This past year has been an inspiring time in which our Board of Trustees and staff have been diligently preparing The Land Conservancy for future expansion of its mission to Conserve, Care, and Connect.

Over the last year we completed the application process for national accreditation, enrolled in the Terrafirma insurance program to add an additional layer of protection for the lands under our watch, and completed and released our 5-year Strategic Plan. We also grew our membership family and brought more people of all ages out to Land Conservancy properties than ever before. Not surprisingly, more inspired and capable volunteers have come our way to help us achieve our ambitious goals. In particular, our Board of Trustees has provided new levels of leadership to The Land Conservancy by serving on committees, leading outings, and increasing their financial support. All these efforts have led to a stronger and more focused Land Conservancy that is better poised to serve the communities of San Luis Obispo County.

As leaders of this land trust, we envision a county that is bustling with economic activity and a high quality of life while fostering meaningful connections to the natural lands that support this way of life. We recognize from San Miguel to Nipomo that we all rely on fertile soil, clean air, and a rich diversity of wildlife to sustain us and inspire us.

This report aims to give you a glimpse of the vast network of dedicated people, including you, who support The Land Conservancy’s critical work now and in the future. Every day we are humbled and honored to serve the people and wildlife of this spectacular region. Thank you for helping us preserve the unmatched beauty of San Luis Obispo County and our local way of life.
CONSERVE

There are wild places in San Luis Obispo County where the “hand of man” is hardly visible and wildlife found nowhere else on Earth take shelter. There are places that hold secrets of ancient peoples and paths that restore downtrodden spirits. By conserving these threatened but critical landscapes The Land Conservancy is providing hope for the future; a future with healthy natural surroundings in San Luis Obispo County.

Nestled between the City of San Luis Obispo and the Pacific Ocean are the Irish Hills, named for their resemblance to the lush, green lands of Ireland. They are steep and rugged, and they include large swaths of wilderness dominated by Coast Live Oak woodlands and coastal chaparral ecosystems. Affectionately known by our staff as the “steep and deep”, the Irish Hills not only shelter dozens of rare and sensitive wildlife species, but they are also home to some of our county’s most coveted hiking trails including those that spur from Montana de Oro State Park and the San Luis Obispo Greenbelt.

Earlier this year our land holdings in the Irish Hills grew by 65 acres bringing the total acres owned and managed by the Land Conservancy in the Irish Hills to just shy of 1,500 acres. Reaching this remote 65-acre parcel of land and its tiny turn-of-the-century cabin would likely require a full day’s hike from the nearest road, although it is only five miles as the crow flies from Avila Beach.

PROTECTING LAND IN PERTPETUITY IS A GREAT RESPONSIBILITY AND REQUIRES SUSTAINABLE FUNDING SOURCES.

At a time when The Land Conservancy is routinely completing conservation projects that include hundreds if not thousands of acres, it may seem strange to celebrate 65 acres of remote land for permanent conservation. What makes this conservation property noteworthy, beyond its spectacular locale in the “steep and deep”, is that it came to The Land Conservancy, as a testamentary gift from the estate of Robert Martin who passed away in late 2011.

In our history, this is only the second time a planned gift of land was left to The Land Conservancy. Thoughtful legacy gifts like Robert’s are one way for land trusts like ours to meet the perpetual commitment to care for conservation lands that benefit the community forever. Planned gifts are the primary source of support for our organizational endowment which will ensure that The Land Conservancy is always present and working to steward and conserve the special places in our region.

In addition to supporting the capacity of the land trust, planned gifts offer landowners a way to establish a unique and meaningful conservation legacy by creating an estate plan that keeps their vision alive forever. Many appreciate that their enduring values will be passed on to the next generation through an estate plan that permanently protects the places they loved long after they are gone.

The donation of land, or any planned gift, reflects The Land Conservancy’s reputation as a beloved organization and represents true value to the community. We are honored by the trust Robert Martin and others have placed in our organization, and we remain dedicated to earning this trust.

In an industry that all too often measures its successes in “bucks and acres”, we are proud to celebrate accomplishments of any size that represent the hope of our community for a future San Luis Obispo County with protected lands for people and wildlife.

PROTECTING LAND IN PERTPETUITY IS A GREAT RESPONSIBILITY AND REQUIRES SUSTAINABLE FUNDING SOURCES.

ACCOMPLISHMENTS

Produced the land conservancy’s 2013-2018 Strategic Plan to guide the organization’s efforts over the next five years.

Coordinated the permanent conservation of the 65-acre Martin Property in the Irish Hills.

