

THE Bridge

Sustainable Conservation partners with the private sector to find environmental solutions that make economic sense.

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LETTER FROM THE **Executive Director**

GIVING NATURE ITS DUE

Sustainable Conservation is launching the next big idea in conservation. But don't take our word for it. Just ask Dr. Gretchen Daily – Bing Professor of Environmental Science and Director of the Center for Conservation Biology at Stanford University – who's featured inside.

Gretchen is leading a global movement of science, conservation and government allies to measure and protect the vital, but often ignored, benefits nature provides to humans. Things like clean air, clean water and abundant food.



Sustainable Conservation is launching a pioneering effort with California landowners to enhance clean air, clean water and other overlooked benefits of a healthy environment.

Here in California, Sustainable Conservation is developing innovative approaches to enhance these "ecosystem services" by rewarding private landowners – in real dollars – for managing the natural resources under their care responsibly.

You see, California farmers, ranchers and others provide important services – such as clean drinking water purified by forests and wetlands, and bountiful fish populations living in intact rivers – that benefit us all. Because more than 50% of California is privately owned and a majority of the state's natural resources are on or near private property, engaging these folks is essential in safeguarding nature's benefits and human well-being for generations to come. As Sustainable Conservation has proven for nearly 20 years, financial incentives spur lasting results – and, in many cases, at a fraction of the cost of increased regulation, buying land outright or building expensive infrastructure like treatment plants.

Thanks to your continued support, Sustainable Conservation is, yet again, showing the nation and world how improving the long-term health of the environment can be good for the bottom line.

Warm regards,

Ashley Boren

Ashley Boren
Executive Director

Valuing Nature

Sustainable Conservation caught up recently with distinguished professor and Director of Stanford University's Center for Conservation Biology, Dr. Gretchen Daily, to talk about a promising new approach to conservation she's championing internationally and Sustainable Conservation is launching in California. The approach involves accounting for the tremendous but often overlooked benefits nature provides to people – like clean air and water – and promoting financial incentives to encourage the sound stewardship of these vital “ecosystem services.”

Q: What drives your interest in studying the planet and developing new approaches to conserving natural resources?

Dr. Gretchen Daily: I just find it incredible that until the next asteroid hits the planet, it's people much more than any other force that will dictate the future course of all known life. On the one hand, it's frightening because we expect to lose perhaps 50% of the plants and animals that were on the planet when humanity came onto the scene within this 100-year period we're in now. But, at the same time, it's exhilarating because there's such a movement of people in all sectors to try and figure out what we can do in our generation to recognize this and focus our conservation efforts in ways that will yield the greatest benefits. And, not only for nature but for people. That's what's going to motivate conservation. That's what will make it mainstream.

Q: What's the “ecosystem services” approach to conservation all about?

Humanity is at a really momentous time in history. We're understanding for the first time in real depth how people fit into the bigger picture of the planet – and what we need to do to make sure that, in our quest to improve human well-being around the planet, we sustain the very ecological underpinnings of that well-being.

Right now, we tend not to think about nature so, in effect, nature has a value of zero in our decision-

making. **Sustainable Conservation** and I share the hope that in the future people will always be accounting for nature, that we're always aware at a pretty deep level of the ways we depend on nature's provisions. This applies to clean energy from hydropower or wave energy in coastal areas, or the essential pollination of many fruits and vegetables by bees.

What my colleagues and I are trying to do now internationally and what **Sustainable Conservation** is doing in California, is to identify in a very systematic way which parts of nature are most critical for human well-being and what we can do to motivate more investment that would achieve not only a payoff for conservation in the short term, but also for our kids' and their kids' well-being.

The way this is developing in a lot of places is to pool the people who benefit from a particular service, a particular process going on in nature that we all need, like forested watersheds providing clean water. Then, have these beneficiaries pay those individuals and entities that are enhancing that benefit.

Looking into the future, the ideal would be to really harmonize people and nature to do these little things that, taken together, would add up to a transformative impact. It would change how people interact with nature and would lead to better outcomes not only for nature itself but also livelihoods, sustaining what we all need to keep these benefits flowing. This means rewarding landowners for not just growing traditional

commodities like almonds and tomatoes, but also for cultivating new kinds of commodities like clean water and air.

So, this is a really pioneering frontier of conservation science and practice – and **Sustainable Conservation** is at the forefront. It's exploring how to set up this kind of arrangement, bringing together the many different users and beneficiaries of nature. And, then also bringing together those on the supply side to figure out what kind of policies and financing mechanisms would bring the supply and demand together.

Sustainable Conservation is saying, “Let's get really practical here, not academic and theoretical ... let's just see what could work so we can all achieve a better outcome.” In the case of land use, like farming, the outcome potentially involves a neat business model that diversifies income streams – which is advantageous to landowners – and recognizes the benefits that often have been flowing for a long time to the greater public but weren't ever that appreciated.

Q: How does the adoption of this conservation model in California stack up with other states?

California is definitely leading in this arena, and **Sustainable Conservation** can take a lot of credit for that – along with its partners. The partnership approach that **Sustainable Conservation** is taking is definitely the way forward. There's a lot of innovation in California, and we've got the know-how. Partnerships that bring academics together with real-world conservation practitioners are absolute win-wins on both sides.

The new policy and finance approaches that **Sustainable Conservation** is really innovating are designed to lead to a better supply of nature's benefits for the general public, but also more economic security for those providing them.

Q: What are the limitations to advancing this type of conservation?

There are many areas of nature that we don't understand that well. And, many people are worried that we're just going to try and put everything in dollars and cents. We simply can't capture the full glory of nature in dollars and cents. It would be crazy to do so. But, it's important to recognize that there are a few pragmatic things we can do today that will really help align economic incentives with conservation outcomes.

I think that what we're doing today is our very best at trying to work out, in places where we have some understanding, what the return on investment of conservation would be to society to motivate governments and businesses, landowners and all the others involved to come up with a better system. But over the long run, we want to go way beyond that. This is just the initial game plan. We want to build a much deeper understanding and have that reflected in our policies and the way that our economy is structured.



“This is a really pioneering frontier of conservation science and practice – and Sustainable Conservation is at the forefront.”

– Dr. Gretchen Daily, Stanford University

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Bringing the Next Big Idea in Conservation to California



Sustainable Conservation and our partners are launching one of California's first and boldest ecosystem services projects along the Mokelumne River in northern California. Our efforts involve rewarding farmers, ranchers and other landowners like Lodi wine-grape grower Vino Farms (pictured) for providing measurable benefits to the natural resources under their care.

Working with Vino Farms and others along the river, Sustainable Conservation will bring back the thick, lush forests that once blanketed the Mokelumne's banks to prevent soil runoff, boost water quality and enhance habitat for wildlife like imperiled steelhead trout and Chinook salmon.

"My family has a long history of taking care of this land, and I want to make sure that legacy lives on," says Vino Farm's owner John Ledbetter. "Sustainable Conservation is helping me do just that."



Soil runoff from farms and other private land can cloud waterways and harm fish habitat (top). Streamside vegetation keeps soil in place, promoting clean water for people and wildlife (bottom).

