

Sonoma Mountain Journal

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This year's Journal highlights the Sonoma Developmental Center—its past, present and future.

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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.

Lend the Mountain a Hand

We're looking for:

- Sonoma Mountain photos
- "Why I Love the Mountain" stories
- Assistance with updating FaceBook
- Someone to post blogs in WordPress
- Blogs about the mountain (anything you find interesting!)
- Someone to oversee referrals from County PRMD

Sonoma Developmental Center at a Crossroads

John McCaull, Sonoma Land Trust

How often does a place inspire us to slow down? Venturing off Highway 12 near Glen Ellen, the Sonoma Developmental Center—or SDC—has that time-out-of-time character. Green lawns, ball fields and shady spots beckon us to take a walk, or have a picnic. The forests on Sonoma Mountain can be explored on trails linked to Jack London State Park. The Valley floor's oak woodlands and grasslands are accessible through Sonoma Valley Regional Park. Because the property is state-owned, it's easy to assume that SDC is protected and not facing any threats of imminent change. But in reality, the future of SDC is at a crossroads.

Developmental centers are expensive to run and serve a dwindling resident population. Legal mandates require that most clients be transferred to community-based care. A 2014 Health and Human Services Agency report concluded that Developmental Centers will need to transition "to a new model." The "new model" for SDC is unclear, but

the Report recommends a course that threatens closure and possible sale of the facility.

Surplus Property

If SDC is sold as "surplus" property, the loss to our community will be profound. What will happen to the current 400+ residents and others who need its facilities? If the property is sold for development or vineyards, what will become of the wildlife and open space? SDC is the heart of the Sonoma Valley Wildlife Corridor, a crucial wildlife passage for the entire North Bay. The property has an abundant water supply, tremendous habitat value, and the capacity to serve an array of health, economic, social, environmental, recreational and aesthetic needs for the region. The state's track record of closing developmental centers is one of top down politics, with very little public input. How can we convince the state to give our community a voice and listen to creative ideas and scenarios they may not be considering?

The SDC Coalition

In order to serve as an organized voice for local and regional interests, Sonoma County Supervisor Susan Gorin, county agencies, Sonoma Land Trust, Sonoma Mountain Preservation, Sonoma Ecology Center, Parent Hospital Association and others formed the "SDC Coalition" in 2012.

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Letter from the Chair



Dreaming Large

Meg Beeler

Sonoma Mountain Preservation has been working behind the scenes for over 21 years, helping preserve the scenic, agricultural and natural resources of Sonoma Mountain.

Lately, we've been dreaming big dreams: imagining all the 800 acres of SDC wildlands being transferred to Jack London State Historic Park and Sonoma County Regional Parks...looking forward to walking two new trails on the mountain's East and North Slopes...and celebrating the late 2014 opening of Sonoma Mountain Regional Park & Open Space Preserve near the summit, comprised of 738 acres we helped preserve.

To help realize these big dreams, we've created a social media presence with a new FaceBook page for timely posts (over 225 likes already!). On our updated web page we have a PayPal link so you can donate directly if you like, and we've been running a "Why I Love the Mountain" campaign, posting blogs from community members. Check them out, send your own blog, and, of course, like us!

As part of our preservation work, two Steering Committee members—Mickey Cooke and Pat Eliot—have been your representatives at the monthly SDC Coalition meetings. The Coalition is weaving the concerns and issues of SDC families and employees

with the broader community's need for more open space, presenting a powerful, united front to negotiate the best possible outcomes with the State. As a long-time organizer and change advocate, it is exciting for me to see such deep cooperation within the community!

You'll notice that the enclosed envelope asks for your email address. In the long run, we are looking at distributing the Journal electronically. More immediately, we'd like to notify you quickly when the SDC process needs broad community input and support.

Shifting Visions

Arthur Dawson

Like cloud shadows playing over Sonoma Mountain, many dreams have come and gone on the lands of the Sonoma Developmental Center (SDC). Picture the place before humans arrived—a mosaic of redwoods, grasslands, oak woodlands, with lush alders and willows along Sonoma Creek. Creatures from freshwater shrimp to grizzly bears made it their home. Rich with life, it was not subject to human visions of what it should or could be. It just was.

