



Land Trust of Santa Cruz County Executive Director Position Description

Painter Executive Search is supporting the Land Trust of Santa Cruz County (Land Trust) in its search for an Executive Director to lead its efforts to protect, care for, and connect people to the extraordinary landscapes of Santa Cruz County.

Santa Cruz County has nearly 30 miles of Pacific coastline, rugged mountains, dense evergreen and redwood forests, fertile farm and grazing lands, wetlands, key watersheds, and unique sandhill ecosystems that are home to many rare plants and animals. Located a short drive from Silicon Valley, Santa Cruz County retains its rural charm in the face of substantial development pressure. As local land experts, the Land Trust of Santa Cruz County (Land Trust), protects critical working lands and open space while ensuring that important habitat and wildlife corridors are safeguarded and that access to open space is increasingly available for all people.

The Land Trust, accredited by the national Land Trust Accreditation Commission, has protected more than 16,500 acres (directly and through partnerships) since its inception in 1978. The organization is currently responsible for over 5,000 acres held in fee title and over 3,000 acres of conservation easements.

The Land Trust is engaged in many of the most challenging aspects of land conservation. The Land Trust actively manages land including periodic timber harvests, seasonal livestock grazing and active cultivation. It is engaged in wetland restoration and stewards land with threatened species. It also has a deep commitment to public access. Working with a variety of partners, the Land Trust is in the process of developing over 50 miles of hiking and biking trails on properties throughout the county.

The new Executive Director will have the opportunity to engage a highly supportive community in protecting the underpinnings of environmental vibrancy of this unique county and ensuring that the public can more fully access the diverse beauty and bounty of this land.

POSITION SUMMARY

The Executive Director (ED), reporting to the Chair of the Board and accountable to the Board of Directors, will lead the execution of the Land Trust's mission and build a foundation for organizational sustainability and stewardship of the lands in its care. The ED will lead a team of seasoned conservation professionals to develop and execute plans to conserve and steward land critical to wildlife corridors, preserve fragile ecosystems, protect vibrant working lands, and increase access to the land for public enjoyment. The organization is seeking a forward-thinking leader who will help shape the vision for conservation and public access in the county and solidify the Land Trust as an important local leader in the community and among its numerous conservation partners.

The ED will have responsibility for all Land Trust operations including fundraising, administration, acquisition, stewardship, and public access. This new leader will be expected to sustain and build dynamic, collaborative relationships with local and regional leaders, landowners, conservation partners, current donors, prospective supporters, and the public in order to grow visibility and support for the

Land Trust's work. The ED will be charged with fully engaging the Board and staff to achieve the fundraising goals required to build support for operations and programs, including land acquisitions, capital projects and ongoing stewardship. The ED will bring strengths in strategy, organizational development, inclusivity and diversity, and human resource management to build greater capacity within the Land Trust. The ED will expand and build programs that consider land use and recreation priorities of a broad diversity of local communities including Latinx, farmworkers and indigenous people. Additionally, the ED will engage with others across the land conservation sector to ensure that the Land Trust is evolving practices and preparing for emerging issues and new opportunities. A significant focus of this role will be on increasing and diversifying financial support and building long term sustainability for the organization and its key programs.

The Land Trust currently has a staff of 15 full-time and 7 part-time and occasional employees who have significant depth in land conservation, fundraising, stewardship, public access, and administration. The organizational culture has a family-like quality, with strong individual commitments to conservation and the Land Trust mission. The staff operates with a great deal of autonomy and welcomes the opportunity to explore new ways to build impact, align priorities, strengthen communications, and grow organizational capacity with the new leader.

The ED will oversee an average annual operating budget of around \$2.8 million excluding real estate transactions. The 2020/21 approved budget is nearly \$12 million for operations and capital projects. Revenue for operations is largely contributed through regular capital campaigns with three successful campaigns completed since 2014. Since 2006 donations from individuals have been matched \$2 to \$1 by foundation and government grants. The Land Trust recently launched a \$61 million campaign that is on track to raise funds for land acquisitions, trail construction, and operations for the next three years. The Land Trust currently has approximately 100 weeks of core operating funds on hand.

The Land Trust currently has 11 members on the Board of Directors. The Board is active in its committee participation and is interested in increasing its engagement in fundraising activities. Continued Board development will be needed around governance and in diversifying representation across communities, geographies, and expertise.

CONSERVATION CONTEXT

Santa Cruz County has been mapped for regional conservation values through the Bay Area Conservation Land Network (bayarealands.org) and at the countywide level through the Santa Cruz County Conservation Blueprint ([blueprint](#)). Together these studies frame the Land Trust's overarching conservation strategy.

Santa Cruz County lands play a vital role in regional landscape connectivity between the Santa Cruz Mountains and the Gabilan Range to the south and the Diablo Range to the east. These linkages between the Coast Range Mountains have been identified as essential to maintaining biodiversity within the Central California Coast Ecoregion.

