

# Sonoma Mountain Journal

Volume 19, No. 1

November, 2019

**This year's Journal highlights  
access and preservation  
on Sonoma Mountain.**

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The first peoples of southern Sonoma county, the Coast Miwok, placed *oona-pa'is* — Sonoma Mountain — at the center of the world, imagining its summit as an island in the primordial ocean at the beginning of time.

Geologists tell a similar story —that Sonoma Mountain's layers of volcanic and sedimentary rock, pushed upward by tectonic forces, rose from the depths of a shallow sea.

**Our mission is to preserve  
Sonoma Mountain's scenic,  
agricultural, and natural  
resources by cultivating a  
sense of place, engaging people  
in the landscape, and  
inspiring them to become  
mountain stewards.**

## CREATING THE NORTH SONOMA MOUNTAIN RIDGE TRAIL

Kim Batchelder

Natural Resources Planner, Sonoma County Ag + Open Space

Sonoma County Agricultural Preservation and Open Space District (Ag + Open Space) has a diverse and multi-faceted mission. This mission includes the protection of scenic corridors, watersheds, greenbelts, agricultural lands and recreation. However, this mission would be impossible to complete in isolation. So Ag + Open Space has a long history of partnership with local and state partners and agencies that manage our parks and preserves. One project that highlights this collaborative effort is the North Sonoma Mountain Ridge Trail ("North Sonoma Mountain Trail"). Starting back in March 2005, Ag + Open Space embarked on the construction of a trail from Jacobs Ranch, off of Sonoma Mountain Road in Bennett Valley, to Jack London State Historic Park.

The vision for the trail had its genesis in two innovative efforts that had begun fifteen years before. In 1990, Sonoma County voters approved one of the first "public land trusts" in the United States to protect agricultural and open space lands through a quarter-cent sales tax. Since then, Ag + Open Space —that "public land trust" — has protected over 118,000 acres, including almost 3,750 acres on and around Sonoma Mountain. In 1992, the Bay Area Ridge Trail Council was formed with the ambitious vision of creating a 550-mile path along the ridge tops around San Francisco Bay. Today there are over 375 miles of dedicated Ridge Trail throughout the Bay Area.

The North Sonoma Mountain Trail got its start in 2003 when Ag + Open Space purchased the 168-acre Jacobs Ranch.

Over the next two years, the agency acquired the 47-acre Skiles Ranch and 226-acre Cooper's Grove. Other critical pieces to the puzzle were an 11-acre property donated by the Roth Family (who also gave the land for Fairfield Osborn Preserve) and the 84-acre Sonoma Mountain Woodlands parcel, originally given to Regional Parks to mitigate the impacts of a nearby subdivision. Finally, all the pieces were assembled for a trail that could gently climb from Jacobs Ranch for nearly five

*continued on page 6*

**"My first assignment for Sonoma Ag + Open Space was to develop the North Sonoma Mountain Ridge Trail. I remember visiting a small redwood grove on Jacobs Ranch — the proposed launching site for this magnificent trail—and just feeling exuberant about the idea of creating a path across such a spectacular landscape."**

—Kim Batchelder





## Letter from the Chair



### A GRATIFYING YEAR FOR THE MOUNTAIN!

Meg Beeler

*Where the World Begins* has been a local bestseller (Readers and Copperfields Books) for *six months!* To all of you who purchased, gifted, and raved about the book, thank you. To our donors—the many volunteers who helped make the book launches so much fun for nearly 600 attendees, the vintners who contributed wines, and those of you who made contributions—deep gratitude.

Creating the book has inspired your SMP Board and Steering Committee to vision a broader educational commitment and some exciting initiatives for SMP's next 25 years.

In August 2019, twelve of us gathered at Sonoma Mountain Ranch for a day of strategic visioning and planning. Two wonderful facilitators guided us in honing our mission as we identified five *potential* areas of focus:

- Trail accessibility and development on open space lands;
- Experiential education programs bringing people onto the mountain to encourage connection and understanding;
- A conference or gathering bringing landowners, SMP, and PRMD together for better understanding and collaboration;
- Expanded publications, including trail guides, editorials, maps, regular email newsletters, and a website update;
- Advocacy and collaboration with PRMD to consistently enforce the County's scenic guidelines governing ridgetop building (not

allowed) and the visual impact of new building and lighting from major roads.

