



Sonoma Land Trust Executive Director Position Description

Painter Executive Search is supporting Sonoma Land Trust in their search for a visionary Executive Director who can lead them in their efforts to protect the outstanding natural legacy of Sonoma County forever.

Since its inception in 1976, Sonoma Land Trust (SLT) has protected over 47,000 acres of scenic, natural, agricultural and open landscapes throughout Sonoma County. Located north of San Francisco, Sonoma County is a million acres of diverse natural resources, fertile agricultural land, acclaimed wineries and small cities. Sonoma is one of the most bio-diverse counties in California with more than 55 miles of Pacific coastline, significant tidal wetlands, redwood forests and oak woodlands, unique geological regions, and productive valleys and waterways.

An accredited land trust, Sonoma Land Trust is dedicated to being a premier civic institution in Sonoma County and among the leading land trusts in the Bay Area and nationally. The organization's deep expertise in land transactions and stewardship and its history as a trusted and willing partner make Sonoma Land Trust a potent catalyst for protecting Sonoma County's outstanding landscapes and ecosystems.

POSITION SUMMARY

The Executive Director, reporting to the Chair of the Board and accountable to the Board of Directors, will lead the execution of SLT's mission to protect the scenic, natural, agricultural and open landscapes of Sonoma County for the benefit of the community and future generations. Building upon the strong foundation of acquisitions and stewardship, the ED will lead the staff and Board in the development of the next Strategic Plan and a new articulation of the vision of a vibrant and sustainable county landscape. The ED will lead an extraordinary team of seasoned conservation professionals as together they map and execute plans to conserve and steward land critical to securing wildlife corridors, preserving sustainable ecosystems, and protecting the beautiful vistas that define the county while increasing access to the land for public enjoyment. The organization is seeking a forward-thinking leader who will help shape the vision for conservation in the county and solidify the unique role SLT plays among its numerous conservation partners.

The ED will have responsibility for all SLT functions including fundraising, operations, acquisition, conservation, stewardship and public engagement programs. She/he will be expected to sustain and build vibrant and collaborative relationships with regional and national leaders, local and environmental partners, current donors and volunteers, prospective supporters and the public in order to grow visibility and support for SLT's work. As the chief fundraiser and face of SLT, the ED will be charged with fully engaging the Board and staff to achieve the fundraising goals required to sustain operations and fund programs, including land acquisitions and stewardship. A significant focus of this role will be on increasing financial support for SLT and building long term sustainability for the organization and its key programs.

SLT currently has a staff of 15 full-time employees and 8 part-time employees with significant depth in conservation (acquisitions) and stewardship. The organizational culture is family-like, with shared values, strong personal commitment to conservation work and close working friendships. Staff operates with a great deal of autonomy, but welcomes the opportunity to explore new ways to build the impact of their work under the leadership of the new ED.

The ED will oversee an operating budget of nearly \$5 million dollars excluding real estate transactions. Revenue for operations is largely contributed with annual fundraising goals for individual and foundation support running approximately \$3 million annually. SLT currently has a \$1.5 million operating surplus, with no designated endowment. In 2012, SLT launched a \$65 million campaign with a \$15 million goal in private fundraising. To date, the campaign has raised over \$5 million in individual pledges and major gifts with over \$2 million scheduled to provide revenue into 2017 and over \$25 million in public funds. This campaign will need to be re-evaluated with the hire of the new ED and the subsequent hire of a Director of Philanthropy (a search on hold pending the hire of the new ED.) Campaign and annual fundraising efforts continue with active staff and board support and are on-target for this year.

There are 15 members of SLT's Board of Directors. The Board includes new residents and Sonoma natives and brings a range of conservation and business knowledge, as well as community ties. The Board is comfortable in its responsibility for oversight and is increasing its engagement in fundraising activities. Continued Board learning and deepening engagement will be needed, as well as support in building and diversifying the Board.

Organizational Summary and Program Highlights

History and Successes

The Sonoma Land Trust has evolved from a dedicated grassroots organization to a leader which strategically selects land with high conservation values and collaboratively works with a wide range of partners to ensure protection and stewardship. Over the years, the trust has been gifted with a number of historic ranches including Glen Oaks Ranch in Glen Ellen and Laufenburg Ranch and Live Oaks Ranch in Knights Valley. Sonoma County residents cherish the County's open space, as evidenced by the formation of the Sonoma County Agricultural Preservation & Open Space District in 1990, authorizing a ¼ cent sales tax toward conservation. With that local source of revenue and the passage of several state bond measures, came the opportunity and capacity to think in terms of whole landscape conservation and long term sustainability.