We can't know what dreams the First Peoples brought. Certainly they recognized the place as abundant; enough so that several villages were established nearby. How did those individuals and communities share the resources and lands of the future SDC? According to historian William Cronon, native communities claimed "not the land, but the things that were on the land."

Neighboring groups recognized each other's right to hunt, fish and gather in specific territories. By agreement, these boundaries were generally respected. Within

a group, members shared many of the resources on their communal land. However, rights to the acorns from a particular oak, or fish from a certain pool, were often held and passed down by a family. Repeated use established such rights and could be lost if a resource was not used regularly.

Landscape-scale decisions, such as the common practice of intentional burning, were made communally. Others, like deciding when to prune or fertilize an acorn-bearing oak, were up to the families that held the rights to those resources. Before Europeans arrived, the resources at SDC were probably managed in a patchwork of recognized family and communal rights.

Another vision of ownership appeared in 1579, when Sir Francis Drake claimed California for England under the "Right of Discovery" recognized in Europe. By 1823, California was a Mexican territory and Father Altimira came here seeking to establish a new mission. His explorations took him across the SDC lands. Gazing at Sonoma Mountain, he saw it both for what it was and what it could be, describing it as "well covered with trees fit for building a pueblo."

It was General Vallejo who realized Altimira's dream. As the mission





children. Frances Bentley and Julia Judah dreamed of a place where such children could be cared for. Passionately lobbying politicians and influential citizens, they eventually convinced the California legislature to designate public funds for the idea in 1889. Hill's ranch was

chosen as the institution's permanent site.

At that point, SDC lands returned to a form of communal ownership—held in trust by the State for the benefit of the clients and broadly, for all Californians. The vision included a measure of self-reliance—the patients would be “trained to usefulness” while the institution strove to be “self-provisioning” with a dairy and cattle operation, vineyards, and orchards.

Even as that vision came to pass, times were changing. Forty years ago, 162 acres of SDC's former grazing lands were transferred to the county and became the Sonoma Valley Regional Park. Twenty years later, SDC's upper 600 acres (once Charity Asbury's) were declared surplus by the State Department of General Services (DGS). The Department's idea was to lease this land for vineyard development. Sonoma Mountain Preservation and many local politicians, organizations and agencies had a different dream—that these acres be added to Jack London State Park. It took five years of concerted effort, but that dream won out.

The Sonoma Developmental Center is a big property deserving of a big vision. With the institution moving towards closure, many are working hard to creatively imagine its future. The hope is that whatever vision emerges will be equal to the size, the history and the richness of the place.

system was dismantled, Vallejo claimed the 66,000-acre *Rancho Petaluma*, including all of SDC west of Sonoma Creek. In 1839, he built one of the first lumber mills in California nearby. Redwoods and Douglas fir from the slopes of SDC were cut and milled into lumber for the pueblo of Sonoma.

In the wake of logging, people with a different vision arrived; American pioneers. Among them were Charity Asbury and her family, who settled SDC's upper lands, purchasing 640 acres from General Vallejo. Others came with the same idea—to establish small, self-sufficient farms. They worked hard, but turning that dream into reality was difficult—the mountain slopes were not favorable for agriculture. Many sold or abandoned their property.

By the 1870s, William Hill had put together several parcels, including the Asburys', into a large ranch stretching from Sonoma Mountain across the valley to what is now Highway 12. In so doing he established the boundaries of the future SDC. Hill's vision was bigger and more commercial than the mountain pioneers', with 125 acres of vineyard, orchards, hayfields, and cattle herds. From its earliest days, the Hill Ranch saw some public use. A county road ran through it and in the 1880s, two railroads laid their tracks across it. Fishermen and hunters also enjoyed the property.

The next dream arose in the minds of two prominent San Franciscans who were mothers of disabled

Grazing for Biodiversity

Pat Eliot and Nate Chisolm

Sonoma Mountain Institute (SMI) comprises 400 acres of woodland and meadow high on the southwest flank of Sonoma Mountain. Owned by Susannah Schroll, SMI is carrying out a grazing experiment on the former Moon Ranch. The project, certified by the California Certified Organic Farmers, provides organic grass for grazing while also restoring health to the soil.

