

A Land Trust Legacy

PRESERVING HABITAT TAKES COLLABORATION

It's mid-October and I'm on The Nature Conservancy's 9,000-acre Staten Island, part of the 46,000 acre Cosumnes River Preserve, in California's Sacramento River Delta. Owned by the Conservancy, the island is all farmland, farmed for the benefit of migrating birds. I'm looking over fields of harvested wheat, corn and potatoes as hundreds of 5-foot-tall greater sandhill cranes jump and dance in the fields. As I watch, hundreds more arrive with their haunting, gurgling call.

It's a valley almost totally dedicated to agriculture. As wildlife-friendly crops are being converted to grapes, olives and walnuts, crops with minimal wildlife values, it is the work of a land trust that plays a key role for the future of these sandhill cranes. The entire western population of greater sandhill cranes relies on this preserve for their very survival. Located strategically on one of the last fully functioning floodplain habitats in California, and on the only free flowing river coming out of the Sierras, the preserve is an example of what land trusts are about.

I'm here on a field trip for "Rally," the annual conference for The Land Trust Alliance, the national organization representing land trusts. The Alliance represents 1,100 land trusts across the U.S. with five million individual members. These land trusts protect 24 million acres of private lands. And, while there are some large national trusts, like The Nature Conservancy and Trust for Public Lands, the vast majority of the land trusts are small, local organizations connected to a specific place and supported by their local communities.

There are 19 land trusts in Oregon, working cooperatively through the efforts of the Coalition of Oregon Land Trusts, and more than 5,000 volunteers, to protect more than 344,000 acres. And the national diversity of small, locally driven land trusts is reflected in Oregon as well.

Land trusts protect land by buying it. They also purchase or accept donations of conservation easements, which they then monitor for compliance. With an easement, the property owner sells or donates certain specified development rights, forever. Trusts also protect land by partnering with communities, utilities, and state and federal agencies. And, because the land trust focus is on private land, they often protect resources that are under-represented on public lands.

Land trusts are locally driven, protecting resources important to the community. As a result, land trusts work to protect a wide variety of resources. There are trusts that protect historic sites, rock climbing sites, public access to outdoor recreation, farmland, wildlife habitat, water quality, rural heritage and more, based on local community priorities.

To be successful, land trusts work as part of a broader conservation community. In the Sacramento Delta, The Nature Conservancy works with Ducks Unlimited, the BLM, U.S. Fish & Wildlife and the local farming communities. In our community, the McKenzie River Trust works closely with the Long Tom and Middle Fork watershed councils, Friends of Buford Park & Mt. Pisgah, EWEB, and federal and state and county agencies. These partnerships expand the trust's effectiveness to make strategic acquisitions of land and easements.

Land trusts often make news over a high profile purchase in six or even seven figures, but it's the support from individual local donors that make it possible to do these important projects. Grants from government agencies and foundations don't usually pay the bills to keep the doors open. It's individual donors who do that. Land trusts can't apply for grants, or buy land or easements, or protect and restore land, or fulfill the monitoring requirements that come with conservation easements, without the support of the local community.

Working with its local partners and with the support of our community, the McKenzie River Trust is protecting more than 4,500 acres of land in the McKenzie, upper Willamette, Siuslaw and Umpqua watersheds. Examples include the spectacular Green Island, an 1,100-acre former family farm at the confluence of the McKenzie and Willamette rivers, the Berggren Farm on the McKenzie River, as well as other land and easements on the McKenzie, Umpqua, Siuslaw and Long Tom rivers, and on Coyote Creek.

At Green Island, I look out over the former Green family farm. I see levees breached to reconnect the land with the river. I see the results of hundreds of volunteers planting thousands of native plants in the newly connected floodplain. I see former gravel mining pits restored and returned to the river, creating refuge and sanctuary for native fish and wildlife. I see the Oregon chub brought back from the brink of extinction.

No, there are no cranes here, yet. But what I see here is even more inspiring. I see a family's legacy with the land continuing according to their own wishes. I see invasive non-native fish replaced with salmon, steelhead, cutthroat trout and chubs, all natives. What I see here is hope, hope for the future, and for the continuing return of a living river.

Robert Warren has been a Eugene resident since 1984. He retired in 2012 as a regional business development officer for the Oregon Business Development Department for Lane, Benton and Linn counties and had a long career in economic and community development, forest policy and natural resources consulting. He currently serves on the board of McKenzie River Trust.

behalf of the Eugene community for nearly 25 years through her professional career and many volunteer activities; she has an excellent skill set to lead Eugene into the future. Honesty and sincerity are at her core. She gets my vote.