Here's how we are thinking of SMP's mission:

**Our mission is to preserve Sonoma Mountain's scenic, agricultural, and natural resources by cultivating a sense of place, engaging people in the landscape, and inspiring them to become mountain stewards.** *You all help this process along every time you take a friend for a hike, gift the book, or volunteer with us.*

#### Changes, News, and Events

SMP's long-serving Treasurer, Jack Nisson, who kept track of all the changes as we moved from a minimal budget to a more complex system for book sales, ended his devoted service this summer. Please welcome our new Treasurer, Bob Bowler from Penngrove, to our Board.

We'll begin the new year with a special hike on the East Slope Trail, starting from the Eliot land at the top of Grove (making this beautiful trail much more accessible). Other experientially-focused hikes will begin in Winter 2020. Finally, our 3<sup>rd</sup> annual Trek across the Mountain with Landpaths will take place April 10 to 12, 2020 (see pg. 6). Our email newsletter is the best way to [get news](#) about hikes like these.

An additional seven hundred and twenty five acres of SDC open space will

become officially part of JLSHP and Regional Parks; a conservation easement to protect the lands permanently should be signed by the time you are reading this Journal.

The Petaluma City Council has allocated \$50K for Lafferty Ranch planning—270 more acres of open space on the west side.

#### SMP Earns Bronze Seal

This rating gives you one more reason to support our work on the mountain! You can donate through Paypal on our [website](#) or mail your check to PO Box 1772 Glen Ellen, CA 95442 (envelope enclosed). Thank you!



### GIFTS!

*Where the World Begins* makes a fine holiday gift for family and friends. Have it mailed to anyone in the US by purchasing [online](#). Or get your copies at Readers Books, Copperfields, Jack London and Sugarloaf State Parks, Laurel Glen, McCormick's Mercantile, Talisman, Kenwood Press, or the Petaluma Museum.



**SMP's current board**, from left: Nancy Kirwan, Secretary; Arthur Dawson, Vice Chair; Meg Beeler, Chair; Bob Bowler, Treasurer.

## TRIBUTE: TED ELIOT

Mickey Cooke, SMP Founder



A great deal of Ted's connection with Sonoma Mountain came from his spouse, Pat. Ted used to say that he watched the birth of Sonoma Mountain Preservation at their kitchen table. She was complaining about development and Ted said, "Why don't you do something about it?"

They were a fabulous couple who prodded each other to get things going. Ted would say, "If she had something she wanted, she got it." She was persistent. And so was he. As an Easterner, he didn't really know much about West Coasters. Then he met this wild, red-headed girl and fell in love. She didn't want to get married; it took him three years to convince her. They were wed in Sri Lanka, his first consular post.

Ted's diverse experiences shaped him and made him comfortable with everybody. He was born in a Manhattan brownstone with Boston wrapped around his neck—his grandfather was president of Harvard. How do you shake that? He would be the first to say he came from a family of

privilege. After graduating Harvard, he applied to the State Department kind of on a whim. It took him around the world, to consulates in Afghanistan, Russia and Sri Lanka. At the end of his career he was the man in Washington who collected all the documents that came into the State Department building. Whether it was super secret or just plain, Ted distributed it to the people who needed to use it. He knew everything and had earned a lot of trust and respect.

After Ted retired, he and Pat built a house on Sonoma Mountain. They really wanted to connect their property with the trails at Jack London Park (see pg. 7) Eventually they convinced the McCrae family to grant a trail easement across their property. Then the McCraes sold the land and the buyer reneged; he didn't want a trail up there. Ted went to the homeowner's association meeting in Sobre Vista, right below that property. The new owners were there and he just laid into them. He got fired up and told them what he thought. It was quite powerful. He was someone who rarely lost his temper—only if somebody was unfair and did something really wrong. I think he was a little ashamed afterwards. But he did the right thing; people took it seriously. It told you that his heart was where his effort was.

