

SBALT NEWS

San Benito Agricultural Land Trust takes title to the Historic Harvey and Gladys Nyland Property

By Lynn Overtree

On June 1, after managing the land for 20 months, your local San Benito Agricultural Land Trust (SBALT) took title to the Nyland Property! This reflects the formal conveyance of the property from the Trust for Public Land (TPL), a nationwide land trust, to SBALT, with a conservation easement protecting agriculture and wildlife habitat held by the Land Trust of Santa Cruz County (LTSCC), a cultural easement providing access for Indigenous land stewardship, and cultural and educational activities held by the Amah Mutsun Land Trust (AMLT). The 3 local land trusts will collaborate to steward the property.

The funding came from a state grant, TPL donors, and the Wildlife Conservation Network (WCN). In addition to providing valuable wildlife habitat for numerous wildlife species, the property contributes to an important regional wildlife corridor linking the Gabilan Mountains to the Santa Cruz Mountains.

The 540 acres helped sustain the Indigenous Amah Mutsun people for thousands of years before they were taken to Mission San Juan Bautista and Mission Santa Cruz as part of the Spanish conquest of California.

"The Amah Mutsun people have lived in Popoloutchum, which is now recognized as San Benito County and beyond, for millennia," said Valentin Lopez, President of the Amah Mutsun Land Trust and Chairman of the Amah Mutsun Tribal Band. "Our ancestors worked to fulfill their sacred obligation to take care of Mother Earth and all living things for thousands of years. Today we are happy to return to Popoloutchum through this Cultural Easement. This easement will ensure this land remains undeveloped and intact. We hope to share our traditional Indigenous knowledge and practices regarding land management with our partners, and the public so we can all learn from each other."

In support of SBALT's mission to conserve agricultural lands, the property is currently leased for cattle grazing. On the first Sunday



Nyland burn started by Chairman Valentin Lopez of AMLT. Photo by Bob Connolly.



San Benito Agricultural Land Trust

of every month, members of the public join SBALT staff for a work party and/or hike on SBALT lands.

"Permanent conservation of the ranch will ensure this land can support viable grazing operations that contribute to our local economy, feed people, and protect our scenic views," said Michael Reeves, Board President of the San Benito Agricultural Land Trust. "We are excited about owning these 540 acres, which are adjacent to the 520-acre Rancho Larios Open Space that we have owned since 2004. Together with the Land Trust of Santa Cruz County's Rocks Ranch, there is now a chain of protected working lands from the San Juan Road exit of Hwy 101 to the City of San Juan Bautista. We are honored to continue the Nyland family's stewardship legacy."

Three days after the transfer, the partners hosted their first prescribed burn on the Ny-

land Property. CAL FIRE led the burn with the Central Coast Prescribed Burn Association coordinating a large training event for approximately 40 people. California Academy of Sciences sent a film crew to the event to get footage for an exhibit on prescribed burning that will open Memorial Day weekend, 2024. The U.C. Cooperative Extension Fire Advisor explained the burn process to about 15 community members who registered to observe.

the event. On the second day, Hollister Fire joined the training event. A 30-acre area was burned sparsely due to the high moisture remaining in the vegetation from this year's wet winter. For Michael Reeves, "The highlight was watching Chairman Lopez, along with individuals from several other tribes, sing traditional songs and then light the first fire, reviving their practice after 200 years."

To learn more about how to be involved with the Nyland Property, visit our website at www.sanbenitolandtrust.org and subscribe to our email list. ■



The iconic barn on the Nyland Property.



101 Equipment grazes cattle on the Nyland Property.