

Where We Are Now

Senator Laird Delivers 30x30 Update



Common cause With a grant from the Harold J. Miozzi Charitable Trust, Creek Lands Conservation works with community stakeholders to create the SLO Creek Resiliency & Rewilding Action Plan. “If the community can protect and restore the key elements needed to support steelhead, they may be able to persist here for future generations,” says Creeklands Executive Director Don Chartrand. “If we fail, this population could disappear.”

On May 7, state Senator John Laird wrote a letter to Governor Newsom and the California Natural Resources Agency on 30x30, the state’s program to conserve 30% of California's land and waters by 2030 as we face the “Sixth Extinction,” a human-created crisis of global consequence.

The 12-page letter, prepared with the input of local land trusts, environmental organizations, resource conservation districts, tribes, and regional, state, and federal agencies, was a statewide survey of conservation projects completed or undertaken in California over the last two years. The portion of the letter focusing on San Luis Obispo County and the broader 17th Senate District should be of particular interest to our members, as it provides a vivid picture of where we are in efforts to conserve and protect the natural lands and wildlife of the Central Coast.

First and foremost, Sen. Laird noted that “thanks to the work of the Northern Chumash Tribal Council (NCTC), the Santa Lucia Chapter of the Sierra Club, and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, we are approaching the final stages of the formal designation of a new marine sanctuary, located between the existing Monterey and Channel Islands national marine sanctuaries.... As advocated by NCTC and all three Central Coast wind energy leaseholders in their April 19, 2024, letter, we can achieve this sanctuary designation using a phased approach, in cooperation with the thoughtful development of offshore wind on the

Central Coast -- an essential component to achieving the state's ambitious clean-energy goals and responsibly facing the climate crisis and its potentially devastating impacts to humankind and biodiversity.”

In an overview of biodiversity initiatives across the county, the Senator singled out the recent conservation easement on the 27,500-acre Camatta Ranch and noted that additional efforts are needed to connect the Carrizo Plain National Monument to lands of the Los Padres National Forest, the Bureau of Land Management, and the U.S. Forest Service. (“As an added benefit, projects in this interior region of the state are much cheaper, which significantly leverages limited conservation dollars toward maximum biodiversity protection.”)

Recognizing that the Salinas River “is one of the most important rivers in the State of California,” Laird advocated for a comprehensive Salinas River Corridor management plan that should include restoration projects of degraded areas. “We should also support educational and recreational programs around the river, including the Salinas River Trail, Salinas River Center, and the projects of the SLO Beaver Brigade and Ecologistics, to promote the stewardship, revitalization, water resiliency, and biodiversity of the Salinas River.”

Laird noted that although California's iconic forests and woodlands are considered “biodiversity hotspots,” these native tree ecosystems “are facing increasing threats due to habitat destruction, fragmentation, wildfires, and other climate-related impacts. We should consider efforts to strengthen forest and woodland protections statewide, with a focus on redwood forests and native oak woodlands. Not only will this boost the biodiversity in these regions, but protections of these species are key to a climate resilient future because of their powerful role in carbon sequestration.”



Poster child Nipomo's native oak woodlands, now on the brink of destruction by the Dana Reserve development, could have used stronger statewide woodland protections.

Laird emphasized prioritizing the current efforts to extend the California Coastal Trail – planned to stretch 1,230 miles from Oregon to Mexico – writing that “significant progress toward this goal has already been made along the Central Coast, but much work remains. We need extension efforts at the Guadalupe-Nipomo Dunes, between Morro Bay and Cayucos, at the Hearst Ranch/SLO North Coast, along the Big Sur coastline, and elsewhere where the California Coastal Trail is fragmented and incomplete.”

One of those places is the 12,000-acre Diablo Canyon Lands surrounding the Diablo Canyon Power Plant, where a managed coastal public access program, including a 20-mile extension of the Coastal Trail, will ensure conservation of intact coastal habitat, rocky intertidal areas, and sacred Chumash cultural sites. “This vision took a major leap forward when \$5 million in funds that I secured in the 2023 state budget were allocated this year to the State Coastal Conservancy,” wrote Laird, a longtime champion of the preservation of these lands. The funds will enable the creation of conservation easements across all 12,000 acres, the completion of pre-acquisition steps for Wild Cherry Canyon, and the implementation of a public and tribal outreach program, as outlined in the 2023 “Diablo Canyon Power Plant Land Conservation and Economic Development Plan” by the California Natural Resources Agency.

Sen. Laird also secured \$1.5 million for the acquisition of 750 acres of the 2,000-acre Toro Coast Preserve between Cayucos and Morro Bay, and urges completion of the full project by 2030 to enhance public coastal access. The funding of additional easements would conserve the 2,500-acre McMillan Ranch, the 1,500-acre Adelaida Springs Ranch, and the 850-acre Cottontail Creek Ranch, which plays a crucial role in the water quality of Whale Rock Reservoir immediately downstream. Initial restoration of the Black Lake Canyon Ecological Area was completed in 2023, but additional sediment removal is needed to improve the area’s habitat.

On the North Coast, efforts to improve public access and habitat should include “State Parks’ efforts to finally establish a 20-mile extension to the California Coastal Trail on the Hearst coast. We should also support a creative solution to the annual loss of dozens of elephant seal pups at the Piedras Blancas rookery, which are separated from their mothers during increasingly heavy wave action during winter storms, exacerbated by a loss of beach due to rising sea waters.”

The Senator advocated for the Guadalupe Nipomo Dunes, including efforts to enhance habitat and rehabilitation projects on this rare coastal dune ecosystem “in light of the potential phasing out of off-highway vehicle access on the Oceano Dunes portion.” In particular, the state should “prioritize the permanent protection of the 680-acre Buffer Area (a site of rare plants) located immediately east of the protected Oso Flaco Lake Natural Area. Oso Flaco Lake itself should also be protected against plans that would fragment the ecosystem and introduce incompatible uses, to ensure continued conservation of this birding area of statewide significance, its rare and highly biodiverse coastal lake, dune, and riparian habitat, and its popular and quiet coastal destination for locals and visitors.”

Everywhere they are found, conservation successes are a source of hope. “But much work remains,” Laird told the Governor and the state resources agency, “and the projects outlined

above can make a significant impact. I urge your support of these initiatives; time is of the essence.”