

GOOD DIRT

NEWSLETTER OF THE ANDERSON VALLEY LAND TRUST

FALL 2021

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE: Anderson Valley Land Trust, a 30-Year Reflection

I hope this newsletter finds you well and enjoying our much-needed fall rains! At the close of AVLT's 30th year, it feels like a good time to reflect on some of our accomplishments and ongoing work over the years. Below, you will find a partial list of these endeavors. We:

- have worked with landowners to write and steward 28 conservation easements currently protecting 2,800 acres in Anderson Valley.
- organize 2-3 annual, educational, free field walks or workshops (except in the pandemic, and then some on Zoom) with focuses like watershed restoration, resilient landscapes, using a compass/map reading, trail building, road building/re-building, estate planning, and wildflower walks.
- create tours of conserved land and gardens, including many years of Sustainable Discoveries demonstrating sustainable local food and agriculture.
- hosted the well-attended Legacy of Working Land, an all-day workshop on the intergenerational transfer of farm and ranch land and succession planning.
- invite donors to an annual thank you event (except in the pandemic).
- gave a presentation to the Mendocino County Board of Supervisors resulting in a General Plan Amendment to acknowledge the benefits of permanent voluntary land conservation.
- led a scientifically-based Navarro River Watershed Strategy Assessment, which established a baseline for grant funding for restoration work.
- carried out a National Park Service Rivers, Trails, and Conservation Program grant to determine the feasibility of a Navarro River Trail.
- bi-annually publish the *Good Dirt* newsletter.
- participate in the county-wide Sustainable Agriculture Land Program to help protect agricultural and range land.
- joined the City Nature Challenge Bio-Blitz last year to survey the native plant and animal species in Anderson Valley.

We are so grateful for all of the support we have received over the years. Our work would not be possible without it. We hope you will continue to support our efforts for the next 30 years and beyond!



Sincerely,

Rachel Turner Williams
President, AVLT Board of Directors

CALISOGA SPIDER – A LOCAL “FALSE” TARANTULA – SO VELVETY! BY NANCY HORNOR

Have you ever noticed a burrow in the ground in the summer or fall, a hole about an inch in diameter, lined with silky white webbing? After seeing several in our “yard” in Philo, and elsewhere in the Valley, I wondered what this was and did some sleuthing. Here’s what I found on the Internet, and from information generously provided by Mendocino County naturalist Kate Marianchild, author of *Secrets of the Oak Woodlands* (a wonderful book, and great gift for enjoying the natural history of our area).

This silky burrow is the home of *Calisoga longitarsus*, also called velveteen or false tarantula. It looks like a tarantula, but *Calisoga* is smaller and not as hairy. It’s around two inches in diameter, is grayish brown or silvery, and kind of velvety-hairy. Though smaller, these spiders are more aggressive than true tarantulas. I found one once under some wet leaves I was clearing away from our house in the fall and it was intimidating when it reared up and showed its “fangs”! *Calisoga* spiders are not dangerous to humans but will bite if harassed and their hairs are irritating to skin. It’s a beautiful, showy spider, rarely seen and best left alone to do its spider thing.

Found in California in a variety of habitats, including oak woodlands and grasslands, they are homebodies and night-owls, rarely leaving their burrows except to find food or a mate, and mostly come out at night. They stay just below the burrow entrance where they “ambush” and eat other arthropods (such as insects and spiders) that come close by or inside.

The burrow where *Calisoga* spends most of its time is often entirely excavated by the spider. It can also be a “remodeled” rodent burrow or a space left by a rotted tree root. A layer or two of silk usually lines the first few inches of the burrow. The spiders also cover the entrance with silk when they are molting and when eggs are developing in egg sacs. *Calisoga* does not make a web for capturing prey.

You may notice a silky white ball just outside the burrow in the summer, like someone had taken out the trash. This is a discarded egg sac. I opened one up last summer to see what was inside – it looked like the discarded molted exoskeletons of many tiny growing baby spiders. It would be fun to have a closer look with a good magnifying glass or close-focusing binoculars.

Not everyone is a fan of spiders, but these shy, velvety creatures are a fascinating part of our natural world and if you do ever see one, consider yourself lucky and give it some wonder and appreciation.



Photos by Kate Marianchild www.katemarianchild.com.

TRUE CONSERVATION

We are happy to report that our bank of conserved lands has just grown by 202 acres thanks to the donation of a new conservation easement. What makes this conservation easement so special is that it abuts two other areas of conserved lands to create a combined 480 acres of forest land extending from ridgeline to creek zone that is restricted from development and conserved in perpetuity.

