



SANTA LUCIA CONSERVANCY

2021 Annual Report

A Year of Growth and Change

Letter from the Executive Director

After the first storms of the season, The Preserve is awash in new green grass shoots, windswept leaves, the sweet smell of fecund earth, and the sound of babbling brooks and streams. As we wrap up a year of tremendous growth and change at the Conservancy, I can't help but take a deep and satisfying breath of the fresh December air, proud of all we've accomplished together as a community.

Since joining the Conservancy last November as the new executive director, I have been repeatedly struck by the incredible success of The Preserve design. It is not only a major land conservation accomplishment with far-reaching implications for regional habitat connectivity and fire preparedness, but a feat of conservation-compatible development with a thriving community at its center. Our mission is twofold: To protect, enhance, and steward the unique natural and aesthetic resources of the Santa Lucia Preserve while also promoting sustainable, human development. This year, the Conservancy made great strides on both fronts.

We conducted a successful prescribed burn in November and secured grant funding to support wildfire preparedness over the next two years. As part of our Fuel Management Plan Initiative and working closely with The Preserve Community Services District (CSD), 34 individual landowners agreed to have new or updated lot-specific fuel management plans (FMPs) prepared for their properties. We also became a certified Firewise community and in our third year of the Grasslands Initiative treated more acreage than ever before.

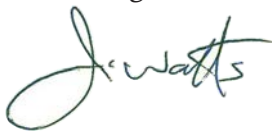
This month, we distributed the *Conservation Living Guide* to Preserve landowners. Complete with a fold-out habitat map, tips for caring for Preserve Homelands and Openlands, guidance on fire safety, and information about wildlife, this handbook is intended to foster a comprehensive understanding of what it means to live in a conservation community.

After completing an internal assessment to determine whether the right strategies were in place to mitigate the primary threats to the Preserve's natural capital and community, we put climate change adaptation at the fore of our work, restructured our departments, and hired staff to increase our capacity to address our primary objectives. If that wasn't enough, to accommodate our team of 12 full-time staff, we also moved offices to the Rancho Canada property we acquired in 2018.

Our priorities for the coming year include building climate and fire resilience on The Preserve, inspiring community through conservation by connecting people to nature and each other, continuing to restore our native grasslands, and collaborating with our partners to improve wildlife and fisheries linkages across our region.

In partnership with all of you – our incredible conservation community – I'm looking forward to the New Year with an extremely talented Board and staff working together with The Preserve community to advance our collective vision of a place where both people and nature thrive.

Warm regards for the holidays!



Jamison Watts, Executive Director



Enhancing Fire Safety and Preparedness

On November 7 we conducted a prescribed burn on the Santa Lucia Preserve off of Rancho San Carlos Road in Carmel Valley. The goals of the burn were to maintain the safety of a primary evacuation and firefighting route, restore native grasslands, and study pre-fire treatment of coyote brush in collaboration with the UC Cooperative Extension and San Jose University. The Santa Lucia Conservancy couldn't be more proud of the collaborative effort between Preserve landowners, Santa Lucia Community Service District (CSD), Central



Coast Prescribed Burn Association (CCPBA), UC Cooperative Extension, San Jose State University, Monterey Regional Fire District, Cachagua Fire District, and CalFire in making this burn a success. The *Monterey County Weekly*, *Carmel Pine Cone* (pp. 10, 18), and the *Monterey Herald* all covered the event.

In May we launched our Lot-Specific Fuel Management Plan (FMP) Initiative with the goal of preparing and updating 50 FMPs for individual lots on The Preserve by May of 2022. To date, we've had 34 landowners participate, representing 68% of our target and putting us well on track to exceed our goal. Lot-specific fuel management plans are crucial to ensure the safety and security of the Preserve community. We are happy to share that, in partnership with the SLPA, nearly 60% of the residents on the Preserve have current FMPs, a marked improvement from years prior. Further supporting fire preparedness, the Conservancy initiated a two-year effort to strategically manage fuels in targeted woodlands and forests using a \$2 million grant secured in 2020.