The Institute's methods mimic the behavior of wild ungulates and are designed to restore the land to its former pristine condition. Electrically-fenced lanes retain herds of 100 cattle in small paddocks for short periods. This encourages light grazing and diminishes hoof impact while removing thatch and keeping manure sparse. The earth is left open and pliant, ready to benefit from winter rains.

Only 90% of the pasture is grazed; in areas which are not grazed, the earth is actually less productive.

The Herder Boys: Nate's View

Byron Palmer and I are Sonoma Mountain Institute's herder boys. While we spend our days with cattle, we aren't really in the beef or dairy business. Our performance reviews focus on whether we have created good native grassland habitat. Cattle are great tools for helping native grasses and can make restoration pay.

There's something about a job that focuses your mind. For us,

continued on page 4



The Future of SDC

Continued

The Coalition continues to grow, and now includes state employee unions, state and federal legislators, Impact100 Sonoma, historical preservation groups and regional care providers for the developmentally disabled. The Coalition has also attracted participation by the Department of Developmental Services that operates SDC. Their attendance has built trust and fostered new lines of communication with state leaders in Sacramento.

The Coalition is not organized to advocate for particular outcomes for SDC. Instead, the Sonoma Land Trust has raised funds for an 18-month visioning and planning effort that will launch in 2015. The "Transform SDC" Project will engage the community to develop recommendations for future uses of the SDC land, health care and infrastructure.

A Shared Vision

The most important goal of "Transform SDC" is to tap the imaginations, technical skills, intellectual capital and passion of those who care about Sonoma Valley. Developing a shared vision for the future of the SDC site will require combining community dialogue with technical expertise in public-private financing partnerships, legal issues, land use, innovative health care service and funding models, and ecosystem management and protection. Although there are no perfect parallels for this process, the establishment of the Presidio Trust provides a relevant starting point for this effort.

We don't know where we will end up, but in the late 1990's, local advocates "transformed" a proposal to develop 600 acres



"The site is a favorite one with our visitors, and truly excites the mind to the loftiest thoughts."

"The air is ever mild, the sun is ever bright and warming."

It is a place of "almost ideal reclusiveness, where nature seldom frowns, and where all the elements are benign."

—1891 description of SDC

of SDC for vineyards into another outcome: the land was annexed to Jack London State Park. This victory serves as the inspiration for our current challenge. At the dedication ceremony for SDC's opening in 1891, the keynote speaker's closing remarks paid tribute to founding activists Julia Judah and Frances Bentley. For them, he said, "there was no such word as fail."

Grazing for Biodiversity

Continued

that involves large animals and nature, and that has a positive effect. While we wait for the cattle to finish their paddock, sometimes we have time to sit under a shade tree and watch the season unfold. We know by checking our socks that the grass seeds have matured and are falling off the plants. Since we are always looking at the ground, we know there were almost no bay nuts this year. We absorb bird songs and weather patterns and get a good dose of fresh air, sunlight and exercise.

One of the frustrating things for us is that it takes a full year to see the impacts from our management. It is a pretty delayed feedback cycle due to the Mediterranean climate. Winter rains create a short growing season followed by a long dormant season, which slows

biological activity and the speed at which organic matter can be cycled through the system. It's not something you can speed up, which slows down how fast you can learn and obtain meaningful data. In climates with more evenly distributed rainfall, you can see results and impacts quicker than in California.

Drought

We normally keep cattle enclosed with a single temporary electric fence. This allows us to fine tune our management and follow slope contours, vegetation changes and shady spots under the oak trees. For an electric fence to work, the soil must have enough water to conduct electricity. This hasn't been a problem in our area in living memory. But by July 19th, soil moisture dropped so low that the soil no longer conducted electricity. How do I know this? The fence failed. The cows celebrated their new-found freedom with a parade that stretched all over the ranch. Nature is generous when dispensing humility.

