

Sonoma Mountain Journal

Volume 24, No. 1

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Oona-pa'is, or Sonoma Mountain, occupies the unceded ancestral lands of the Coast Miwok people, who are closely related to other Indigenous peoples of southern Sonoma County.

We are grateful for their ongoing stewardship and take inspiration from the idea that the mountain has occupied a central place in the world since time immemorial.



LETTER FROM THE CHAIR

Tracy Salcedo

The theme of this edition of the Sonoma Mountain Preservation Journal is opportunity, and it's important to acknowledge that much of the opportunity this nonprofit now celebrates is born of another theme: change. This has been a year of transformation for us on several scores, and the opportunities continue to reveal themselves.

First things first: Two long-standing board members, Arthur Dawson and Kim Batchelder, have stepped away from their positions as directors. We at SMP offer gratitude to both for their many years of service. Arthur served most recently as chair, and also as vice chair and primary author of the organization's best-selling book, *Where the World Begins*, which showcases Sonoma Mountain in all its glory. Kim, who works with Sonoma County Ag + Open Space, generously offered his insights into how to make SMP's advocacy more effective in the halls of government. In Arthur's absence, I have stepped into a leadership role with the organization, filling enormous (in the nicest way) shoes. It's an honor and pleasure to serve SMP in this way, and I hope I do well by the mountain, my fellow directors, and SMP's supporters, for as long as I hold the chair.

I'd like to introduce our new Communications Specialist, Soneile Hymn. Soneile has been worked behind the scenes with SMP for as long as I've been involved. She's done an amazing job producing our social media posts, curating our monthly newsletter, and tackling administrative tasks that have streamlined our operations. She not only brings great talent to the table, but also a passion for Sonoma Mountain and curiosity about how best to serve.

Another introduction: Mark Hannon joined the board of directors early in 2024. He has hit the ground running (so to speak), leading our most recent hike at Tolay Lake and agreeing to be our vice chair, a board position formerly held by yours truly.

SMP will, in the next few months, also bid a fond and appreciative farewell to our long-time treasurer, Bob Bowler. He has done a stellar job of keeping us on track as our donor base and advocacy efforts have expanded.

So, on to the opportunity: If you are interested in joining the board, and particularly if your skillset includes fiscal expertise, please reach out. We are a fun, dedicated bunch who share a love for the mountain and all the communities it supports.

The articles in this Journal illuminate other opportunities to deepen our connections to Sonoma Mountain. Board member Larry Modell describes what's happening at Lafferty Ranch. Soneile delves into the story of one of the newest preserved properties on the mountain, where we have the opportunity to explore the natural history of vernal pools. Board chair emeritus Meg Beeler describes SMP's expanded hiking program. I've written about the opportunities for improved trail access and interpretation on the newly acquired open space in Glen Ellen.

Finally, check out the new map created by Alex Young, which shows existing lands either preserved or conserved on the mountain, and the expansive opportunities to make connections for wildlife and for people.

As SMP launches into its fourth decade of advocacy, it's clear the opportunities to increase connections with, and on, this remarkable mountain remain as boundless as the views from the summit. We hope you'll join us as we continue to celebrate Sonoma Mountain.