Gifted a 71/2-acre preserve in Los Osos to California State Parks to become a part of Morro Bay State Park.

Completed the rigorous application process to be formally accredited through the national Land Trust Accreditation Commission, which included over 2,000 hours of staff and volunteer time over the last four years.

Adopted and worked on over 15,000 acres of up-and-coming conservation projects.

Coordinated with the County of San Luis Obispo, City of San Luis Obispo, and Bicycle Coalition partners to ensure strategic collaboration for future extensions of the Bob Jones city-to-sea trail.

Enrolled in the Terrafirma insurance program to add an additional layer of protection for our 12,200 acres of properties under easement.

2013 annual report www.lcslo.org

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Acquiring land or easements is only the first step of a long journey to protect the natural beauty of San Luis Obispo County. Each conservation success brings permanent responsibilities to steward and protect the conservation restrictions placed on the land. One of the lesser known duties we have as a land trust is to perform annual monitoring of the 14,500 acres that The Land Conservancy has conserved over its 29 year history.

What is annual monitoring and why do we care? Conservation involves a preservation of certain conditions on the land over a passage of time. And time has a way of slipping by and leading to unforeseen and often insidious changes in conditions. These changes can be difficult to perceive day-to-day or year-to-year but would be striking if viewed for the first time after five years. Annual monitoring is our primary opportunity to reconnect with our landowner partners and their properties, as well as review conditions on our own conserved lands.

The process starts when we come together to establish a conservation interest on a piece of property either as a conservation easement or as the fee simple owner. We take a tour with the landowner, where stories are shared. This meeting establishes trust between parties as we prepare a baseline report, documenting features of the property like seasonal creeks, important wildlife corridors, sensitive habitat, existing buildings, fences or stock tanks. We design a route through the land establishing photographic reference points which capture one or more important characteristics of the property that will be relevant in five, ten, and twenty years from now, a harder task than it might seem.

During the annual monitoring, we meet with our landowner partners and get a chance to learn about some of the joys and challenges of the year on the land. Monitoring visits result in much more than the linking together of yearly snapshots of land. They are the way we show compassion and caring, both for people involved in the daily managing of the land and for the things that cannot speak like the clean springwater and the migratory trails of bobcats. These visits connect us deeply to our conservation lands, which will remain wild and natural, forever.

In total, there are twenty-nine properties that need annual monitoring including a few really solid places with miles of untrammeled hinterlands as well as some smaller pocket parks that are host to a special spring or critter. Some properties are set aside as wild lands while others are working agricultural landscapes. Each is unique and critically important to San Luis Obispo County’s vitality.

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ACCOMPLISHMENTS
Restored a pond at the Dunn-Veihman family farm near Nipomo and planted 3,000 native shrubs and trees to create wetland habitat.

Monitored 29 conservation easement properties to record annual photo points and assess land uses.

Collaborated with local farmers to produce food on properties we own.

Treated over 80 acres of invasive veldt grass and European beach grass in the Guadalupe-Nipomo Dunes and removed an acre of invasive Giant Grass in Cambria.

Established formal photomonitoring points for all properties we own.

ATTACHMENT 2: SANTA MARIA

PACIFIC GROWTH PROJECT

AGRICULTURAL LANDSCAPES ANNUALLY MONITORED

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Twenty-four little pairs of sneakers stop at the edge of a trail as a class of 4th-grade students eagerly observe leaves from two different native oak trees. While comparing and contrasting the identifying features of the leaves, the call of a red-tailed hawk yanks the group’s attention to the sky and the discussion turns momentarily to bird identification. This leads to burning questions from the kids about the hawk yanks the leaves from two different native oak trees. While the instructor eventually brings the discussion back to oaks, the Land Conservancy recognizes the imperative need to educate and inspire the next generation of conservation leaders. Through this innovative, high-impact outdoor education program known as Learning Among the Oaks (LATO), we are helping young people appreciate the life-sustaining values and wonders within the oak woodlands of San Luis Obispo County.

The centerpiece of the LATO program is a nature trail that meanders through fifteen acres of oak woodland and savanna just beyond the blacktop at Santa Margarita Ranch. The trail allows for docent-led educational hikes that are central to a beloved environmental education program known as Learning Among the Oaks (LATO), studies show that these types of educational experiences will increase students’ self-esteem, problem-solving abilities, and overall motivation to learn, with strong evidence correlating to improved math and science achievement. Experiences increase students’ self-esteem, problem-solving abilities, and overall motivation to learn.

