



SAN BERNARDINO
MOUNTAINS
LAND TRUST

Dedicated to the acquisition of forest open space and wildlife habitat on private lands within the San Bernardino National Forest in order to ensure lasting public benefit of the natural mountain environment.

NEWSLETTER

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ONE-HUNDRED ACRES PROTECTED AT SUGAR PINE RIDGE

Sugar Pine Ridge is the latest successful purchase of conservation land by the San Bernardino Mountains Land Trust. The 110-acre property is located along the western rim of the San Bernardino Mountains, in a wild and scenic area surrounded by public National Forest land.



View of the newly acquired Sugar Pine Ridge property, where 110 acres west of Cedar Pines Park were protected by SBMLT in May.

This area is a natural refuge for forest wildlife. Mountain lions, bears, and deer traverse the rugged, partially forested landscape while keeping a safe distance from the nearby communities of Cedar Pines Park and Crestline.

This property was one of many pieces of private land intermixed throughout the National Forest. Such inholdings cause gaps in the forest's integrity, where intrusive development can enter in and degrade the surrounding wildland if not protected.

Valuable Progress

Protecting isolated parcels like this important site from becoming urbanized avoids the harmful fragmentation of wildlife habitat and scenic resources that has negatively impacted the mountains in other over-developed areas of the National Forest.

Sugar Pine Ridge is one of several parcels that the Land Trust has been seeking to acquire for many years. As the right opportunity presented itself, SBMLT was well prepared to close the deal. Each success in adding conservation protection to another missing piece of the public forest represents a vital step forward.

Transfer of ownership from the seller, Mr. Jeffrey O'Connell, to the Land Trust was completed May 1.

This project is the first conservation purchase made possible by use of the special revolving Land Acquisition Fund created last year with the help of The Wildlands Conservancy.

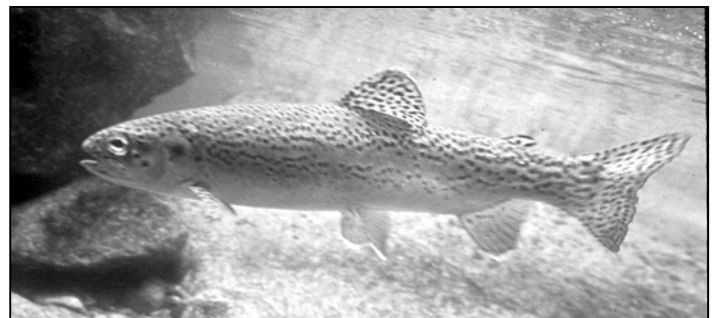
MORE PROGRESS in PROTECTING DEEP CREEK

Seven more small properties have been added to the Land Trust's Deep Creek consolidation project in the headwaters area of the stream, where it passes the community of Arrowbear Lake.

Deep Creek is the major watershed of the western half of the San Bernardino Mountains, originating near Snow Valley and winding its way for about 30 miles to the Mojave River in the Summit Valley of Hesperia.

The creek traverses some of the most scenic areas of the San Bernardino Mountains and has become famous as the premier wild trout stream of Southern California.

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Famous for its wild trout, Deep Creek supports Rainbows (shown above) in its upper reaches; while Browns are found in its lower half.

WILDFIRES SCORCH LOCAL MOUNTAINS AGAIN

The Role of Conservation in Minimizing Risk

Last autumn and late summer the return of major wildfires, fueled by drought and high winds, caused thousands to evacuate the forest and destroyed 450 mountain homes, while national media attention was briefly focused on the San Bernardino Mountains.

Painful memories of the previous firestorm disaster of just four years earlier were re-awakened in the minds of mountain residents. Firefighters and scientists believe the disturbing increase of large wildland fires is a likely symptom of erratic climate change and global warming.

Not long ago the pattern of large fires recurred in 10 to 20 year cycles, such as the decade between the famous Bear Fire of 1970 and the devastating Panorama Fire of 1980. Only four years between major outbreaks is unprecedented. One fire chief in Arrowbear observed that, "fires of this magnitude used to happen as once-in-a-career events."

Negligent Development Policies

While visiting the burned areas of our local mountains, U.S. Senator Dianne Feinstein asked a very logical question, which most public officials overlook, namely, why is so much building allowed to occur in such a hazardous area?



Helicopter douses the flames in the Deep Creek canyon below Running Springs during the Slide Fire of October 2007.