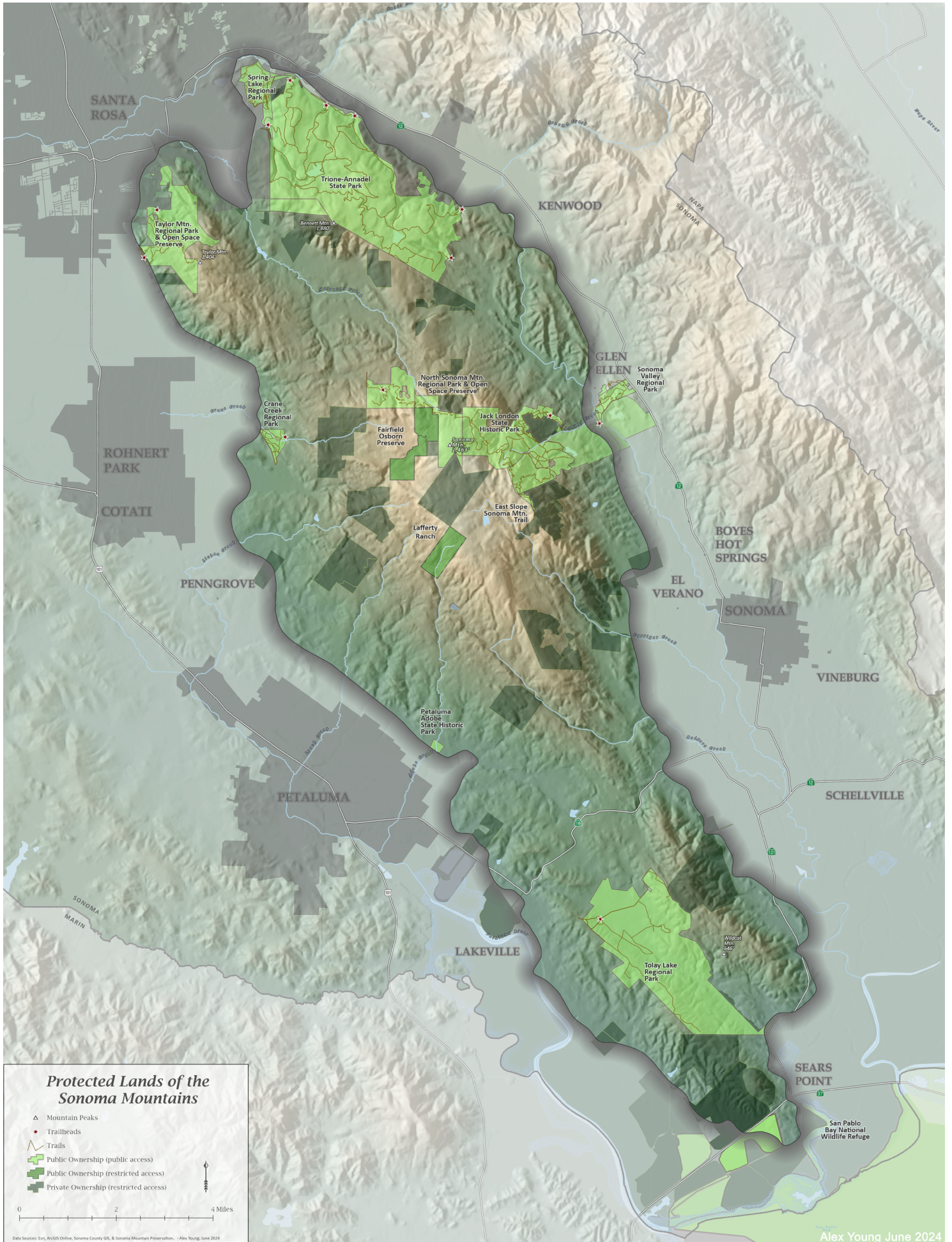
Stories Inside

Sonoma Mountain Trails
Lafferty Ranch Open Space
Sonoma Developmental
Center
Vernal Pools
SMP Accomplishments

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

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Alex Young June 2024

EXPERIENCE SONOMA MOUNTAIN FROM THE TRAIL

By Meg Beeler

Imagine getting to see east and south to San Pablo Bay, Mount Tam, Mount Diablo, Sonoma Valley, and the Mayacamas, all on the same hike on a privately held, conserved trail. Imagine meeting the 2,000 year-old Grandmother Redwood, or an ancient, gnarled madrone that turns and twists toward the sky, a dancing tree. Imagine walking to stretch and exercise, and also to slow down, sense, notice, and learn about the mountain in our midst. These are some of the treats of joining SMP on our hikes.

What makes our hikes most unique is the passion and enthusiasm we have for Sonoma Mountain. It bubbles over and brings out the same in others. We engage with the land. We call your attention to rock formations, unusual trees and plants, and spectacular views. We explore native wildflowers and ecosystems, creatures, Indigenous history, geology, and wildlife corridors with the experts who accompany us. We encourage sharing: Questions, comments, and participant wisdom are welcomed. We stop long enough for you to take in the vastness and beauty, the wonderment of a three-inch praying mantis along the trail, or the scat of a bobcat. Sometimes we're quiet for a while so everyone can listen for the running creek, the blue-belly lizards scurrying in the grass, the wind rustling leaves.