The county has significant fertile farmland, productive rangeland, and large, multi-generational landholdings. There are prime timberlands, critical aquatic and riparian systems and endangered habitat. With the range and diversity of conservation targets, the Land Trust has many partners in conservation. The Land Trust works with and adjacent to organizations such as Peninsula Open Space Trust, The Conservation Fund and The Trust for Public Land, and with local partners such as the Mountain Bikers of Santa Cruz. In addition, it works with a diverse range of public agencies and funding partners. The Land Trust plays a key role in the constellation of conservation efforts by being the local trusted partner who understands the community history and values. There is a significant opportunity to

step more fully into leadership and articulate a broader conservation strategy for the county and to build support for a regional funding measure.

Strategic Plan

The Land Trust is currently operating under the 2019-2022 Strategic Plan (Plan) which marks a milestone in the Land Trust's growth as it focuses on managing de facto public parks – a significant shift toward connecting people to nature with as much emphasis as it has on protecting nature. The Plan delineates a significant buildout of wildland trails including Phase 1 (10 miles) in San Vicente Redwoods, 5 miles of trail at Watsonville Slough Farm, trails on the eastern side of Glenwood Preserve as well as enhancing ADA access to Antonelli Pond. Many of these projects have moved forward in planning and the Glenwood Preserve trails have been completed. In addition, the Plan outlines other trail development work including plans to connect San Vicente Redwoods to Cotoni-Coast Dairies National Monument and supporting fundraising efforts for segments of the Coastal Rail Trail project.

The Plan also outlines key targets for a range of conservation goals including the completion of a critical wildlife tunnel under Hwy 17 and land conservation targets for Pajaro Hills, sandhills, Santa Cruz Mountains and farmland in the Pajaro Valley and other areas. It also calls for significant stewardship including developing the Watsonville Slough Farm as a model for practices that advance ecological and economic sustainability. It establishes management plans for the ongoing stewardship for all the Land Trust held properties.

Among the operational goals outlined in the Strategic Plan is the launching of the current Capital Campaign – a \$61 million dollar campaign which funds the purchase of Rocks Ranch and the associated work with Caltrans developing another key wildlife crossing under Highway 101, as well as construction of the Highway 17 Wildlife Crossing, easements for another 1,400 acres of forests and farmland, and funding for key trail work. To date the campaign has secured over \$50 million in contributions, including \$35 million in grants and partner contributions and nearly \$17 million in private individual donations.

Rocks Ranch

The Land Trust recently announced its largest sole acquisition to date, a 2,640-acre property, Rocks Ranch, strategically located at a choke point connecting the Santa Cruz Mountains and the Gabilan Range in San Benito and Monterey counties. The ranch which was under threat of development has a 2.5-mile border with US Hwy 101 and a culvert system that can be retrofitted to improve critical wildlife connectivity. This high value conservation target has 9 ponds, 2 miles of streams, many seeps and springs, wetlands, riparian woodland, extensive grassland, oak savanna, and oak woodland.

The complexity of the Rocks Ranch acquisition and the vision articulated in the Strategic Plan signal a significant shift for the Land Trust from a rather small and scrappy local land trust to one that requires deep expertise and sophisticated approaches. The new Executive Director will be key to developing the relationships and structures required to accomplish the long-term sustainability of the organization and deepen its position of leadership for the land and people of the county. As the current Strategic Plan winds down in 2022, the new ED will play a key role in leading the organization as it defines its goals for the future.

Executive Director

ESSENTIAL DUTIES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

Leadership and Strategy

- Be a visible leader who represents the Land Trust actively, broadly and with integrity and is able to inspire the community to support the work;

- Collectively engage in the development of a regional vision that reflects the organization's values and meets the long-term conservation needs of the county;
- Together with the staff and Board, chart strategies that deeply consider the regional conservation requirements and the financial and human resources needed to achieve the Land Trust's mission to protect in perpetuity;
- Creatively and systematically advance the quantity and quality of conserved land in the county;
- Listen to the community and be an effective advocate for conservation and public access,
- Together with local, regional, state, and national partners pursue resources, policies, programs, and strategies that will ensure the long-term health and beauty of the local 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;
- Actively inform and engage the Board in issues of importance to the operations and strategy of the organization; and
- Assist the Board in the recruitment, selection and evaluation of Board members and leverage its expertise and networks for the benefit of the Land Trust.