-Photo by Scott Secombe

Since the Mill Fire of 1997 (followed by 10 dangerous fires in 10 years), it is apparent that there are more houses crowded into the San Bernardino National Forest than can be protected by the combined forces of our state, county and federal governments. About 1,500 houses were lost in the last two big fires. Five firefighters perished in the 2006 Esperanza Fire defending a remote forest structure.



Super Tanker drops fire retardant on the ridge between Green Valley Lake and Arrowbear

-Photo by Scott Secombe

The ecology of the San Bernardino Mountains is designed by nature to burn on a regular basis. Mountain fires cannot be avoided, since they are a built-in part of this unique ecosystem. What can be avoided is adding unnecessary houses to the mix, which only makes the problem worse. The annual gale-force winds will inevitably coincide with fire again in the future. Every time that happens a predictable disaster will recur.

How Does SBMLT Help Reduce Fire Danger?

Conservation protection of remaining forest inholdings rather than adding more development is the wisest choice for future public safety. Overall risk is reduced by not increasing the number of structures placed in the path of fire danger. Conservation promotes greater safety.

Buying key lands is the most effective way to achieve this goal, and the Land Trust is the leading organization working on this major problem in our local forest at the present time.

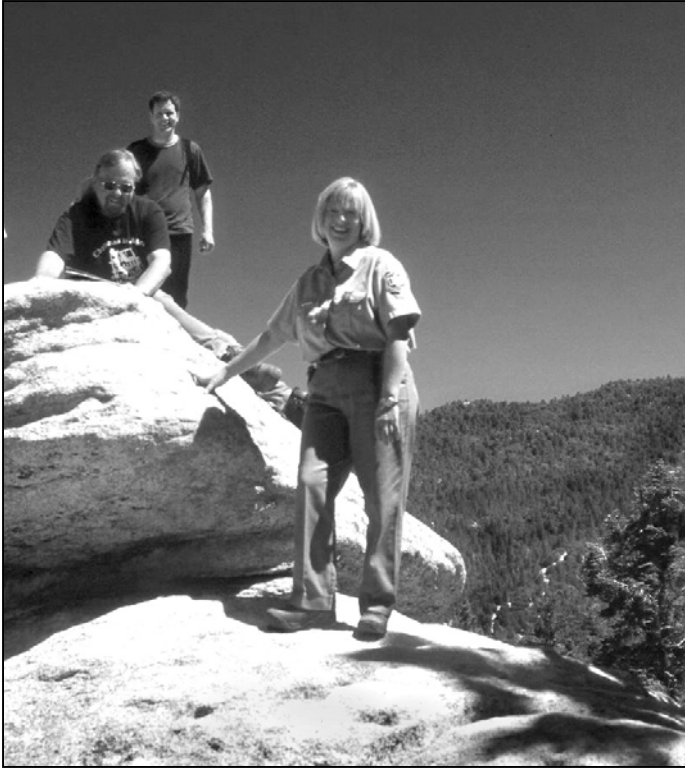
The situation is urgent because the county has strong economic incentives to build more mountain houses. Not only does the county gain increased property tax revenue from new development, but also the enormous costs of fighting wildfires are shifted to the state and Forest Service. Therefore, the county shares none of the costs or responsibility. For this reason, there is no economic incentive for the county to change course.

Meanwhile, each parcel of land acquired for conservation reduces the possibility of placing more people at risk. Conservation of remaining privately owned forest lands is one of the most effective and long-term solutions for lessening the overall risk.

-- "Deep Creek" continued from page one

Most of the creek is protected within the public National Forest, though about a half mile still flows through private land. It is in this area, where the stream has become subdivided into small parcels, that the Land Trust is working to provide greater conservation protection.

For land acquired by county tax default sales, SBMLT requires approval by the Board of Supervisors. The mountain area supervisor Dennis Hansberger has been consistently supportive of these efforts.



Allison Stewart, former Ranger of the Mountaintop District of the San Bernardino National Forest, visits one of the priority sites for future acquisition, along with members of the Land Trust.

NOTES & NEWS

Longtime Land Trust volunteer **Bill Engs** was elected by the Board of Directors to continue as the SBMLT President for 2008. Bill has been instrumental in instituting more efficient operations for the organization overall. As one example, the executive committee now meets on a regular monthly basis to help alleviate and prioritize the increasing responsibilities of the Board of Directors.