We want you to remember the long branch of a coast live oak reaching sideways and inviting a sit, the surprise of blue lupine and orange poppies blanketing a field in the spring, sunlight filtering through the trees, the views across the Petaluma River estuary. Every visual and physical memory helps you build relationship with our mountain. The more we love the land, the more we want to preserve it!



Links to all SMP hikes appear in our monthly newsletters and on social media. Join us! Photos by Scott Hess.



Celebrating SMP's 30th Anniversary

In the years following publication of *Where the World Begins: Sonoma Mountain Stories and Images* in 2018, SMP's board members started leading a few hikes each year. Then, in 2024, we decided to organize nine special hikes to celebrate our 30th anniversary. We wanted to show participants the range of possibilities and the diversity our mountain offers.

Fabulous vistas are a hallmark. From the west or north sides of the mountain, you may see the Santa Rosa Plateau, Mount Saint Helena, the Petaluma River, Mount Tam, and San Pablo Bay. From the east side you can see San Pablo Bay, Mount Tam, Mount Diablo, Sonoma Valley, and the Mayacamas. Over half the hikes explore privately owned lands not normally accessible for visits. Here's the full list to whet your appetite:

- Eighth annual New Year's Day East Slope Hike
- Lafferty Ranch and Adobe Creek, a joint hike with LandPaths docents
- Van Hoosier Wildflower Preserve
- Grandmother Redwood on the former Sonoma Developmental Center lands, now part of Jack London State Historic Park, beginning at Fern Lake, with State Parks' permission, to cut off 2–3 miles of uphill
- Sonoma Mountain Vernal Pools, a joint hike with Sonoma Land Trust
- North Sonoma Mountain Regional Park and Open Space Preserve, featuring the park's conservation story and trail design
- Fairfield Osborn, learning about Sonoma State University student projects exploring geology and reptiles (two visits)
- Tolay Lake Regional Park, with special emphasis on Indigenous and settler history



LAFFERTY:

A generational opportunity for public access on the Petaluma side of Sonoma Mountain

By Larry Modell

Sonoma County's second largest city, my home for forty years, lies at the base of the county's dominant landform and namesake.

Place names abound here. I live next to Sonoma Mountain Parkway. My children attended Sonoma Mountain Elementary School. Many Petaluma streets and windows offer a cherished view of the mountain's wooded creek canyons, broad ridge, and grassy shoulders.

About a third of Sonoma Mountain proper — 20 square miles — makes up Petaluma's viewshed and watershed. At present, just 2% of that expanse is publicly owned — the 270-acre parcel known as Lafferty Ranch owned by the City of Petaluma.

Many of us hope one day to see a vast network of public open spaces and trails on Sonoma Mountain. Absent the acquisition of new public lands, as has been the case on the Petaluma side of the mountain, existing properties like Lafferty Ranch present an unmissable opportunity.

After several false starts, Petaluma is again moving forward with its long-standing plan for a wildland open space preserve with public access at Lafferty Ranch. The city contracted with LandPaths to train docents (including current and former SMP board members) and organize guided outings. This follows what has become a usual progression of interim access leading to full public access.

These guided outings, at least one per month, present additional opportunities. Many hundreds of hikers and nature lovers and learners, young and old, from Petaluma and beyond, have connected with their mountain for the first time. In English and Spanish, we've explored oak woodlands and perennial streams, while learning

about geology and history, mushrooms and wildflowers. The view from the ridge is more than just pretty. It is a chance to contemplate our town in its watershed and, by extension perhaps, our place in nature.

And there is one more kind of opportunity at hand. Petaluma, with help from organizations like Friends of Lafferty Park, LandPaths, and Sonoma Mountain Preservation, has an opportunity to demonstrate responsible wildland management with public access at Lafferty Ranch.

This property hosted almost no human activity for several decades. The minimalist human presence now beginning, and contemplated going forward, is really a reintroduction of what we understand the landscape has known for millennia, with the

Coast Miwok and perhaps earlier groups, somewhat sparse, traveling on foot across the land, mostly in daylight.

