to recurring monthly gifts, and passive fundraising platforms, i.e. escrip
- ii. Develop retailer relations and sales of wholesale BYLT merchandise including trail cards

**f. DEVELOP A STRONG, ROBUST PLANNED GIVING PROGRAM**

- i. Work with estate planners, realtors and investment managers to promote the benefits of conservation
- ii. Hold twice yearly legacy meetings to educate members about the organization's mission, values, funding goals and giving strategies that will benefit the region for generations to come

**g. IDENTIFY SUSTAINABLE FUNDING TARGETS WITH FUNDRAISING STRATEGIES FOR OPERATIONS, LANDS AND TRAILS**

- i. Form a Conservation Finance Committee (CFC) to shepherd transactions from selection to successful close through sophisticated funding models; the CFC will be comprised of individuals with expertise in financial planning, tax law, real estate and conservation easement transactions
- ii. Draft business plans for each fee title property that identifies revenue opportunities
- iii. Prioritize fully funding the **Resiliency Fund**, with an increase of \$200,000 in cash raised to support eight months of operating expenses
- iv. Create a **Conservation Opportunity Fund** which would allow for proactive protection of critical lands
- v. Create a **Trails Stewardship Fund** to support long-term trail maintenance and improvements
- vi. Explore the feasibility of a **Nevada County sales tax initiative** that would provide public funding, through both residents and a growing tourism economy, for land protection, management, sustainable recreation and improvements to trails

*The Investment Policy Committee meets quarterly to review BYLT's portfolio of assets and performance. The Committee is guided by the Board-approved Investment Policy Statement. We strive to invest in companies that share our values and exercise sound, responsible judgment with environmental, social, and governance matters.*

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# V. IMPLEMENTATION





## The Process

Over the course of two years (2020-2021), the next phase of the strategic planning process will involve the generation of three implementation plans:

- a. Strategic Conservation Plan Greenprint
- b. Strategic Fundraising Plan
- c. Community Conservation Plan

To bridge the gap, working plans will be created to outline the scope of work for each goal, broken down into yearly tasks over five years.

## Decision-making Tool

The tool is created as a means of weighing decisions and tradeoffs between organization and community values and various projects and decisions that support the vision, strategies and goals of BYLT. It provides a framework for an equitable decision-making process and increases transparency within the organization. The decision-making tool can be applied to many different types of decisions, not only by Board and Staff Members but also volunteers, individuals and partner organizations, as it relates to our collective work.

### The Decision-making Tool is designed to:

1. Enhance the effectiveness and efficiency of our organization
2. Identify and optimize opportunities to protect and defend the working and natural lands of the Bear and Yuba River Watersheds
3. Create a culture of innovation, so that our challenges become our opportunities and our opportunities sustain our organization
4. Ensure the values and principles of our organization and community needs are considered during the analysis and deliberation of actions.
5. Deliver transparency to the decision-making process so that all involved may make informed decisions.

Projects and situations must pass the Core Funnel test before being considered a Catalyst for Innovation. From there discussions evaluate the environmental, social and economic impacts before a decision is made.