In addition to serving as the Land Trust's vice-president, **Arnie Bean** also accepted the duties of Board Secretary on an interim basis with the recent retirement of **Sandi Huckaby** from that role. **Valerie Wilson** has graciously agreed to continue as the board's treasurer, despite struggling over the winter to recover from a troublesome illness. To make the job more manageable, SBMLT has upgraded its computer bookkeeping software.

Photo Contest and Calendar Coordinator, **Ellie Lytle**, has selected this year's judges for the annual photo awards. The judging takes place in the month of June. Talented graphic artist **John Hummel** will design and format the 2009 Land Trust Calendar.

VOLUNTEER ACCOLADES

The Land Trust wishes to extend its special thanks to **Sandi Huckaby** on completing her three-year term of service as Secretary for the SBMLT Board of Directors.

Sandi's thoughtful, diligent and upbeat contribution in this demanding role has been greatly appreciated. She will be greatly missed in the continuing complex discussions and decision-making process that is part of the responsibility of each of the SBMLT board members.

However, we are grateful that Sandi is continuing as a volunteer on newsletter mailings, SBMLT's Adopt-a-Highway project, and helping to upgrade the Land Trust's outdated website.

Thank you, Sandi.

Three Cheers for the Thrift Shop Heroes

We also wholeheartedly extend our on-going commendation for all the Land Trust volunteers who dedicate valuable time to the management of the Mountain Thrift Shoppe in Blue Jay Village.

The SBMLT Board of Directors proudly acknowledges and applauds the invaluable services of this wonderful team of steadfast retail specialists. The current team of volunteers includes (in alphabetical order) **Vivian Allard, Georgina Coats, Sandy Ellis, Bill Engs, Peter Jorris, Caryn Powell, Lori Semeniuk, and Zeneida Salva.**

The Land Trust is one of nine managing organizations of the nonprofit thrift shop. All thrift shop proceeds are proportionally distributed among the participating mountain charities.

Each year the Land Trust receives about \$10,000 from this important source, thanks to all its excellent volunteers.



Sandi Huckaby, past SBMLT Secretary, cheerfully supports all the Land Trust's valuable work.

SUCCESSFUL TEAMWORK

For twelve years, the San Bernardino Mountains Land Trust has been the leader in achieving vital wildland protection in the popular San Bernardino National Forest. This important work and its continued success is the result of generous support from people like you who make it possible and help sustain the progress.

Threatened Forest

What makes forest land protection so vital and the role of the Land Trust so essential?

Few people realize that the SBNF is both the most *popular* and the most *threatened* National Forest in America.

Popular, because it serves the most heavily populated region in the country. *Most Threatened*, because of constant development pressure to crowd more and more housing tracts into such a rare and inspirational forest environment.

The potential profit to be made by developing the hundreds of private parcels (called "inholdings") inside the National Forest adds ever-increasing pressure to this constant threat.

Unfortunately, the County of San Bernardino is highly permissive in allowing more urban sprawl in the local mountains, even though our Forest already has the highest percentage of urbanization of any National Forest in the country.

Buying Land for Conservation

The best solution for preserving the integrity of our National Forest is to buy the threatened lands (i.e. those missing pieces inside the Forest) for conservation.

The Forest Service can't accomplish this task alone, because budget and staffing levels have been cut to bare minimum levels. The assistance of the nonprofit San Bernardino Mountains Land Trust is essential for saving vital forestlands.

Willing sellers depend on land trust organizations like SBMLT. We are able to act more quickly than government.

Likewise, your support makes it possible for the Land Trust to carry out these successful on-going forest conservation efforts.



Land Trust's Project Manager Kevin Kellems and mountain biologist Dr. Tim Krantz of the University of Redlands study Shay Creek, habitat of the rare endangered fish, the unarmored three-spined stickleback. Dr. Krantz is a long-time advisor to the Land Trust, helping to evaluate many important projects.

More Land Conservation

Other important land protection projects that are currently underway include the acquisition of a 50-acre inholding in the Holcomb Creek area, where the Land Trust has helped to facilitate a Forest Service purchase of this significant riparian habitat.

Also, as part of the mitigation for the CalTrans bridge project at the Big Bear Dam, SBMLT is working with the Forest Service on the acquisition of special habitat for the southern rubber boa, a rare and protected species found only in the SBNF.

A 26-acre parcel in Lytle Creek, which the Land Trust has been monitoring for several years, became available for acquisition this spring on the County of San Bernardino's annual tax-sale auction.