“Most of all, I’ve enjoyed learning how to be a trail guide and teaching others about our local history and wildlife. The joy of teaching others is the most rewarding thing I have done. Participating with my friends and classmates is extremely fun, and I loved how we worked together on the hikes.”

When asked to present to the Wildlife Conservation Board at the State Capitol in 2012, Nathan was one of the Oak Ambassadors nominated to speak about his experience with LATO.

“All of the time I spent talking in front of my peers and friends gave me more confidence with my public speaking skills. Having the experience of teaching and presenting to others changes how you view your teachers and lessons,” he reflected.

Nathan Sharon, a former graduate of the LATO program and an Oak Ambassador alumnus.

Among the Oaks is helping to ensure that the adults who fill those shoes have the knowledge, understanding and the passion to help solve environmental challenges and the process of asking questions, finding answers, and solving problems.”

Those same little sneakers that are encouraged to get dirty along the trail will one day be replaced by grown-up shoes worn by our future leaders—teachers, doctors, farmers and scientists who will eventually inhabit this world. Through place-based learning and environmental youth leadership training, Learning Among the Oaks is helping to ensure that the adults who fill those shoes have the knowledge, understanding and the passion to help solve environmental challenges and the process of asking questions, finding answers, and solving problems.”

ExPERIENCES INCREASE STUDENTS’ SELF-ESTEEM, PROBLEM-SOLVING ABILITIES, AND OVERALL MOTIVATION TO LEARN.
There are moments in life when a person or community can feel alone in their effort to protect what they most cherish; moments when one feels like a grain of sand resisting the surge of a churning wave. Those of us in San Luis Obispo County who are focused on protecting the land beneath our feet can feel quite small when facing societal changes that threaten the sustainability of our community and the wildlands that nourish us.

The reality is that we are one land trust among many others that are working to conserve special places in communities like ours across the United States and beyond. The Land Conservancy and our members are part of a thriving network of 1,700 land trusts representing 5 million members and 350,000 active volunteers. Our community of land trusts has collectively protected 47 million acres of land, roughly half the land area of California.

LAND TRUST MOVEMENT

We live in a landscape filled with hope and promise—the grin on a child’s face after picking a bucket of apples; the color and vibrancy of our farmer’s markets filled with fruits and vegetables from nearby fields; the diverse network of parks, trails, and open spaces that link neighborhoods to natural landscapes; the burrow that houses a critter found nowhere else in the world; and the beaches, universities, bustling towns, and outstanding events that attract visitors who support our livelihoods.

As we embark on a major conservation campaign to raise $30 million in the next five years, we do so with the goal of realizing our community’s promise. By purchasing a phenomenal property that serves as the backdrop of Pismo Beach we will inspire people to get outside, stay healthy, and connect with the natural world. By protecting the upper reaches of the Nacimiento River we will safeguard a regionally significant source of drinking water. By continuing to conserve agricultural land in Los Osos Valley we will sustain some of the most productive soil in Coastal California. By continuing to conserve agricultural land in Los Osos Valley we will sustain some of the most productive soil in Coastal California. By opening the Octagon Barn Center and Kathleen’s Canyon Overlook for public use, we will provide community centers for people to gather, learn, and play. By expanding our education efforts we will encourage new and diverse voices to strengthen public support for land conservation.

Together we will realize a future San Luis Obispo County with a community grounded in the natural beauty and rural character of the region, with farming as way of life, and with places where people and wildlife flourish. Join us for the next step, a once-in-a-lifetime step along a path filled with hope for a bright future for our home.

LAND TRUSTS THROUGHOUT THE NATION HAVE ENRICHED OUR WORLD BY PROTECTING AND CARING FOR SPECIAL PLACES AND CONNECTING PEOPLE TO THOSE AMAZING LANDSCAPES.

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LAND CONSERVANCY OF SAN LUIS OBISPO COUNTY

FUTURE OUTLOOK

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IF YOU WANT TO GO QUICKLY, GO ALONE.
IF YOU WANT TO GO FAR, GO TOGETHER.
THANK YOU FOR GOING THE DISTANCE WITH US.
OUTDOOR PLACES ARE WHERE MEMORIES LIVE AND POSSIBILITIES BLOOM.

We see sound financial management as the foundation of our work. Over the last year, The Land Conservancy received over $400,000 in contributions from local donors and brought over $140,000 into our community. Financial regulations.

We take pride in the way that we manage our funds, and we voluntarily go through a full audit each year to ensure that our organization is always in compliance with accounting standards and net-for-profit regulations.

Please feel free to contact us at any time for more information about our finances, and please visit www.lcslo.org for a copy of our IRS 990 Form.