Lastly, in recognition of the combined efforts of the Conservancy, The Preserve's Community Services District, and homeowners, the Santa Lucia Preserve received the Firewise® Community certification this year. Administered by the NFPA, USDA Forest Service, and National Association of State Foresters, this certification recognizes communities that have systematically instituted fuel management plans, use of fire-resistant building materials, strategic placement of structures, and implementation of careful landscaping with ignition-resistant plants.

Year Three of Our Grasslands Initiative

To those of you who live or spend time on The Preserve, the most visible part of our work is our ecological management. This was the third year of our Grasslands Initiative, a five-year, \$2 million project to manage and restore roughly 5,000 acres of grasslands on The Santa Lucia Preserve through weed management, conservation grazing, and prescribed fire. In 2021 we treated more acres than ever before, with 2,000 acres grazed by over 120 cattle and 600 acres managed for weeds. Additionally, our team treated 87 acres for shrub encroachment.

SLC Moves Office to Rancho Canada Property

After 20 years of leasing an office from Quail Lodge on Rancho San Carlos Road, the Conservancy moved offices to the Rancho Cañada property it acquired in 2018 while the Board of Trustees continues its search for a permanent home on the Santa Lucia Preserve. The new address is 5240 Carmel Valley Road, Carmel, Calif., 93923.



As the Conservancy has grown to 12 full-time employees with an additional 10 seasonal employees and interns, our staff and operations have outgrown the Quail Lodge office. Located on five acres, the new location provides a secure location for equipment and vehicles, conference rooms for private and staff meetings, temporary lodging for summer interns and visiting researchers, and 6,500 square feet of storage space for field equipment and supplies. While the move was necessitated by the need for additional space, the Conservancy remains committed to finding a permanent home on The Preserve.

First Edition of the Conservation Living Guide Published

Two years in the making, the Conservancy published the *Conservation Living Guide* for Preserve landowners! Born from an imperative to foster a comprehensive understanding of what it means to live in a conservation community, this guide provides an overview of the diverse habitats and wildlife found on The Preserve, as well as specific ways Preserve residents can care for their land in conservation-compatible ways. Answering the most common questions we receive from landowners, the Guide offers context for the protected values that guide our work. Having handed out our entire stock, we are in the process of printing more copies and will make them available for sale in the new year.



Restructured Departments and Staffing

To support the core functions and objectives identified in an internal assessment, we restructured our departments and strategically increased staff capacity. Dr. Rodrigo Sierra Corona now leads the Conservancy's restructured Ecological Management Department, which consists of biological monitoring, fire and fuel management, and habitat restoration. Jenna Allred was promoted from Natural Lands Manager to Senior Manager of Climate Change Adaptation, where she is responsible for researching, developing and implementing climate change adaptation strategies across our programs and projects.

Jackson Brooke was promoted from Restoration Technician to Restoration Manager where he oversees our seasonal restoration crew responsible for treating invasive weeds on over 600 acres. We welcomed Claudio Nunez, Conservation Grazing Manager, and Andrew Evans, Conservation Grazing Associate, who through our beautiful herd of 120 cattle increase grassland health and biodiversity on over 2,000 acres. In November, we hired Conservation Ecologist Dr. Brian Woodward to lead biological monitoring and ecological research efforts, ensuring that land management decisions are based on the best science available.

To best support the enjoyment and conservation of the incredible beauty and wildlife located on 8,000 acres of conservation easements, or Openlands, the Conservancy holds in trust, we restructured our Stewardship Department to work in partnership with the Preserve community. With Stewardship Manager Andrew Nguyen and Stewardship Associate Izaak Tompkins joining the team, the department is designed to prioritize win-win solutions for people and the land.

In the spring, we brought on full-time Communications and Outreach Coordinator Alix Soliman to increase access to information and build community with landowners, Preserve members, and the public. Finally, to support operations and business development, we hired Bookkeeper Shane Stillinger.