It was a down deep thing driving them to connect themselves with the central part of the mountain. And they got it done. But it took sixteen years. I think because of his work in government, Ted learned to tack when he couldn't get exactly what he wanted. But Pat wouldn't let him go too far. She was a good engine behind them. They really were a pair. Ted's love for the outdoors and conservation went back to Roger Tory Peterson, the grandpa of American birders. Ted learned his birding from this man, along the New England shoreline.

Probably the biggest thing Ted contributed to the mountain's preservation was getting the top 300 acres of the Developmental Center moved to Open Space. Ted was on their Advisory Board. The fact that they provided \$300,000 for it was because of him. The 300 acres below that, with the orchard, went to the park, again because he made a great deal of noise about it. Ted was always around when there was a need for funding. He could find people to give money for things. That was his big power. Just having him walking around behind Pat, his big tall presence, was really good.

### Join Us in 2020!

**Quarterly Steering Committee meetings:**  
**January 22; April 22; July 22 & October 28**  
(Wednesdays) 3:30 to 5:30 PM  
at the Sonoma Ecology Center, Eldridge  
(SDC campus. For directions call: 996-9967)

Guest speakers deepen our knowledge of the mountain at each meeting.  
You're encouraged to join us!

### Keep up with Issues and Events:

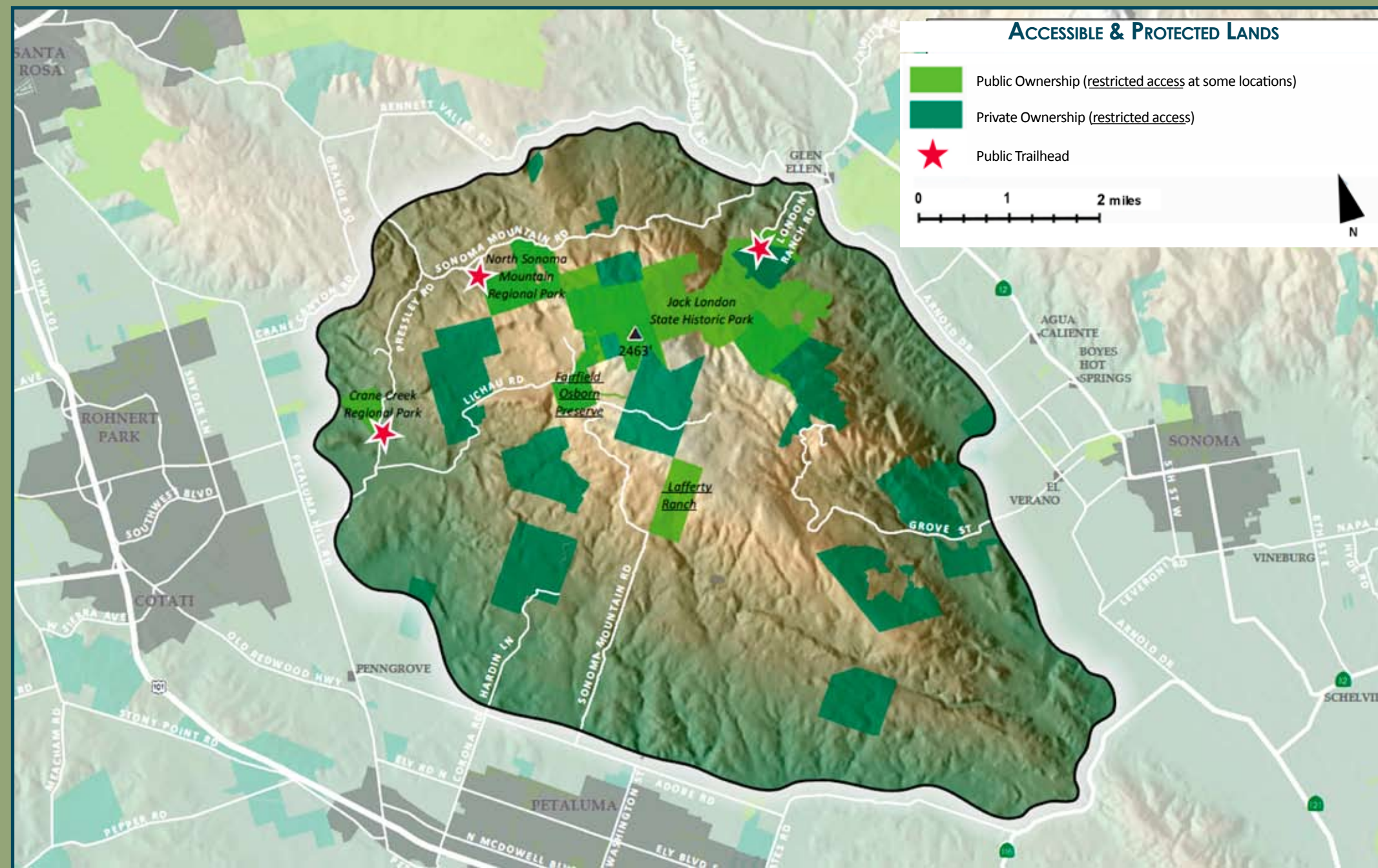
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or  
Paypal/credit card  
at  
[www.sonomamountain.org](http://www.sonomamountain.org)