Sonoma Land Trust currently holds title to about 7,000 acres of land and conservation easements on another 7,000 acres. Some of the land will transition to other partners to hold and manage, but key properties will be held by Sonoma Land Trust for long term stewardship. These "Anchor Preserves" provide a visible presence in the region in which the land is located and have become foundations for ongoing land protection efforts. The Anchor Preserves are: Sears Point Ranch off Highway 37, Glen Oaks Ranch and surrounding properties in the Stuart Creek Watershed in Glen Ellen, Estero Americano Preserve south of Bodega Bay, Laufenburg Ranch in Knights Valley, and Pole Mountain and Little Black Mountain in Cazadero. The Land Trust has other properties including White Rock, west of the Alexander Valley, Live Oaks Ranch in Knights Valley, and Tolay Creek Ranch off Highway 121. SLT continues to steward these properties and evaluate opportunities to transfer ownership of select properties or to partner with other organizations who are interested in long term stewardship of the land.

SLT will continue to use acquisition as a key tool for its conservation efforts given its deep expertise and capacity for nimble action. Over time SLT has experienced a shift from immediate conveyance to holding and stewarding land longer. This requires a deeper consideration of the SLT's long term business model.

Growing fundraising and communicating the importance of restoration, stewardship and public engagement on landholdings will be an increasing need for the organization.

In the last 11 years, SLT has grown substantially under the capable leadership of Ralph Benson. Ralph brought tremendous knowledge and sophistication to Sonoma from his previous 25 years of work at the Trust for Public Land. SLT has become one of the leading land trusts in the country by completing large iconic acquisitions and developing significant landscape initiatives across the county. With his decision to retire, the Board and staff are looking ahead to ensure the work continues with the same ambition, while recognizing that land conservation work in the future will require new ideas, creative solutions, increased collaboration, and effective ways to introduce the value of their work to a broader and more diverse group of people.

Key Program Highlights

Over the past ten years, SLT has focused on implementing landscape scale land protection, restoration and stewardship programs in three high risk/high priority regions: the Sonoma Baylands along San Francisco Bay, the Sonoma coast, and the Sonoma Valley and its surrounding mountain ranges. SLT deploys a variety of land conservation tools to achieve its goals as demonstrated in these characteristic projects:

Sears Point—Sonoma Land Trust is in the process of acquiring and restoring land along San Pablo Bay that was historically marsh, but has been farmed for the past 100+ years. The objective is to restore San Francisco Bay's wetlands to reestablish the health of the bay as an estuary and to act as a hedge against sea level rise. Part of the Pacific Flyway, this land is key to bird migration and to mitigating the impact of climate change. Working with partners including Ducks Unlimited, Sonoma Land Trust is currently restoring 1000 acres of tidal wetlands—the \$18 million dollar Sears Point Restoration Project. In that same area, another significant acquisition was recently completed. Purchase of the 1200-acre Haire Ranch on Skaggs Island was the lynchpin that leverages restoration of 4,400 acres of agricultural land to wetlands.

Jenner Headlands--In December of 2009, Sonoma Land Trust acquired the stunning 5,630-acre Jenner Headlands — a nationally significant project and the single largest conservation land acquisition in Sonoma County at that time. This \$36 million purchase was completed with the collaboration of 10 public and private funding partners. In September 2013, Sonoma Land Trust transferred the fee title of the property to The Wildlands Conservancy to manage as a preserve governed by consensus management decisions between The Wildlands Conservancy and Sonoma Land Trust based on a restoration blueprint.

Pole Mountain--In June 2014 Sonoma Land Trust closed on the purchase of Pole Mountain, the highest point along the Sonoma Coast, with 360-degree unobstructed views of Sonoma County and beyond, including Sonoma Mountain and the Santa Rosa Plain, the Cedars and the Mayacamas. This 238-acre property connects Jenner Headlands with Little Black Mountain Preserve, ensuring wildlife access to over 6000 acres of protected land.

