

Conservation in Action

Fall 2023



Lilyana holds a California slender salamander (*Batrachoseps attenuatus*). Photo: Paige Green

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Everyone agrees on the need for good fire. So, what does it take to get it on the ground?

Change is good fortune

Disruptions, disturbances, changes, and surprises are challenging at best and often stressful. It's no wonder that we humans strive for stability. In fact, stability is so revered, it might seem like our primary goal, permeating all aspects of life.

Earlier this year, we set out to develop a cohesive strategy that will guide Audubon Canyon Ranch for years to come. Sounds like a textbook example of trying to control change and create stability, right?

Instead, we found through conversations with our staff, board, volunteers, funders, and collaborators that having an opportunity mindset – embracing change as necessary – is critical to achieving durable conservation outcomes.

Our newly adopted five-year Strategic Plan focuses on resilience and, importantly, requires us to think and do differently than in the past. We are already putting it into practice.

We are including more people, with diverse world views and skill sets, who are motivated to make positive change. We are joining or creating collaboratives and investing in relationships so together we can have a greater impact. We are taking the right risks and sharing lessons learned so that others can benefit from our work, and we are providing experiences that will build enjoyment, engagement, understanding, and emotional attachment to catalyze action for people and planet.

And we are continuing to learn from each of you about the ways you are cultivating your own resiliency.

Together – embracing change as good fortune – we will create more resilient systems by being prepared for the changes that life brings and by enacting the changes needed for a world where the diversity of life thrives, and nature benefits all.



Tom Gardali, CEO

[egret.org](https://www.egret.org)

Join us for hikes,
tours, and volunteer
opportunities!

[egret.org/event-calendar](https://www.egret.org/event-calendar) →



Photo: Carlos Porrata





Participants of last summer's Conservation Science Intensive residential program surveyed the mudflat in front of Cypress Grove Research Center, Tomales Bay. Photo: Paige Green

New five-year strategic plan charts course for greater resilience

by the Audubon Canyon Ranch Strategic Planning Task Force

To make a difference most effectively for nature and people, our 2023–2028 Strategic Plan focuses on resilience at several scales and, specifically, across two strategic initiatives: Resilient Lands and Waters and Empowered and Inclusive Communities.

Resilient lands and waters

Simply protecting natural areas and species is not enough to maintain biodiversity and the ecological functions that sustain us all.

Stewardship — assisting natural areas or species with positive human actions — is needed to arrest biodiversity loss and restore ecological functions.

The Resilient Lands and Waters initiative captures our investment in the ongoing stewardship of the lands we hold and beyond.

We will take the best care of the places we have direct responsibility for, and we will test, model, and share lessons learned with public and private land managers at the land-scape scale.

Our efforts within this initiative include **Good Fire, Science for Stewardship, and Impact Stewardship.**

Lasting impacts will include:

- Communities that are safer from wildfire and connected with landscapes through fire stewardship,
- Knowledge is held by a diverse set of community members to increase biodiversity across multiple scales,
- Bay Area landscapes that are more connected and resilient, and
- Thriving plants and animals in Bay Area forests, waterways, and grasslands.

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About the artist | We partnered with Marin County native Wyatt Hersey on illustrations to capture the heart of our new strategy. A lifelong naturalist and gifted artist, Wyatt's playful drawings depict a world of diversity, collaborative action, and belonging. Discover more of his work online @wyatthersey.



Empowered and inclusive communities

Most conservation work has excluded Black, Indigenous, and People of Color — the very people who contribute the least to environmental degradation yet are disproportionately impacted by it. Because of this exclusion, mainstream conservation efforts have not met the needs of all members of society and have not benefited from ideas generated from diverse world-views and lived experiences.

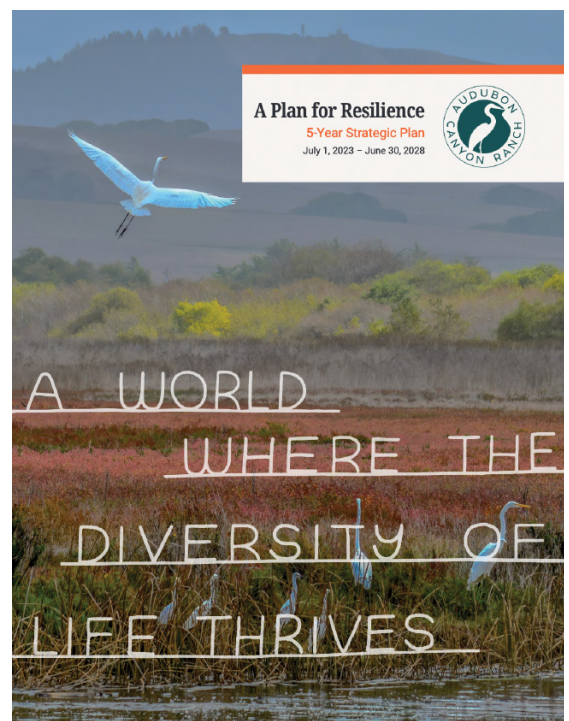
We believe including more people in conservation efforts will build more durable outcomes, and that living-wage careers in conservation will empower local communities to make real and lasting change.