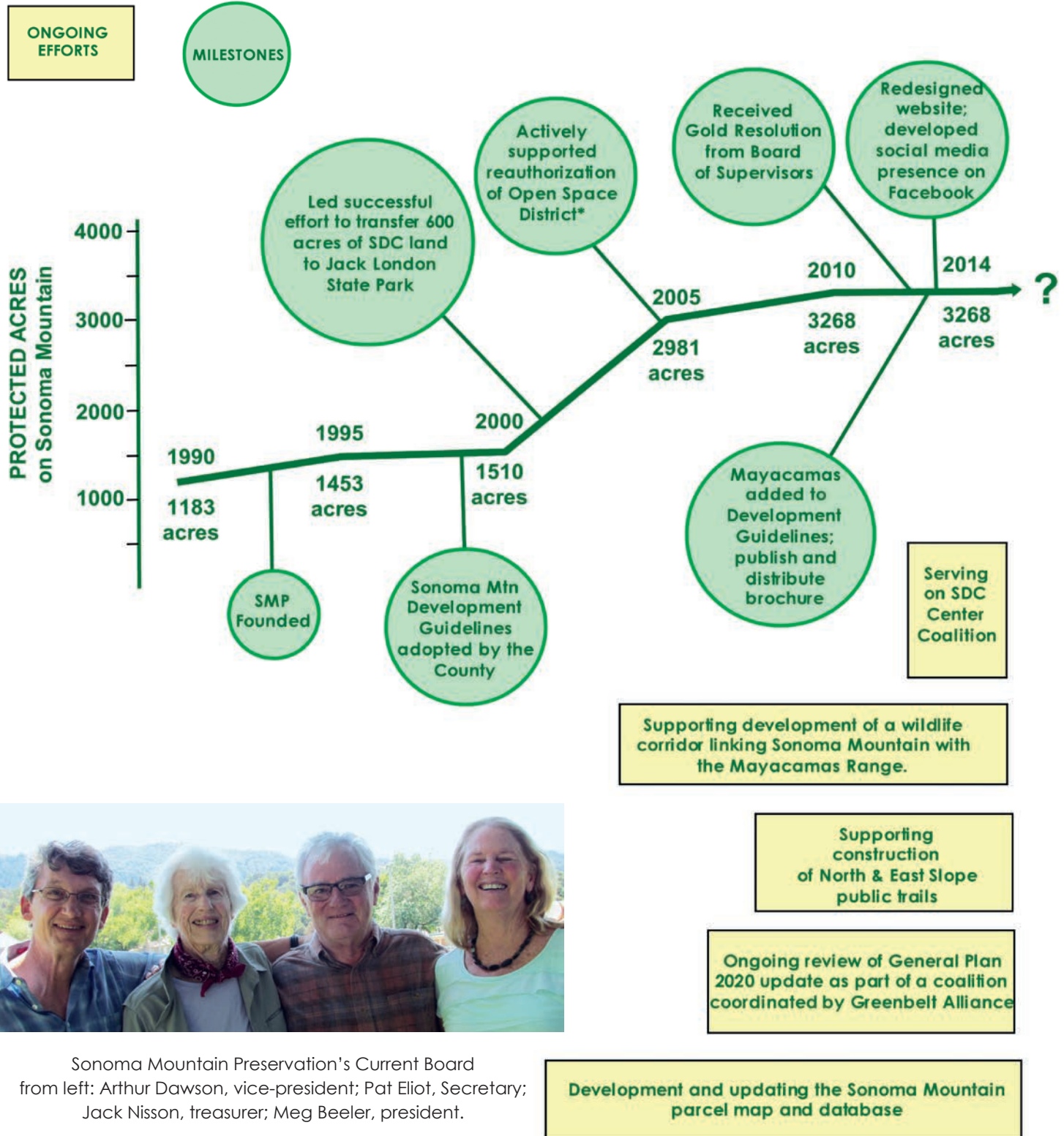
Working with living things isn't always convenient. However, a living system needs living managers. Cattle have their place and so do people. It would take a lot of people to manage all our land effectively and that's a good thing. Humans need to be open to weather, sunshine, a connection with plants and animals, and the lessons of nature. Otherwise we don't function properly either. You can't help but wonder what such a huge dose of nature would do for our society and...well, I guess those are shade tree daydreams.

For now, we're pretty content moving the cattle 'round in a circle, as Byron says. We just hope that someday the circle will be a little bigger.

For more information, visit:
www.sonomamountaininstitute.org

Sonoma Mountain Preservation Twenty-One Years of Achievement!

Our mission is to preserve the scenic, agricultural and natural resources of Sonoma Mountain; to expand recreational opportunities there; and to provide a forum for constructive discussion of issues relating to the mountain.