I have known Lucy for years. We first met when our sons became friends and we volunteered in local schools. Most recently our paths crossed again when Lucy was development director for ShelterCare, where I have been an active fundraiser. It was a pleasure to be reminded of her style: having compassion for others, understanding the community's needs, having intelligence to make a successful plan for important goals and a dedication to doing the job right. Lucy's leadership style will be an asset for Eugene.

Lucy has a personal passion for helping people, the drive to envision projects to promote community growth, the personal skills to collaborate and lead others, and the experience to work within organizations and lead others toward the path to success.

Lucy Vinis gets my vote and I would encourage others to get to know her!

*Sandy Caughron
Eugene*

TOO GOOD FOR RICKER

As a small business owner in downtown Springfield, I am extremely disappointed in your March 10 article titled "All Quiet on the Eastern Front" by Ben Ricker. Born and raised in this area, I've been involved in our community for more than 27 years.

I live in Eugene but choose to run my business in downtown Springfield. I chose Springfield because it is an up-and-coming area that is full of life, history and extremely hard-working individuals who strive to make this city wonderful. In the last three years I have not only seen my business double, but I have also seen the general foot traffic multiply.

We may not yet have the nightlife that Eugene does, but surely if Ben visited more than the 7-11 and strip clubs he would see there is vibrant life on the east side of the river after all. I invite him to come on a Saturday morning and check out The MotherShip Salon or The Washburne Café. Visit our farmer's market Sprout!, have dinner at Plank Town and then check out a painting class at Vino and Vango. He'll see a much different side.

His article may have been meant as satire or "art," but for the people who remember Springfield as it used to be it only confirms their outdated negative opinion and deepens the divide. Taken from your mission statement: "As informed citizens, we carry a responsibility for community leadership." I'd say he missed that mission by a mile.

Ben, try coming back and taking a second look; then rewrite your piece with an apology. Though if your taste in beer is any indication of your likes and dislikes, we may just be too good for you.

*Katelyn Chaffin
Eugene*

SMART & EXPERIENCED

Thank you for the comprehensive cover story March 24 on Hillary Clinton supporters in the Eugene-Springfield area.

There is no doubt among us that Hillary is the smartest and most experienced candidate in either party. She'd be an amazing president and she has big plans for our future. She believes it's time to act on raising wages and reforming our immigration system. She believes it's time to change our gun laws and make health care and education more affordable. She believes it's time to make sure that all people are an equal part of our political process and our communities, regardless of your gender, race, creed or sexual orientation.

While some on the Republican side spew divisiveness and hate, we're ready for an America where everyone can reach his full potential, no matter where you come from, what you look like or who you love.

That's why we're fighting alongside Hillary to win the Democratic nomination, win the White House and truly change our nation's history forever.

For more on local grassroots activities, please join us in the "Lane County Democrats for Hillary!" Facebook group and visit HillaryClinton.com for additional campaign opportunities.

*Curtis Taylor
Eugene*

POOR PLUG FOR HILL

What a disappointing March 24 article about Hillary Clinton. You state that she has been criticized for voting for the war in Iraq, yet don't require that her supporters respond to that issue. Is this the same newspaper that so adamantly opposed the war back in 2002? Foreign policy is considered Clinton's strength, but the war in Iraq was a huge disaster that she supported, and she continues to support regime change elsewhere.

Your author also failed to address the real facts of Clinton's ties to Wall Street, her past support for the bankruptcy bill that hurt consumers and her reliance on big donations. The article was a one-sided, poorly disguised plug for Clinton.

Most disappointing is the patronizing attitude of the pro-Clinton supporters toward those who support Bernie Sanders, and the author's failure to confront them with actual facts about the senator's long history of effectiveness in the U.S. Senate.

I am sorry to see the *Weekly* join *The New York Times* and others in the Bernie Blackout. I hope to read a well-researched piece soon about both candidates.

*Kathryn Tassinari
Eugene*

EDITOR'S NOTE: Our cover story on Bernie Sanders was Feb. 18.

GREAT PORTRAIT

Wow! What an amazing portrait by Jeremy Okai Davis of Hillary Clinton for the March 24 issue. It almost, but not quite, makes me want to vote for her. Maybe you could have him do a portrait of Bernie? I hope I can see more of his artwork!

*Ruth Duemler
Eugene*