## GETTING ON THE MOUNTAIN: FLAVORS OF ACCESS

- **Open public access** is found at state and regional parks. You may have to pay an entrance fee, but anyone can walk the trails, have a picnic etc.
- **Trail Easements** on private property allow public access, but users must remain on the trail. Please respect signs regarding private property--access depends on the continued goodwill of the landowner. The East Slope Sonoma Mountain Ridge Trail (p. 7) is one example.
- **Restricted public access** is provided at the Fairfield Osborn and Van Hoosear Preserves, both of which have guided walks and activities on a regular basis. They are owned by the state of California and a private landowner respectively (a conservation easement on VanHoosear is held by the county). Other private preserves do occasionally grant access, often through partnering with non-profit organizations such as Sonoma Land Trust, Land Paths and Sonoma Mountain Preservation.
- **Handicapped access** to trails, picnic areas and museums is found at Crane Creek and North Sonoma Mountain Regional Parks as well as Jack London State Historic Park. All these sites have ADA parking and restrooms.
- **No access:** Private property is off limits to the public unless you have an invitation from the owner. Portions of public land are sometimes placed off limits to protect sensitive habitat, wildlife, or human safety. In some places and seasons access is denied for certain types of uses (e.g. hiking, biking, equestrian).

## LEAVING A LEGACY

Arthur Dawson

At some point, most of us think about the legacy we will leave behind—what will be our gift to the future? There are tangible things, like family heirlooms and “real” estate. There are also intangible gifts, like a sense of wonder or an experience or mindset, that we try to impart to the next generation. It’s a compelling idea, the thought of passing along something valuable that will outlive our own lifetime.

Gifting land outright, or for a conservation easement, creates both a tangible and an intangible legacy that lasts forever—or at least as long as any of us can imagine. Outside the state and regional parks, more than a dozen easements protect

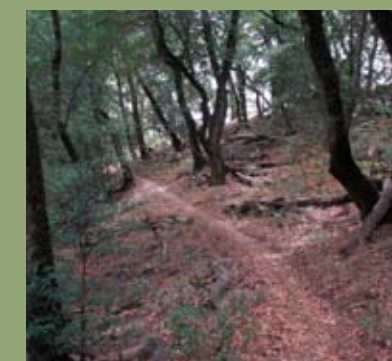
the treasures of Sonoma Mountain—its wildlife habitat and water, its viewsheds, its recreational opportunities and chances for quiet time in nature.

Protecting a property “forever” requires selling it to an organization or agency that will steward it; or placing a conservation easement on it while retaining ownership. A conservation easement is a voluntary, legal agreement between a landowner and a conservation organization or agency that permanently limits uses of the land in order to protect its conservation values. An easement allows owner to continue to live on and use their land, and to sell it or pass it along to their heirs.