Sonoma Mountain Preservation's Current Board
from left: Arthur Dawson, vice-president; Pat Eliot, Secretary;
Jack Nisson, treasurer; Meg Beeler, president.

Mountain Birdlife

Kathi Province, Kathleen Mugele & Ted Eliot

Sonoma Mountain supports a vast array of bird species in its diverse habitat and varied ecosystems. The western slopes and wind-scoured mountaintop, which receive hot afternoon sun, are primarily grasslands with occasional copses of oak and bay laurel. The eastern and southern slopes are mostly bay laurel and oak woodland. Spring-fed streams create cool environments that provide much needed shelter and food.

About 120 species breed, migrate through, or visit Sonoma Mountain. The Golden-crowned Sparrow winters here and nests as far north as Alaska. Her smaller cousin, the White-crowned Sparrow, is also a welcomed visitor at wintertime feeders. Hungry migrants feast on local delicacies, dropping in to rest and refuel before continuing their long seasonal hegiras. Flocks of Chestnut-backed Chickadees often include colorful Yellow, Wilson's, Orange-Crowned, and Black-Throated Gray Warblers.

Grasslands host many delightful songbirds, including the elusive Grasshopper Sparrow, Lark Sparrow, Horned Lark, and Savannah Sparrow. Killdeer and Western Meadowlarks, once more commonplace, find refuge from vineyard development in uncultivated land. Western Bluebirds and Lazuli Buntings contribute their impossible brilliance to the landscape. So do Black-headed Grosbeaks and Western



Western Meadowlark

Tanagers nesting in the oak woodlands. The few ponds on the mountain attract Canada Geese, a few species

of duck and wading birds like the Great Blue Heron.



Red-shouldered hawk

Many birds of prey live on the mountain, helping keep rodent populations in check. Golden Eagles live here year-round, although recently their numbers seem to be declining. Red-tailed and Red-shouldered Hawks take advantage of updrafts along the mountain flanks, and are often seen soaring overhead or sitting on a strategic perch. The American Kestrel and two Accipiters—the Sharp-shinned and the Cooper's Hawk—also inhabit the mountain. The gorgeous White-tailed Kite can be seen hovering over grasslands looking for its next meal.

Four species of owl reside here—the magnificent Great Horned, the diminutive Western Screech, the Northern Pygmy and the Barn Owl. In the past, old-growth, forest-dependent Spotted Owls have nested in the area. Noisy, croaking Ravens are common, as are Turkey Vultures, who use their sense of smell to find the carrion they clean up.

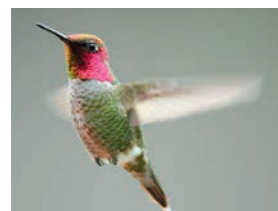
Woodpeckers, including the Pileated, Acorn, Hairy, Downy, Nuttalls, Red-breasted Sapsucker and Northern Flicker forage on insects in the bark of decaying trees. The Pileated is our largest woodpecker at 19 inches. With a majestic ruby red crest, it brings a sense of awe with its undulating flight, loud squawking, and

sheer enormity. Wild Turkeys, an introduced species, have greatly increased in numbers, and are often seen foraging for amphibians, insects, and reptiles. American Robins and Band-tailed Pigeons, both year-round residents, feast in large flocks on Madrone and Toyon berries and clean up unharvested grapes in the fall.

Anna's is the only year-round, resident hummingbird. In the summertime or during migration, you may catch a glimpse of the bright orange *Selasphorus* (Rufous or Allen's). These jewels sip nectar from native plants or feeders; when raising young, they gather bugs.

New knowledge is continually being developed and the impacts of climate change, development and agriculture assessed. A five-year, breeding-bird atlas project for Sonoma County—sponsored by the Madrone Chapter of the National Audubon Society—is in its fourth year of data collection. Results will be compared with those of the original survey in 1995. (Visit: www.pwrc.usgs.gov/bba).