Our efforts within this initiative include **Equitable Access to the Land, Activated Youth, and Skill Building and Training.**

Lasting impacts will include:

- Audubon Canyon Ranch preserves serving as community resources,
- Young people being more connected to the landscapes around them and feeling empowered to take positive action to support stewardship, and
- More capacity for land stewardship and ecological restoration throughout the region, and as a result, more effective work.

Read the detailed Plan for Resilience at egret.org/strategic-plan →



Collecting seeds in the Mayacamas for research and reforestation

by Allie Rigby, Communications Specialist

When Dr. Alison Colwell learned about a native plant growing in serpentine soils on Audubon Canyon Ranch's Modini Preserve, her curiosity was piqued. "As part of a state-wide and national seed collection effort, our research team gets excited when we hear about a rare plant. But it's not always easy to access these areas with rare plants — let alone collect seeds on them," she explains.

Dr. Colwell is a curator at The Center for Plant Diversity, which is one of 12 participating institutions in California who are part of the California Plant Rescue effort to collect seeds. Alongside organizations like California Native Plant Society, Dr. Colwell's team at The Center envision a world where biodiversity can flourish. Given the rapid state of biodiversity loss, the first step is protecting the sources of life themselves: the seeds.

"Together, our goal is to collect and store 1,000 of California's rarest plants for research and conservation," says Colwell.

Some native species of California, particularly those growing in serpentine soils, are rare. Dr. Colwell knew she needed to reach out to Michelle Cooper, the preserve manager and resident biologist at Modini Preserve, for support.

"Thanks to early efforts by Modini Preserve's first manager and biologist Sherry Adams, who worked closely with Jim and Shirley Modini to capture their deep knowledge of the land, a thorough inventory of the preserve's most valuable habitats has been compiled and mapped," says Cooper.

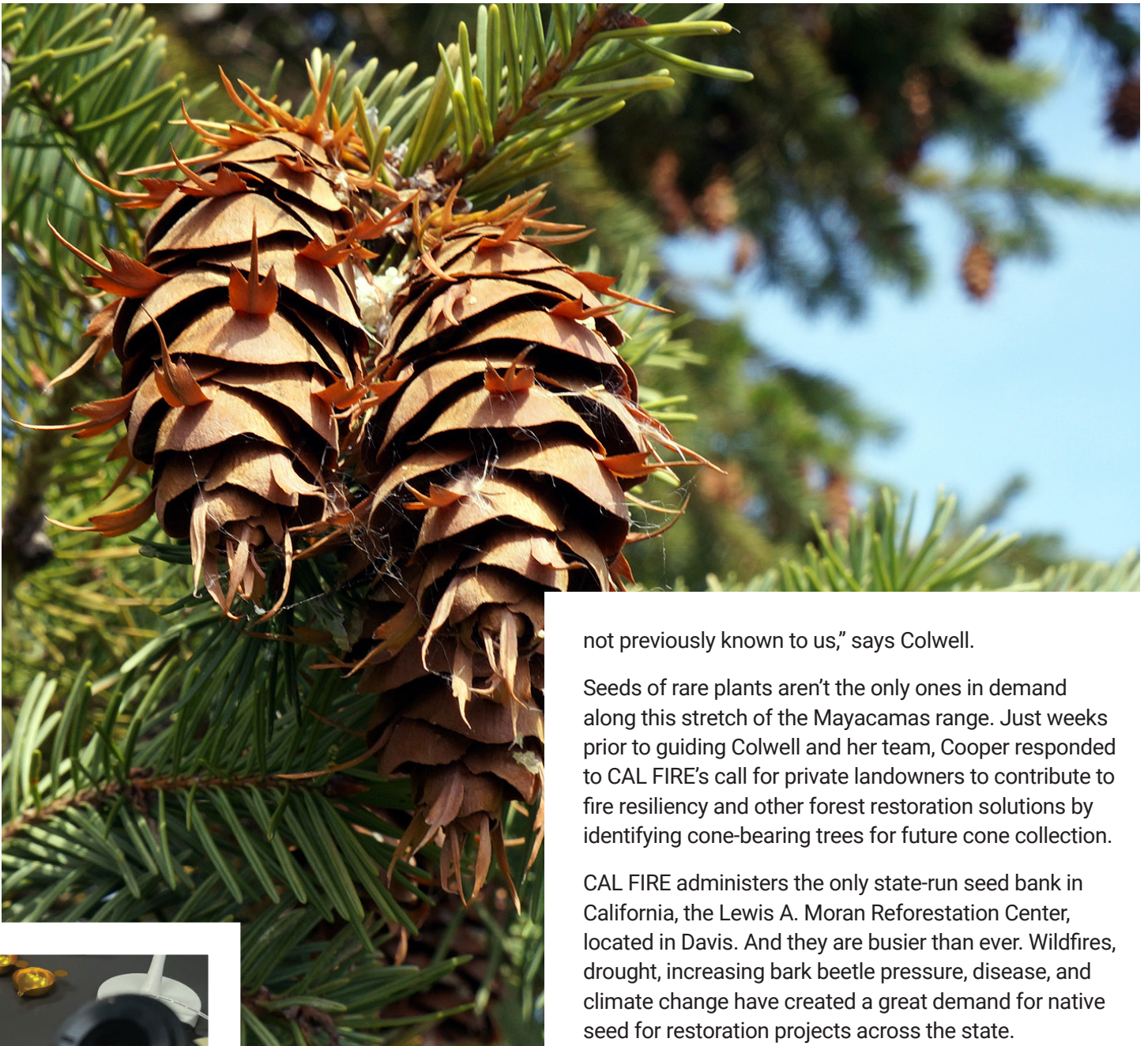
Field technicians Ana Verschoor and Stephen Shacoski made subsequent foraging trips, collecting seed from the Freed's jewelflower (*Streptanthus brachiatus subsp. hoffmanii*), which is one of the target species on their list. But they also took away more than expected.