In return for giving up a property’s development potential, the landowner is paid for those “lost” uses. Generally the stricter the limitations, the more control the owner gives up. Besides the financial reward, there is the satisfaction of contributing to local preservation efforts and the knowledge that their property is now part of a bigger conservation landscape.

The terms for conservation easements are open to negotiation. The owner might be allowed to build additional structures within established envelopes; or to use part of the parcel for agriculture. It all depends on the particular conservation values the buyer is interested in protecting. When the property is sold or passed down, the new owners

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East Slope Sonoma Mountain Ridge Trail. Public access here is over an easement granted on private property (see pg. 7).



Moutain Ridge Trail

Continued from page 1

miles along the north slope to a high point near the top of the mountain.

In 2005, the California State Coastal Conservancy approved a planning grant to help Ag + Open Space plan the trail. A technical Advisory Committee was formed that included the landowners, Ag + Open Space, Regional and State Parks, and the project’s funders—the Coastal Conservancy and Bay Area Ridge Trail Council. Financial and technical resources were pooled to bring in top trail designers with decades of experience. These included Don Beers of State Parks, Steve Ehret from Regional Parks, and Ridge Trail Steward John Aranson. Each of these individuals, agencies and organizations contributed to quality control and oversight—assisting Ag + Open Space in working through the design, environmental review and permitting processes. Under their guidance, an optimal trail alignment was laid out and features were established at the trailhead to meet the needs of equestrians, pedestrians, and cyclists.

A groundbreaking event took place on June 20, 2010 when construction of the North Sonoma Mountain Trail began at Jack London State Park. Simultaneously the acquisition of Sonoma Mountain’s summit with the purchase of the 283-acre Sonoma Mountain Ranch was celebrated. This completed the footprint for the 820-acre North Sonoma Mountain Regional Park and Open Space Preserve. It took another two and a half years to finish trail construction, trailhead development, access road improvements, and signage to complete the entire 4.5 mile trail. Another 1.4 miles, called the East Slope Sonoma Mountain Ridge Trail, were added in 2014, south of the state park. The East Slope Trail offers panoramic views of the Mayacamas Mountains and Sonoma Valley, as well as San Pablo Bay and Mt. Diablo to the south and east.

Third Annual  
SONOMA MOUNTAIN TREK  
April 10 - 12

Join LandPath’s TrekSonoma, Sonoma Mountain Preservation, and the Greenbelt Alliance for a long mountain wander.

Led by Land Paths staff and historical ecologist Arthur Dawson, we will explore a varied landscape, from ridgetops with far vistas to deeply shaded redwood groves, tracking the stories of nature and human history.

Trek includes: 6-7 miles walking/day; transportation of gear and shuttle; overnight at Jack London Vineyard; home-cooked organic and/or local meals.

Cost to be determined. Rental tents and sleeping pads available.

The trek fills quickly!  
For more info, please contact:  
Emmett Hopkins  
[emmett@landpaths.org](mailto:emmett@landpaths.org)

Ag + Open Space learned many lessons in reaching these ambitious trail goals. Most impressive was the collaboration of so many partners, neighbors, and volunteers. Not-for-profit groups such as LandPaths and Sonoma County Trails Council engaged people and rallied supporters to provide input for features that could be offered to the public. Government agencies secured matching financial resources to contribute to construction costs on State Park land, and neighbors provided access for construction equipment and materials to remote trail sections.

The partners who envisioned and built this trail faced many challenges. Yet persistence, a long-term vision and committed collaboration among partners, advocates and funders resulted in an amazing trail that is thoroughly enjoyed by Sonoma County residents and tourists alike.

Leaving a Legacy

Continued from page 5

will also be bound by the terms of the easement.

Easements may apply to a whole property or just a portion. Public access is negotiable and not a requirement. Owners can sell or donate a conservation easement. If it benefits the public by protecting important resources and meets other requirements, it can qualify as a tax deduction. Depending on the situation, donating or selling an easement may result in a property tax savings as well.

Conservation easements can also be an essential tool for passing land on to the next generation. Removing the land’s development potential lowers its market value, which in turn lowers estate tax. It can make a critical difference in the ability of the heirs to keep the land intact.

