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environmental
solutions that make
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THE Bridge

LETTER FROM THE **Executive Director**

20 YEARS... AND WE'VE ONLY JUST BEGUN



For two decades, Sustainable Conservation's environmental solutions that make economic sense have improved and protected the health of California's rivers and fish, including coho salmon.

2013 marked Sustainable Conservation's 20th anniversary, a time for reflecting upon what we have been able to accomplish through our unique approach to environmental problem solving. Thanks to your steadfast partnership and support, Sustainable Conservation is on track to pioneer the next big ideas in conservation.

When I think back over my 16 years at Sustainable Conservation's helm, I realize that our first big idea was the creation of the organization 20 years ago. While more common now, the idea of partnering with business to find environmental solutions was very new at the time. Two decades later, we have the history to show that we were the early movers proving how protecting the environment can also be good for business.

Our following big idea was to promote healthy waterways and wildlife habitat through our Brake Pad Partnership – and I'm delighted to report that industry is ahead of schedule in adhering to new standards set by our groundbreaking clean water legislation.

Up next? Restoring eroded streambanks to simultaneously boost fish populations and conserve land for growing crops and raising livestock. We had the audacious notion to help stewardship-minded landowners by creating a simplified permitting program for restoration projects.

Through collaboration, perseverance, and a focus on results, we were able to establish our hallmark program in nine counties along the California coast, allowing the implementation of hundreds of restoration projects in key watersheds to benefit people and fish.

Thanks to partners like you, 2013 marked the launch of our efforts to scale our program statewide. We achieved a huge milestone this past May (see our main story inside), and momentum keeps building.

I hope you'll turn to the back page for a sneak preview into conservation's next frontier – rewarding landowners for providing measurable benefits to society through voluntary restoration work.

Thank you again for being a part of our dynamic history, and our bright future.

Warm regards,

Ashley Boren

Ashley Boren
Executive Director



Many of California's rivers and streams contain old culverts which once enabled construction of small roads over waterways but now impede the ability of fish to migrate upstream to spawn. Heavy rains plug the culverts with debris, causing road washouts, or water flows under the culverts during drier seasons – and imperiled fish, such as coho salmon and steelhead trout, are left high and dry.



Tom and Manuela Bird utilized Sustainable Conservation's simplified permitting program in partnership with the Resource Conservation District of Santa Cruz County to replace their culvert (inset above) with a free-span crossing and plant native vegetation along the banks of Deer Creek. Our hallmark program saves stewardship-minded landowners a great deal of time and money, allowing them to more quickly implement powerful restoration projects that improve water quality, provide fish easier access to vital habitat, and protect valuable working land from erosion. PHOTO BY: PAOLO VESCIA

Thriving Rivers for People and Wildlife

Salmon are sentinels for the health of California's rivers and streams. How these fish are doing tells us a lot about whether or not our waterways are surviving and thriving. And how we listen to and act upon the messages they deliver will greatly impact the Golden State's environmental future.

At Sustainable Conservation, we have our ear to the river's edge.

Sixteen years ago, we took note of this exquisite, tenuous nexus of wildlife and aquatic health, and plugged in the missing component of a powerful strategy to protect and improve natural resources statewide: private landowners. Specifically, farmers and ranchers who care for and make their livings through soil and root, stream and crop.

We did our homework, including the math. More than 50% of California is privately owned – and a vast majority of California's rivers and streams flow through or along private property. So how these folks manage their properties has a big effect on clean water and fish that depend on healthy waterways.

Farmers and ranchers naturally seek to preserve and improve the land and water that sustain their livelihoods. If high flows erode riverbanks and eat away at acreage housing an apple farmer's trees or winegrape grower's vines, fast action to stabilize those banks is in the landowner's best interest. And, in this case, what's good for the farmer is also good for the water that flows and the fish who swim below the apple trees.

Planting vegetation to build up streamside forests can stop costly erosion, improve water clarity, and provide shade to keep water at a fish-friendly temperature. Removing barriers to fish passage, including replacing old culverts with free-span bridges, can save landowners money on maintenance and repairs and allows salmon to find their way home to native spawning grounds.

Many farmers and ranchers are eager to restore their land and adjacent waterways, but the process to do so can be complicated and expensive – involving permits from up to eight different agencies. Our audacious idea to address this problem created simplified permitting programs with Resource Conservation Districts in nine counties along the coast. Our programs to accelerate voluntary restoration are in high demand in places like Santa Cruz and Marin counties, and provide a winning solution for the environment and landowners.

We have been committed to the health of California's rivers, fish, and people for over two decades – and our work has just begun. We have big plans to provide simplified permitting for the entire state, to make critical restoration activities faster, easier, and cheaper to implement everywhere in California.

We had our first big success in scaling our efforts this past May, when the California Coastal Commission unanimously approved a region-wide program to speed the implementation of voluntary habitat restoration projects in coastal areas from the Oregon border all the way down through San Luis Obispo. As soon as the ruling was made, numerous projects lined up to take advantage of it.

We are delighted to report that two of our environmental sister organizations – Trout Unlimited and The Nature Conservancy – will utilize the new programmatic permit to implement fish habitat and water quality improvement projects. Next up, we are working on extending this agreement from Santa Barbara down to the Mexican border to bolster restoration along California's entire coastline.

Rivers and streams are liquid lifelines – for people, fish, and myriad other species. We can have healthy waterways and a healthy economy grown by stewardship-minded landowners. And, with Sustainable Conservation at the river's edge, we will.

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Don't miss connecting with Sustainable Conservation and our passionate online community as we advance real, lasting solutions for clean air and water, thriving wildlife and habitat, and a healthy climate.



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Around the River Bend



PHOTO BY: HOFFMAN FAMILY

Our ecosystem services initiative aims to reward landowners for implementing restoration projects along California waterways, including the Mokelumne River (pictured above), to improve water quality and wildlife habitat, and conserve working landscapes.

Paddling along the Mokelumne River – site of Sustainable Conservation's ecosystem services initiative – provides a rich look into the challenges California's waterways face, and an exciting solution on the horizon.

Working Landscapes

The Mokelumne River itself and the land running along it provide extraordinary natural resources upon which human health and enterprise depends:

- People fishing on the banks represent recreational outfitters who depend on the river for their livelihoods;
- Vineyard acreage flanking the river shows how farmers depend on the river for irrigation water; and
- Sierra Nevada snowmelt flowing down the river comprises 90% of the drinking water supply for residents of Northern California's East Bay.

Environmental Challenges

The Mokelumne River also manifests burgeoning problems resulting from past and current land management and water supply decisions. Since the 1920s, the Lower Mokelumne River has lost 70% of its streamside forest. Without enough vegetation to filter agricultural runoff, prevent erosion, or slow water down, drinking water supplies and fish habitat provided by the river continue to suffer. This is not an uncommon story in California – but it is one that Sustainable Conservation is focused on turning around.

Our Solution

Much of the remaining vegetation along the Mokelumne River is adjacent to productive and valuable agricultural and range lands. California landowners who manage their properties responsibly provide important services – like clean drinking water purified by vegetation, and bountiful fish populations living in intact rivers.



With our on-the-ground partners, including the Hoffman Family of Heritage Oak Winery, we are advancing an innovative model of conservation that rewards farmers, ranchers, and other landowners for providing measurable benefits to the natural resources under their care. Together, we can help forests once again stand tall along the Mokelumne River to enhance water quality and wildlife habitat. Together, we can set yet another big idea in motion – one that has the potential to impact not only California, but the entire nation.