"Michelle collected seed of the Greene's narrow-leaved daisy (*Erigeron greenei*) that was a surprise population

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Left: Freed's jewelflower found among the rocky serpentine soil at Modini Preserve. Photo: Ana Verschoor. Center: In September this Greene's narrow-leaved daisy looks especially nondescript as it has dried out, but that is perfect seed maturity for collection efforts. Photo: Michelle Cooper. Right: Field technician Stephen Shacoski cleans and packs seeds at the herbarium. Photo: Alison Colwell.



not previously known to us,” says Colwell.

Seeds of rare plants aren't the only ones in demand along this stretch of the Mayacamas range. Just weeks prior to guiding Colwell and her team, Cooper responded to CAL FIRE's call for private landowners to contribute to fire resiliency and other forest restoration solutions by identifying cone-bearing trees for future cone collection.

CAL FIRE administers the only state-run seed bank in California, the Lewis A. Moran Reforestation Center, located in Davis. And they are busier than ever. Wildfires, drought, increasing bark beetle pressure, disease, and climate change have created a great demand for native seed for restoration projects across the state.

Cooper assisted CAL FIRE environmental scientist Dawson Hall and three colleagues in locating viable conifer stands on the preserve, including foothill pine and Douglas fir. If conditions align in the future, climbers will collect cones from the top third of the trees, which offers the best outcome for seedling success in the Center's nursery.

“Sharing our knowledge, caring for these lands, and supporting others to further state-wide conservation goals is a pleasure and our deep responsibility, says Cooper.

Take action: Have at least 10 acres of conifer forest? You may be able to help with seed collection. Details at egret.org/cone-survey →

Students and teachers gain deeper experiences in nature via new Pathways Project

by Allie Rigby, Communications Specialist

Teachers wanting immersive environmental education experiences in Sonoma County have a new level of support with the Pathways Project. Brought to fruition by the Sonoma Environmental Education Collaborative (SEEC), this three-year initiative works with schools that receive federal funding to support low-income students and aims to help teachers navigate field trip logistics, curriculum, and possibilities.

Nineteen Sonoma County elementary schools have been selected for the program.

“We have an abundance of environmental education providers in Sonoma County,” explains Catie Clune, director of education for Audubon Canyon Ranch. “But it can be difficult for teachers to find the right environmental programs for their students, let alone get adequate funding.”

The Pathway Project takes a big load off teachers by helping with field trip logistics and inviting participating nonprofits to collaborate more effectively.

With this pilot program, K-6 students and teachers can benefit from more valuable, interconnected lessons at the outdoor learning programs they visit, while the nonprofit organizations can receive grant support to supplement transportation costs so they can reach historically underserved communities.

Students and teachers participating in the Pathways Project this school year will receive guided nature experiences of Bouverie Preserve twice – once in



Right: a young learner searches for creek dwellers along Stuart Creek.
Below: an oak tree is laden with stored acorns.



“This is about coming together and seeing how our missions align for building environmental literacy with students.”

—Catie Clune, director of education

the fall and once in the spring.