Glen Oaks Ranch and the Sonoma Valley Wildlife Corridor--The 234-acre Glen Oaks Ranch, located in the Valley of the Moon near Glen Ellen, was bequeathed to the Land Trust in 2001. In addition to exceptional wildlife habitat, the Ranch's Civil War-era stone house, stone barn, stone walls and oak woodlands offer incredible scenic and historic value. This property is located within the Sonoma Valley Wildlife Corridor which stretches from Sonoma Mountain, across the Sonoma valley floor, and east to the crest of the Mayacamas range and is part of a critical wildlife linkage from Marin and to Lake County. The goal of this collaborative regional project is to ensure that wildlife can move safely through the

landscape so their populations can persist in the face of development and climate change. The Wildlife Corridor is a mosaic of private lands, protected wild and agricultural lands, riparian corridors and public parklands and SLT is applying multiple conservation tools: acquiring key properties, drafting model conservation easement language tailored to wildlife permeability, adapting management practices on SLT properties, enhancing wildlife habitat and removing barriers to movement, collaborating with the private landowners, the community and partners, and applying the science to inform decision making. The Gordon and Betty Moore Foundation provided a \$1.8 million grant to purchase land and easements that are critical to keeping the corridor open, implement comprehensive monitoring, and develop and implement the wildlife corridor strategy. At the heart of the corridor lies the Sonoma Developmental Center which represents the largest and most significant unprotected land in the Sonoma Valley. Sonoma Land Trust is leading a collaborative effort to envision and bring about a future for the Sonoma Developmental Center that will permanently protect the Center's natural areas and retain services for residents of the Center. Successful protection of the undeveloped portions of this area would directly link more than 9,000 acres of protected land.

Current Focus and Opportunities

In its 2011-2015 Strategic Plan, Sonoma Land Trust set forth a number of goals including being well-run and respected as a community leader. Two primary goals define the thrust of their programmatic work; one is to permanently protect the rural landscapes of Sonoma County and the other is to connect people with the land.

Sonoma Land Trust has focused its conservation efforts on three Legacy Landscapes; protecting the redwoods and increasing public access along the Sonoma Coast; securing Wildlife Corridors and protecting iconic Sonoma Mountain and the Mayacamas; and, restoring marshes and creeks and completing the San Francisco Bay Trail along San Pablo Bay. There have been significant successes in these areas of focus and SLT has continuing strategies and initiatives built around the conservation of these three areas including future opportunities for acquisitions, restoration and securing corridors for use by wildlife and people. In addition to the work at the Sonoma Developmental Center which is a critical component in the next few years, other significant opportunities are expected in both land acquisitions as well as conservation stewardship work with significant impact on access to open space.

Additionally the *On the Land* Program provides public outreach and activities on Sonoma Land Trust properties including hikes, outings, and volunteer work parties. It also is the interface for volunteers of all levels to support and engage in the work of Sonoma Land Trust. SLT has nearly 2500 members and more than 350 active volunteers who work with staff in a variety of ways including citizen science bird counts, removing invasive species, clearing trails, monitoring easement properties, and a host of other important administrative and program support roles.

Trends in conservation and public funding create new challenges for SLT including the opportunity to reach new and diverse audiences, develop and implement new conservation strategies, and address key issues of climate change and water supply.

Executive Director

ESSENTIAL DUTIES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

Leadership and Strategy

- Be a visible leader in local, regional and national land conservation; represent Sonoma Land Trust actively, broadly and with integrity, building upon its reputation as a trusted and nimble partner;

- Articulate a vision for Sonoma County that invites support for SLT's work; speak with passion and work pragmatically to ensure growing enthusiasm for land conservation and stewardship;
- Together with the staff and Board chart a new Strategic Plan that builds upon the strengths of SLT and deeply considers the conservation requirements across the county, the increasing pressures on the land and the resources needed to achieve SLT's mission;
- Creatively and systematically advance the quantity and quality of conserved land in the County and the public's connectedness to that land;
- Be an effective advocate for conservation throughout the county, work together with local, regional, state and national partners to pursue resources, policies, programs and strategies that will ensure the long-term health and beauty of Sonoma County's landscapes;
- Work closely with the Board to ensure strong Board governance and capacity, establish clear lines of communication and organizational transparency; provide well-defined opportunities for committee and staff engagement; assist the Board in the recruitment, selection and evaluation of board members and actively inform and engage the Board in issues of importance to the operations and strategy of the organization.