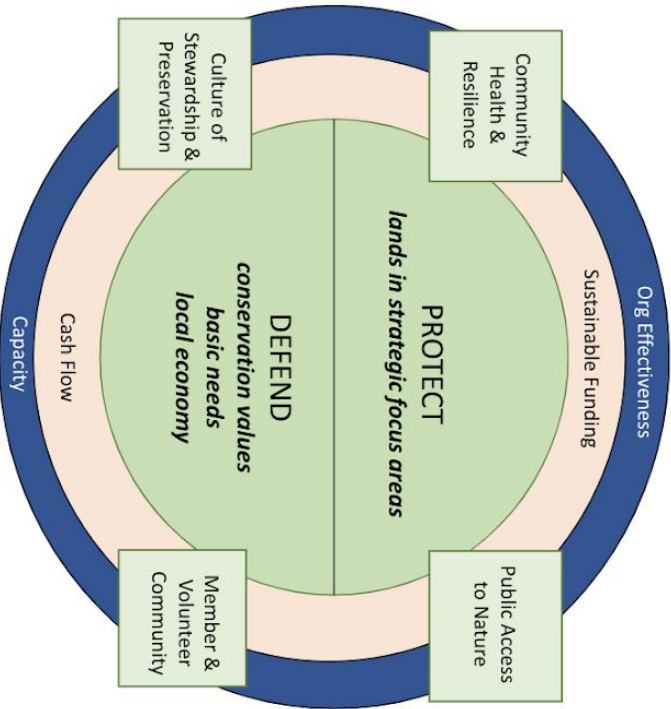
*[See diagram, next page]*



## BEAR YUBA LAND TRUST: DECISION-MAKING TOOL

This decision-making tool is designed to:

1. Enhance the effectiveness and efficiency of our organization.
2. Identify and optimize opportunities to protect and defend working and natural lands of the Bear and Yuba River Watersheds.
3. Create a culture of innovation, so that our challenges become our opportunities and our opportunities sustain our organization.
4. Ensure the values and principles of our organization and community needs are considered during the analysis and deliberation of actions.
5. Deliver transparency to the decision-making process so that all involved may make informed decisions.



- CATALYST FOR INNOVATION**
- ✓ Is this a potential catalyst for strategic, transformative and differentiated development, or is this "business as usual"?
  - ✓ Will this define and enhance the BYLT image to attract landowners, members, donors, volunteers, business support, conservation finance investors, and influencers?
  - ✓ Will this activate community involvement, participation and innovation?

- |   |  |   |
|---|--|---|
| <p><b>Environmental Impact</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Is there development potential?</li> <li>• Does it enhance or preserve open space?</li> <li>• Does it protect conservation values?</li> <li>• Does it reduce or mitigate carbon emissions?</li> <li>• Does it promote a more resilient community?</li> <li>• Does it positively affect community health?</li> <li>• Does it protect endangered or rare species?</li> <li>• Is it complementary use of public and private space?</li> <li>• Does it promote walkability or bikeability?</li> </ul> | <p><b>Social Impact</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Does it enhance a culture of environmental stewardship?</li> <li>• Does it promote conservation relevance?</li> <li>• Does it enhance sustainable recreation?</li> <li>• Does it positively impact public health and safety?</li> <li>• Does it bring the community together?</li> <li>• Is it equitable, just, and inclusive of diverse communities?</li> <li>• Does it acknowledge our cultural heritage?</li> <li>• Does it engage or support agencies or partners?</li> <li>• Is there public benefit?</li> </ul> | <p><b>Economic Impact</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Is it funded?</li> <li>• Will it attract potential funding?</li> <li>• Is there immediate revenue opportunities?</li> <li>• Is it of member or donor interest?</li> <li>• Is it visible?</li> <li>• Does it promote our Brand?</li> <li>• Does it promote agricultural?</li> <li>• Does it increase or promote tourism and/or outdoor recreation?</li> </ul> |
|---|--|---|

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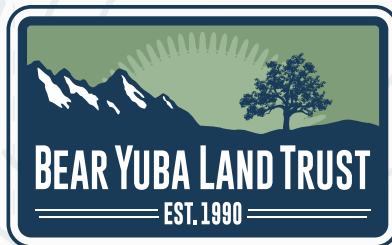
## SPECIAL ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

In late 2014, an ad-hoc Strategic Planning Committee was convened to begin the process and management of the 2019-2024 Strategic Plan. Surveys were conducted with insiders: Board, Staff, significant partners and stakeholders, members, supporters and influential local decision makers. Literature was surveyed and workshops, hosted by the Land Trust Alliance and the California Council of Land Trusts, were attended. Many hours were spent at a series of Board meetings and retreats, which included Staff, considering alternative proposals on a wide variety of topics from defining vision, discussing values and guiding principles, refining the mission and identifying objectives. A leadership change in early 2018 created an opportunity to reassess the state of the organization and an innovative strategic path forward.

Special thank you to the BYLT Board of Directors and Committee members for your incredible guidance and trust in the process. For all involved, we are grateful for the hundreds of volunteer hours you committed to shaping the vision and goals that will direct the course over the next five years. Onward!







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