Both the Sonoma Land Trust, a private non-profit, and the Sonoma Ag + Open Space District, a county agency, are actively involved in protecting local land through easements and acquisitions for conservation. They can be contacted at:

Sonoma Land Trust: (707) 526-6930  
[www.sonomalandtrust.org](http://www.sonomalandtrust.org)  
Ag + Open Space: (707) 565-7360  
[www.sonomaopenspace.org](http://www.sonomaopenspace.org)

WHAT IF?

Sonoma County Superior Court recently upheld Sonoma Land Trust’s authority to protect its conservation easements, enforcing laws used to protect land. New landowners were found to have “knowingly and intentionally” violated an easement by relocating and killing heritage oak trees and destroying a portion of protected ecosystem. They were ordered to cover the cost of restoring the land.

“We made a promise when we took the easement on,” said Bob Neale of Sonoma Land Trust. We made a promise to the land, and we made a promise and an agreement with our community that we’re going to do the things we say we’re going to do. That’s a commitment we take seriously.”

EAST SLOPE  
SONOMA MOUNTAIN RIDGE TRAIL

Arthur Dawson

The East Slope Trail brings you to one of the most remote publicly accessible areas on the mountain. You’ll be treated to panoramas of Sonoma Valley, Mount Diablo and San Pablo Bay; groves of redwoods, madrone, fir, and heritage black oaks; and if you desire, plenty of solitude. Though high on the mountain, there’s usually a little running water too. A round-trip journey requires five or six hours. Shorter trips on a portion of the trail are also well worth it.

Depart from the upper parking lot at Jack London State Historic Park, above Glen Ellen, and follow the ranch road/trail around the vineyard and up to the lake you’ll see a sign (0.5 mi) where a path leaves the road—both the path and the road end up at the lake. Follow the road past London’s stone dam (0.9 mi) and then turn right up the hill, still following the road, now called the **Mountain Trail**.

After climbing through the forest above the lake and passing two trails on the left, you’ll come to a wet spot made by a spring. Almost immediately make a left on the **Sonoma Ridge Trail (2.1 mi)**. After about fifteen minutes, the trail angles up a canyon with redwoods huddled at the bottom and crosses a fork of Asbury Creek (still running in September) on a bridge.

A few minutes later, the view opens briefly to the east, then switchbacks begin and there are some beautiful , gnarled ancient manzanita beside the trail. Nearing the top of the ridge, you’ll get a view north to Mount St. Helena and may catch a welcome ocean breeze as you top out.

Now it’s easy strolling as the trail winds along with just a little up and down. You can go left or right at the next trail junction (4.1 mi; **Sonoma Ridge Loop**)—both soon bring you to a four-way intersection (4.2 mi). A sign for ‘**Coon Trap**’ points downhill. Take the trail to its right (south), which is the **East Slope Sonoma Mountain Ridge Trail**. Descend on switchbacks, then climb the far side of a little drainage.



About fifteen minutes beyond the junction is a grove of impressive black oaks. Their spreading branches and open canopies may have been created by indigenous people, who prized black oaks for their acorns and tended them by pruning. A few minutes more brings a view of the Bay and the trail’s end at the ‘Eliot Family Loop’ (5.5 mi).

The return should go quickly (2 or 2 1/2 hours). On reaching the parking lot you’ll have walked 11 miles and experienced a part of the mountain few people see.



The Sonoma Ridge Trail and the East and North Slope Sonoma Mountain Ridge Trails are sections of the 550-mile Bay Area Ridge Trail circling San Francisco Bay. It’s a work in progress, with 375 miles open to the public. Trail map courtesy of the Bay Area Ridge Trail Council.  
[www.ridgetrail.org](http://www.ridgetrail.org)



Sonoma Mountain Preservation

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Thank you to our California State legislative delegation, Sonoma County Board of Supervisors, and the City Councils of Petaluma, Rohnert Park, Santa Rosa and Sonoma for their support, including official Proclamations recognizing the work of Sonoma Mountain Preservation.

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