To learn more about our mountain's bird mysteries, the annual Audubon Christmas bird count is a great

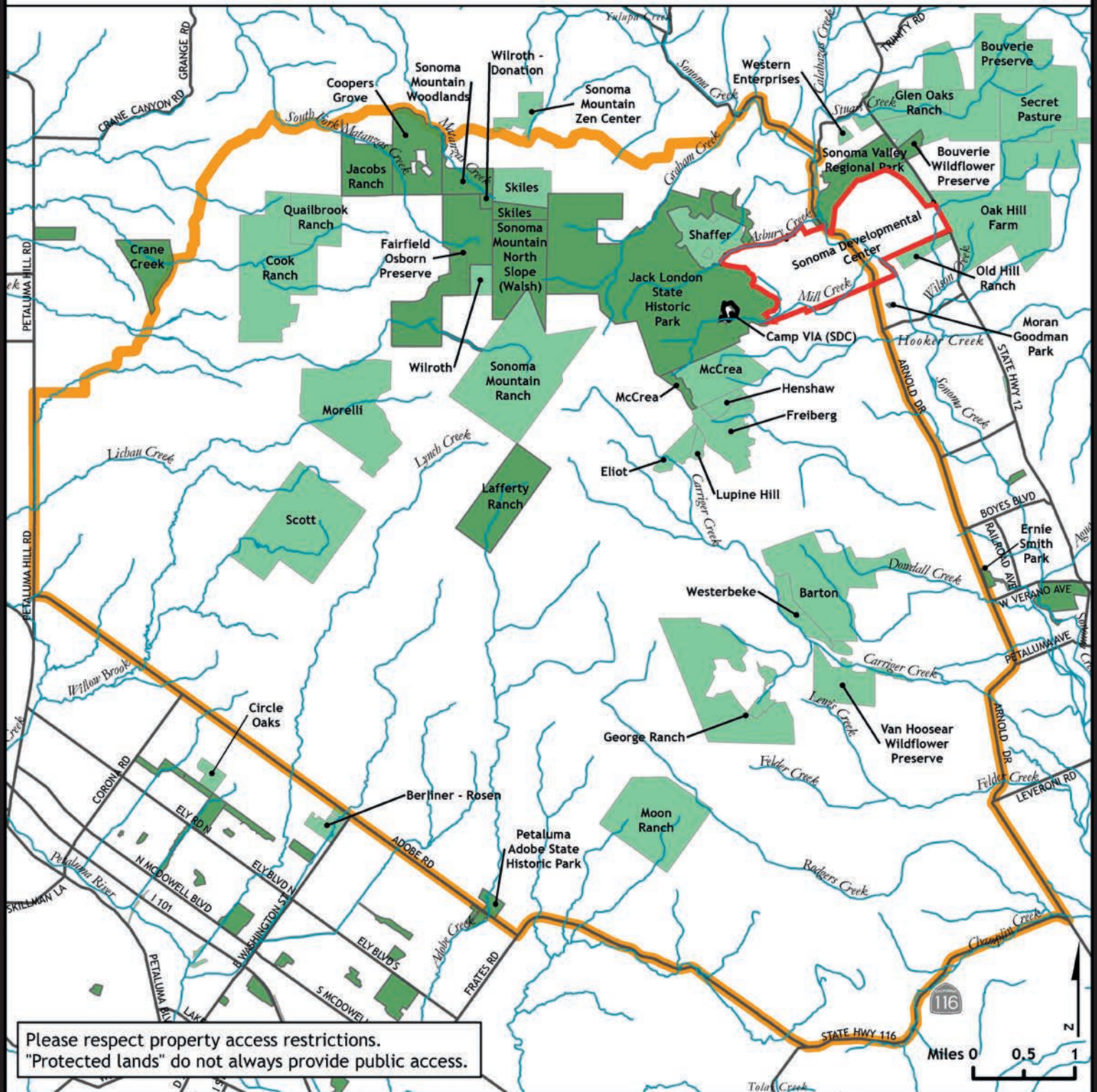


Anna's Hummingbird

way to see and learn many species in a single day (See: www.sonomabirding.com.) The birdlife of Sonoma Mountain is worthy of a lifetime of study and observation; so is carrying a pair of binoculars when walking on the Mountain.

Sonoma Mountain Preservation's work to protect bird habitat is critical for our feathered friends!

Sonoma Mountain Protected Areas



Sonoma Mountain Preservation

5850 Grove Street Sonoma CA 95476

web site : sonomamountain.org



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