Some of the changes seen on Sonoma Mountain's wildlands are probably irreversible. The great grizzlies were eradicated in Mariano Vallejo's and Marshall Lafferty's time, and it is difficult to imagine reintroducing them. But other apex predators, and other wildlife of all kinds, seem to be doing well on Lafferty Ranch, as well as on other nearby wildlands with fuller public access, such as Jack London State Historic Park and North Sonoma Mountain Regional Park.

Humans need an intimate connection to nearby nature for countless psychological, physiological, and spiritual reasons. Our opportunity, and our obligation, is to strengthen that connection while preserving the very wildlands we love, including Lafferty Ranch.



Mountain lions are regularly recorded on the wildlife cameras operated by Friends of Lafferty Park (see www.laffertypark.org)

Upper left image: Sonoma Mountain above Petaluma, with Adobe Creek's deep wooded canyon and Lafferty Ranch centered, reaching to the ridgeline. Photo by Scott Hess.

TRAILS TO TALES:

Opportunities abound on the new parkland at the Sonoma Developmental Center

By Tracy Salcedo

I have wandered the open space surrounding the campus of the former Sonoma Developmental Center for as long as I have lived in Glen Ellen, more than 25 years now. Back in the day, when the SDC was still home to individuals with developmental disabilities, making your way along the paths that snake through the oak woodlands and meadowlands to redwood groves and lakeshore hideaways was a best kept secret. Essentially we were trespassing, but with tacit permission. The SDC's open space, which merged with Jack London State Historic Park on the slopes of Sonoma Mountain and with Sonoma Valley Regional Park on the valley floor, was parkland without park care — without signage, trail maintenance, formal routes, formal rules.



That said, the wildlands were not the wild west. Yes, you could let your pooch off leash ... unless you got caught — and admonished — by a member of “the posse,” volunteers on horseback who patrolled the backcountry. But mostly folks were quiet and respectful on the land. It was, always has been, and now always will be, a place where everyone is welcome. Even as discord simmers over the intensity of proposed redevelopment of the campus, the preservation of the SDC's wildlands was a unifying priority.

It's been nearly a year since about 650 acres surrounding the campus were transferred to California State Parks.

The transition from informal to regulated parkland is unfolding slowly, with the emphasis in these first months on educating an ever-increasing number of trail enthusiasts about proper trail etiquette and soon-to-become rules. State Parks is charged with creating a formalized trail system on the land that also protects the ecosystems enveloping those trails. Next steps involve a master planning process, and that's where the opportunity lies. We have a chance not only to help curate existing and future recreational facilities on the east-facing slopes of the mountain, but also to shape interpretation along those trails.

With regard to the trail system, a number of routes on the former SDC property are redundant. They run parallel to each other, singletrack created by mountain bikes next to fire roads next to hikers' paths. This redundancy is not good for habitat or wildlife, and we should expect and support reclaiming some of those routes as habitat. The

master planning process includes opportunity for public input, and SMP will be in the room. We can't expect everyone's favorite trail to make the final cut — especially if that trail traverses the Sonoma Valley Wildlife Corridor — but we can ensure that the needs of wildlife, flora, and lovers of the outdoors are seamlessly entwined.

With regard to interpretation, one of the most neglected stories on Sonoma Mountain is that of the people who lived at the institution known, in its final decades, as the Sonoma Developmental Center. From its first incarnation, as the California Home for the Care and Training of

the Feeble Minded, though its troubled history as the Sonoma State Home, where eugenics was practiced, to its lasting legacy of caring for individuals with developmental disabilities, we now have an opportunity to showcase the SDC's residents, their caretakers, and the community that supported the institution. The historic orchard in Jack London State Historic Park had nothing to do with Jack London, after all, but was rather tended by people living in the state home — a fact obscured by London's fame and society's historic discomfort with people who look, think, and move through the world differently. The opportunity to celebrate this complex cultural history on the mountain should not be overlooked.



SONOMA MOUNTAIN VERNAL POOLS: AN IMPORTANT PIECE OF THE PUZZLE

By Soneile Hymn

“This Land is Protected Forever,” proclaims the sign where Enterprise and Bennet Valley Roads meet and intersect an extraordinary landscape: the 174-acre property known as the Sonoma Mountain Vernal Pools (SMVP). A few dozen feet west, one of the two large vernal pools, the property’s namesake, can be glimpsed from the road. Surrounding the vernal pools are intact grasslands, gentle slopes of mature oak and evergreen woodlands, and sweeping vistas. More than three hundred and thirty plant species, including four endangered ones, can be found on this biologically diverse land.