The new easement does many things. It protects significant stands of second growth (and getting older) redwoods. It protects habitats for a number of protected species that have been recorded on the property including the Northern spotted owl (*Strix occidentalis caurina*). The Property also contains habitat for the white-tailed kite (*Elanus leucurus*), a fully protected species by the state of California and the Northern goshawk (*Accipiter gentilis*), listed as a “species of concern” by the state of California.

The area covered in the easement stretches along 1,500 feet of a blue-line creek that includes spawning habitat for the Northern California Steelhead (*Oncorhynchus mykiss*) and creekside habitat for the California red-legged frog, (*Rana draytonii*), both threatened species listed by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

While these species may be the well-known “stars” helped by the conservation easement, there are a number of benefits to the myriad of avian, terrestrial, reptile, and amphibious animals that live on and frequent the property. And though it is sometimes difficult to quantify, such a large conservation zone certainly helps protect the water quality of Anderson Valley’s streams.

But wait! There is more! The property involved is actually three legal parcels that could have been sold and developed separately. Through the conservation easement, two restrictions are now in place. First, the parcels must now be treated as one and therefore cannot be transferred separately in the future to multiple owners. Second, except for one existing residence, no additional development can take place. None.

Simple concepts. Protect habitat and restrict development. That is conservation.

Through the generosity of private property owners who donate easements, our library of 28 conservation easements throughout Anderson Valley and the Navarro River watershed protects in perpetuity 2,800 acres of land. These are lands that over time protect and restore the wildlife habitat, watershed resources, working forest and agricultural lands, open space, and the rural quality of life in Anderson Valley.



A New Conservation Easement in Anderson Valley

ANNOUNCING: AVLT VIRTUAL NATURE CENTER

You may now go to the AVLT web page (andersonvalleylandtrust.org) and click “Virtual Nature Center” for access to a host of web sites and on-line resources that provide a wealth of information about Anderson Valley, the Navarro River watershed, our natural resources, recreation opportunities, history, and much more. Given the recent downpour in October, a particularly useful link is the Department of Water Resources site that provides “real time” documentation of stream flows in the Navarro River in 15 minute intervals (hint, enter NRN for the key code that is requested). On October 24 the river flows changed from 43 cfs (cubic feet a second) at 10 am to 9,642 cfs by 10pm. Wow!

If you have other sites you think should be added to our Virtual Nature Center, please send us an e-mail at avlt@mcn.org.



Anderson Valley in the cloud

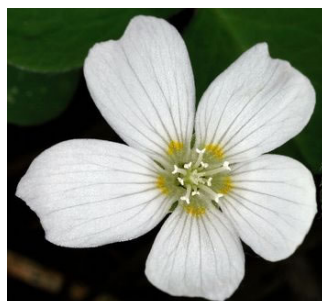
AVLT OUTDOOR PROGRAMS ARE BACK

SAVE THE DATE!

APRIL 24, 2022

WILDFLOWER WALK AT THE LAND!

Once again, AVLT is planning a spring wildflower walk. This year on The Land in Philo. Need we say more? Attendance will be limited to a first-come first-serve basis. If you are interested, please send us an e-mail (avlt@mcn.org) with the number of people that would attend. More information will follow as we approach spring.



HUSCH VINEYARDS RAINWATER CATCHMENT AND RAIN GARDEN by Linda MacElwee and Patty Madigan, MCRCD



By capturing winter rains for use during the summer dry season—when people, plants, creeks, and wildlife need it the most—we can build climate resiliency into our water systems. Rain gardens retain the rainwater and allow it to infiltrate into the soil, recharging groundwater and helping plants to grow deep roots and filter pollutants. In addition, rainwater gardens create beauty, enhance biodiversity and provide food and habitat for pollinators. This demonstration site was developed by Mendocino County Resource Conservation District (MCRCD) through funding provided by the Wildlife Conservation Board.

Since 2018, MCRCD has been developing streamflow enhancement planning and projects on a voluntary basis, with local landowners in coordination with The Nature Conservancy and Trout Unlimited. The Husch Vineyards Demonstration Project was developed as part of the Mill Creek Collaborative Water Management Plan. The Nature Conservancy, with support from the Salmonid Restoration Federation, has developed an excellent Guidebook for [Collaborative Water Management](https://mcrdc.org/resources/flow-enhancement) (can be downloaded from mcrdc.org/resources/flow-enhancement) . We would like to thank Husch Vineyards for their support in this collaboration, and for Trix Holstine’s drawing of plants and pollinators featured on the rain gardens interpretive signage.

