

SBALT NEWS**Fostering trust and stewardship: The importance of annual conservation easement monitoring**

By Laura Kirschmann

Imagine a treasure of untouched landscapes, diverse wildlife, and thriving ecosystems. This treasure is safeguarded by a simple yet powerful tool: the conservation easement. However, like any precious asset, it requires diligent oversight to ensure its protection. Annual conservation easement monitoring is the key to unlocking the promise of perpetual conservation, ensuring that the commitments made today endure for generations to come.

The San Benito Agricultural Land Trust currently has 8 conservation easements protecting over 6,200 acres. Each spring we embark on a journey to not merely fulfill a duty but also to witness firsthand our collective con-



Pictured: two separate easements that SBALT holds and monitors on a yearly basis.

servation efforts. These visits offer a unique opportunity to connect with the land and the people who cherish these protected spaces.

A key focus in our monitoring program is on landowner relations. The landowners are our partners in conservation, and without their cooperation and commitment, SBALT would not be successful. Establishing a working relationship with the landowner is essential for the long-term success of our conservation efforts. This partnership ensures that they not only understand the terms and restrictions of the conservation easement but also feel supported and valued

San Benito Agricultural

in their roles as stewards of the land.

Prior to the monitoring visit, SBALT communicates with the landowners to keep them informed and engaged. This includes detailed explanations of the monitoring process and why it is necessary. The landowners are invited to participate, providing them the opportunity to walk the land with our team and see firsthand what we do. A positive relationship with the landowners is fundamental

in preserving the natural and cultural resources that a conservation easement is designed to protect.

Annual monitoring allows SBALT staff and volunteers to observe the condition of the property to determine whether it is in compliance with the easement terms. Photos are taken at established points to document the current condition of the land. A report is then retained in our records.

As I reflect on the annual monitoring of SBALT's conservation easements, it becomes clear that this is not just a responsibility – it's a privilege. If you would like to learn more about our efforts, visit us at www.sanbenitolandtrust.org and follow us on social media @sanbenitolandtrust. ■