The Sonoma Mountain Vernal Pools Preserve was Sonoma Land Trust’s first acquisition under California’s 30x30 initiative, which is part of the state’s efforts to support its climate and biodiversity goals by conserving 30% of California’s lands and coastal waters by 2030. Of course SMVP is much more than a benchmark. It’s an essential piece of a puzzle that provides increased public connection to nature and place while protecting biodiversity via preserving important and rare habitats and a wildlife corridor.

The property’s two large montane vernal pools are a distinct type of wetland that supports plant species found nowhere else in the country. In late spring, the pools begin to dry, transforming into colorful concentric circles, a fairy ring display of wildflowers, including rare ones such as Sonoma sunshine, Baker’s navarretia, and dwarf downingia. The property drains into Yulupa Creek and the Sonoma Creek watershed, which supports the recovery of Chinook salmon and steelhead trout. On the dry slopes of the surrounding oak woodlands, one might spot endangered Jepson’s leptosiphon or green monardella.

Equally as remarkable as the property’s diverse ecosystems and scenic views is its strategically important location. Situated within the Sonoma Valley Wildlife Corridor (a critical passage within the Blue Ridge to Marin Coast Linkage), SMVP provides habitat connectivity between Sonoma Mountain and Annadel-Trione State Park to a wide range of wildlife including mountain lions, bobcats, black bears, American badgers, and black-tailed deer. This corridor is essential to the biodiversity of the entire North Bay.

Eventually, SMVP will be transferred to Sonoma County Regional Parks, though the development of infrastructure and trails are years in the making. Public access to SMVP has been provided only through pre-scheduled, limited excursions. SMP was delighted to host an outing to the property last June and we hope for future opportunities to revisit.

If one still needs convincing of the significance of this property, SMVP is also a planned link in the Bay Area Ridge Trail (<https://rigdetrail.org>). With over 400 of the trail’s planned 550-mile loop already realized, the Bay Area Ridge Trail will one day encircle the entire San Francisco Bay Area, connecting over 75 parks and open spaces. Bit by bit, continuous sections are being knit together until we one day have the opportunity to hike the entire Bay Area, from ridge to ridge.

An essential piece of the puzzle, the conservation of SMVP is vital for the health of the landscape, biodiversity, and our communities, providing connections and pathways for the movement of wildlife and humans. It is a key link in a network of preserved lands that will hitch people to parks and open space today and in the future.

Thank you to our supporters!

We couldn't do it without you.

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SMP's 2024 Advocacy Recap

In 2024, SMP's ongoing Advocacy efforts have included:

- Supporting protection of the wildlife and riparian corridors on Sonoma Mountain near the former SDC campus via letters to politicians and newspaper editors;
- Following the proposal to install lithium storage battery facilities at the base of Sonoma Mountain in Petaluma;
- Commenting on the impact of building a new CalFire headquarters on 50 acres of open space land at the SDC;
- Objecting to approval of the builders' remedy proposal to develop ~1,000 dwelling units on the former SDC campus.
- Opposing the elimination of fire hazard severity zones;
- Supporting Petaluma's Lafferty Park being accessible to the general public.



SMP's secretary, Nancy Evers Kirwan, staffs the SMP booth at the 2024 Glen Ellen Village Fair as part of SMP's ongoing efforts to raise awareness of the natural and cultural resources harbored on Sonoma Mountain.

SMP has also continued to support land conservation and preservation, public access, and research on the mountain by fostering relationships with Sonoma County Regional Parks, California State Parks, Jack London Park Partners, the Sonoma County Agricultural + Open Space District, Sonoma Mountain Institute, Sonoma Mountain Ranch Preservation Foundation, Fairfield-Osborn Preserve (Sonoma State University), Friends of Lafferty Park, LandPaths, Sonoma Ecology Center, and Sonoma Land Trust.

In addition, SMP has persisted in its efforts to scale back the intensity of redevelopment on the SDC campus by meeting with, and petitioning, county and state elected officials and by attending hearings and meetings, as well as by participating in the successful lawsuit that resulted in the rejection of the environmental impact report and associated Specific Plan for the former campus.