What is Pacific Gas & Electric Company doing in our Conservation Easements?

We have had a number of our Conservation Easement holders ask if there is anything the AVLTT can do to stop the Pacific Gas & Electric Company from clearing around its transmission lines to minimize potential fire risks. Regretfully, our hands are tied.

All of the Conservation Easements donated to the AVLTT include language similar to the following:

Grant of Easement. This grant, donation, and conveyance is subject to all prior encumbrances, liens, interest, and agreements previously recorded against the Property in the Official Records of Mendocino County.

It is important to understand that if there are other easements related to a Property, like a road access easement, and those easements exist prior to the signing of the Conservation Easement, the earlier easements have precedence. Such is the case with the Pacific Gas & Electric Company easements for its power transmission and service lines and the maintenance of them. Additionally, the California Public Utilities Commission, the Governor, and as an implementing agency, the Calif. Division of Forestry and Fire Protection (CalFire) have issued a number of laws and (cont. page 6)

regulations, some of which we appreciate, such as managing for fire protection, and others that we question. . . like the lack of erosion control after vegetation removal (see photo). In the future, AVLT will work to improve PG&E communication and practices on easement lands.



PHOTO: PG&E Company vegetation clearing through an AVLT Conservation Easement.

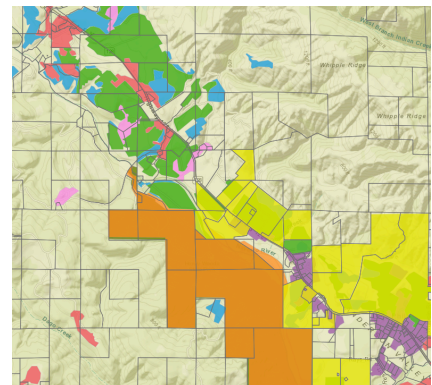
SUSTAINABLE AGRICULTURAL LAND CONVERSION PROGRAM (SALC) – KEEPING IT LOCAL

Given real estate trends and population migration patterns, could there be in the long-distance future an Anderson Valley without much agriculture? How do we keep Anderson Valley’s agricultural tradition of local food production going and going and going over time?

Over the past few years the Anderson Valley Land Trust has been working with the Mendocino County Resource Conservation District and other agencies and land trusts to develop a strategy for conserving our working agricultural lands in Mendocino County. Part of that program is to identify those properties that are most “at risk” to be converted to uses other than agriculture and where protection under a conservation easement makes sense to the owner/farmer/rancher of the property.

To help that effort, we are in the process of mapping selected parcels in two “at risk” categories: agricultural lands at a high risk of conversion within 2 miles of clustered residential developments (think Yorkville, Boonville, Philo, and Navarro); and lands between 2 and 5 miles that are somewhat less at risk. The considerations for identifying these properties are numerous, involving, among other criteria: the pattern of prime farmland soils; parcel size; ownership patterns; and State Department of Conservation and Mendocino County’s designation of Unique Farmland, Prime Farmland or Farmland of Statewide Importance.

As a property owner, if you are interested in learning more about this program and the benefits a conservation easement might bring you, please contact the AVLT office at 707 895-3150 or avlt@mcn.org, You can also check out our Q&As at our website andersonvalleylandtrust.org.



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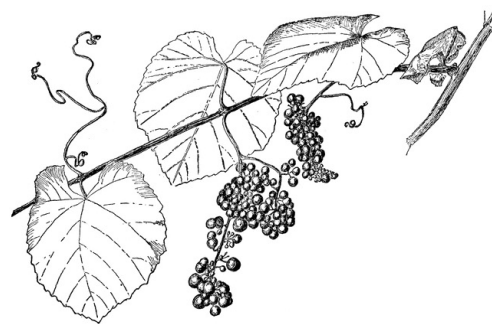
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INSIDE DIRT

A LETTER FROM THE PRESIDENT

***Calisoga Spider* (FALSE TARANTULA)**

TRUE CONSERVATION

AVLT VIRTUAL NATURE CENTER

HUSCH RAINWATER CAPTURE

PG&E VEGETATION REMOVAL

SUSTAINABLE AGRICULTURAL LAND
CONSERVATION PROGRAM (SALC)

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