Fundraising and Communications

- Marshall the resources of the whole organization to raise the funds required to maintain sound operations and facilitate land conservation, stewardship, and access goals;
- Work closely with the Development and Communications Director to develop and execute a long-term fundraising strategy with a diverse range of programs to ensure long-term organizational sustainability;
- Provide strategic leadership and oversight of private and grant fundraising and play a lead role in securing funding for land conservation projects and capital projects;
- Actively participate in growing individual support through cultivation and engagement of donors;
- Build critical relationships with local, regional, state, and federal government and agencies to communicate the Land Trust's strategies and priorities and to build support for its ongoing work;
- Support the Board's and staff's contributions to promoting the Land Trust and build their comfort and engagement in fundraising activities; and
- Assure robust and targeted communications that engage the entire community in the work and the mission of the Land Trust.

Land Protection, Stewardship and Access

- Establish and maintain effective working relationships with organizations involved in land conservation in the region;
- Ensure that the Land Trust's interests are advanced through collaborative and open relationships with local, state, and federal officials and agencies while ensuring the capacity to act nimbly and independently;
- Cultivate and enhance positive relationships with diverse landowners throughout the county; work with the staff and others to evolve discussions and opportunities for conservation projects;
- Empower and assist the land conservation staff and others in designing and implementing effective land acquisition and conservation easement transactions, including developing financing plans, and undertaking due diligence to close transactions;
- Oversee conservation transactions, monitoring and enforcement and ensure compliance with the highest standards of land trust practice;
- Ensure that the Land Trust has adequate capacity to provide responsible professional stewardship of land and conservation easements that it holds;

- Support the Land Trust's access and trail development plans and programs to increase the public's appreciation and participation in land conservation; and
- Actively pursue equity of access to protected lands; value multicultural input when developing land strategies and public programming.

Internal Leadership and Operational Management

- Evaluate the Land Trust's progress in meeting its strategic goals and facilitate updates to the strategic plan; develop and monitor annual work plans;
- Recruit, nurture, and challenge a motivated professional staff; delegate specific responsibilities with appropriate authority and establish accountability; foster open, positive communications;
- Lead the Land Trust in building the organizational structure including policies, procedures, and systems to meet future growth; build institutional and professional capacity to assure ongoing success and stability;
- Annually develop and monitor the Land Trust's budget and provide oversight of the fiscal operations of the Land Trust in cooperation with the Board Treasurer and the Deputy Director;
- Oversee adherence to Land Trust Alliance Standards and Practices to maintain accreditation;
- Ensure effective management of HR, Accounting, IT, and administrative functions; and
- Ensure clear, transparent, and effective communication, reporting and feedback between Board and staff through various committees and organizational structures.

POSITION REQUIREMENTS

Experience

A successful Executive Director candidate will likely have:

- A vision of a vibrant and interconnected regional landscape that ensures biodiversity and serves the plants, animals and people who live within it in perpetuity;
- Enthusiasm for opening access to land along with the ability to convert that vision into support for land conservation;
- Experience effectively leading a nonprofit organization of similar size; ideally with experience in land conservation and/or the management of trails and recreation spaces;
- Experience as the face of an organization; well-developed interpersonal skills; superb oral and written communication skills, ability to present ideas clearly and persuasively;
- Experience in and/or ability to learn, the nuances of real estate transactions and land conservation including easement transactions, funding, and monitoring requirements;
- Demonstrated success achieving fundraising goals including developing, sustaining, and identifying new sources and methods of financial support;
- Evidence of developing and implementing an effective strategy and creative problem-solving;
- Demonstrated leadership and management skills; and the ability to build a team in which Board and staff are united in their efforts to achieve established goals;
- A history of strong collaboration; someone who seeks strategic, effective relationships and maintains a high level of tact and confidentiality;
- Exercises good judgment and is able to hear and value alternate opinions and make informed decisions;
- Strong financial and organizational management skills including experience with nonprofit governance;
- A Bachelor's degree in related field or equivalent combination of education and experience; and
- Knowledge of and/or experience with the central coast of California and its physical, social, and cultural environments would be advantageous but is not required.

Attributes

- Someone who is authentic and inspirational; who loves the land and acts to serve the communities (plant, animal and human) that are dependent upon it;
- Politically astute and able to professionally and respectfully communicate and work with a diverse group of landowners, partners, volunteers, governmental officials, and others important to the work; nonpartisan with a highly collaborative style;
- A team builder with both vision and strong management skills; someone who listens well and can motivate and direct diverse partners while establishing accountability and shared success;
- Emotionally mature with a good sense of humor, someone who is at ease, confident and competent and genuinely enjoys working with people and appreciates volunteers;
- An optimistic person who communicates in a positive, compelling, and inspired way, but can be patient and able to keep the long view while achieving ongoing successes;
- Someone who highlights and supports the successes of others, builds effective and lasting relationships; a team builder who creates high morale and fosters feelings of belonging;
- Able to accept criticism and deal calmly and effectively with high stress situations; cool under pressure and a settling influence when needed;
- Resourceful—able to set priorities and act opportunistically;
- Socially graceful and able to be at ease with a wide range of people; and
- Exercises high ethical standards with honesty, directness, and a good-natured approachability;

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

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