Fundraising and Advocacy

- Be the chief advocate and external face of Sonoma Land Trust; effectively represent the organization in order to increase its impact, visibility and support for its operations;
- Actively participate in fundraising including growing individual support through major donors, developing and maintaining key foundation relationships and critical contacts in local, regional, state and federal government and agencies;
- Together with the staff and Board, actively pursue a strategy that builds greater support from new donors while continuing to cultivate existing relationships and ensuring continued commitment to SLT's work;
- Ensure that the Board is supported in its fundraising efforts, allocate appropriate staff time to facilitate and train the Board in fundraising and advocacy on behalf of the organization;
- Marshall the resources of the whole organization to raise the funds required to maintain sound operations and facilitate the current land conservation and stewardship goals while building a financial and operational foundation that will ensure long term sustainability for the organization and the stewardship of its land holdings
- Actively reach out to deepen and build engagement across a broader set of constituents, pay particular attention to the changes in demographics in the county so that outreach is targeted, diverse and effective.

Internal Leadership and Operational Management

- Oversee SLT's operations and programs ensuring progress toward overarching goals; draw upon staff strengths to develop a decision-making framework for assessing conservation opportunities which align with organizational priorities while retaining the flexibility to act quickly and opportunistically;
- Recruit, nurture and challenge a highly-qualified and motivated professional staff; delegate specific responsibilities with appropriate authority and establish accountability; foster open communications;
- Together with staff, be diligent in the pursuit of conservation opportunities; build relationships with landowners and conservation partners to ensure land of high conservation value is protected;
- Oversee land acquisition transactions and ensure compliance with the highest standards of land trust practice;
- With staff support, implement the new Strategic Plan including an effective communications strategy to grow and build awareness of SLT's work and facilitate public access to the land deepening appreciation for the value of conservation;
- Lead ongoing development and improvement of organizational policies and practices—including assessment of the use of technology in order to effectively plan and manage programs and facilitate tailored communication with various supporters;
- Foster innovation in approaches and execution of conservation efforts; clearly consider the conservation outcomes required and be open to collaborations, partnerships and methods that can achieve those ends;

- Working closely with the Director of Finance to ensure an effective annual budget process, and a culture of operational excellence is maintained throughout the organization and that new procedures and technologies increase the effectiveness of the organization;

POSITION REQUIREMENTS

Experience

A successful Executive Director candidate will likely have:

- Possess passion for the land and understand the importance of both acquisition and stewardship; significant experience in conservation and/or related fields;
- Experience effectively leading an organization of similar size and complexity; ideally a nonprofit organization including experience working closely with a Board;
- Past success in diversifying income and growing support particularly with high net individual donors;
- Evidence of developing and implementing effective strategy- a visionary with the ability to plan and execute in ways that encourage cooperation;
- Demonstrated leadership and management skills, experienced in team building with the knowledge, ability and appetite to mentor staff and foster open communications, combined with the discipline to delegate and honor team contributions;
- A history of strong collaboration; someone who actively seeks strategic partnerships and develops effective relationships;
- Experience as the face of an organization; well-developed interpersonal skills; superb oral and written communication skills, able to present ideas clearly and persuasively;
- Experience as an advocate, able to translate complex ideas for diverse audiences;
- Ability to work well under pressure and adapt easily to changing situations and priorities; exercises good judgment; able to hear and value alternate opinions and make informed decisions;
- Strong financial and organizational management skills; a track record of managing on time and on budget;
- Hands-on, competent in business software and technology (particularly MS Office suite) required to support efficiency and communication both internally and externally.

Attributes

- Someone who is credible and humble in their work but derives strength from his or her commitment to land conservation;
- A team builder with both vision and strong management skills; one who can motivate and direct diverse partners while establishing accountability and shared success;
- Emotionally mature with a good sense of humor, someone who is both confident and competent and truly enjoys working with people;
- Someone who highlights and supports the successes of others, can easily share the spotlight and builds effective and lasting relationships;
- Someone who approaches work and management holistically; is approachable and interested in bringing out the best in each relationship;
- Solutions-oriented with attention to detail; pragmatic with an eye to the future;
- A good listener and strategist; comfortable receiving input from many sources and able to analyze disparate information to create sound decisions and thoughtful plans;
- A hard worker; a 'doer' with a willingness to work hands-on with a high energy level;
- Resourceful—able to set priorities, build efficiencies and create opportunity;
- Exercises high ethical standards.

For additional details or to submit your experience for review, please contact;

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