“We see this golden opportunity to bring the same group of students to the land twice, so they can observe and witness seasonal changes,” Clune shares. “Maybe this will also lead to a deeper sense of belonging too, which would be the dream.”

Building on 50 years of relationships with schools and teachers

Audubon Canyon Ranch has a long history of building networks with schools and teachers, which matters because the needs within education change over time.

“For more than fifty years, we’ve been able to adapt and grow our programs by responding to how educational needs for students change over time,” Clune reflects. “Now SEEC gives us a unique opportunity to learn from fellow nonprofits like LandPaths, Sonoma Ecology Center, and Sonoma Land Trust and work together, rather than work in isolation or risk offering repeated content.”

Read more about how students are forming connections to wild spaces through the Pathways Project at egret.org/blog →



photo: Paige Green



photo: Paige Green



Getting good fire on the ground

by Wendy Coy, Director of Communications

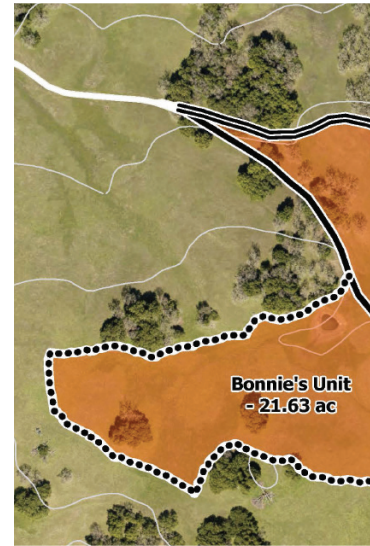
Most of us living in the North Bay have seen an uptick in notices about controlled burning activities being done by CAL FIRE, local fire agencies, Audubon Canyon Ranch, and others.

The alerts tell us who is doing the work and why, how many acres will be affected, and how to plan for increased smoke in our neighborhoods. As important as these notifications are to helping us adapt to a regular pattern of prescribed burning activities, they often don't reveal the months — sometimes years — of planning, the coordination between public and private agencies and landowners, and the slim window of opportunity to conduct the burn.

So, what does it take to get good fire on the ground?

For landowners or managers who have identified prescribed fire as beneficial for land they steward, the preparatory work can include the creation or improvement of control lines, installation of shaded fuel breaks, limbing-up of trees and removal of dead snags around and near the perimeter, cutting access through fences, and more.

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Left: Unit maps show access roads and containment lines. Center: Encroaching trees within a coastal prairie are felled and processed for a future broadcast burn. Right: Piles of limbs and twigs are covered with paper to maintain dryness and help ignitions when burned.



Depending on the complexity and size of the project, a prescribed fire burn plan and a smoke management plan are prepared for review by a certified burn boss and approved by CAL FIRE and the local air district, respectively.

Weather forecasts are monitored in the days leading up to the burn. The burn boss is looking for desired temperatures, relative humidity, fuel moisture, mixing height, and wind speed and direction to manage the conditions on the ground and provide for appropriate smoke dispersal. Within 24 hours of test ignitions, the National Weather Service provides a spot weather forecast specific to the exact location of the burn.

Is there a season for prescribed burning?

Prescribed burning can take place any time of the year as determined by the readiness of the fuels to be consumed, the preparation of the burn unit, availability of prescribed fire crews, a weather forecast that falls within the prescription, and the desired ecological benefit. Prescribed grassland burns in the North Bay are conducted mid-May through early October, when annual grasses have dried out

and before fall rains prompt new growth. In forested areas, mid-summer to early winter can offer the best chance for prepared woody fuels to be dry enough to burn rapidly and create less smoke. Importantly, broadcast burns like these can only be done when fuels are dry enough to carry fire, generally less than 12% fuel moisture.

In the winter, as seen across fields and vineyards in the region, smaller brush in covered burn piles can be consumed quickly.

If any one element doesn't align, a project may have to wait a week, months, or even years, undercutting the region's need to build wildfire resiliency, safeguard neighborhoods, and support the health of the North Bay's ecosystems.

Everyone can prepare for prescribed burning

There's more to learn about getting good fire on the land and our new guide may help you decide whether it's right for you. Find the guide at egret.org/good-fire-on-your-land.

Learn when prescribed burning is happening near you by connecting with us and others on social media and using a notification app, like WatchDuty, on your mobile device.



Audubon Canyon Ranch

4900 Shoreline Highway 1
Stinson Beach, CA 94970
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Coexisting with Mountain Lions

A guide for pet and livestock owners of the North Bay



New resources for you

Caring for pets and farm animals near mountain lion territory?

Whether you are caring for one very special kitty or several woolly farm animals, wildlife, including mountain lions, can be a threat to their safety. With a few precautions, you can help keep your pets — and wildlife — safe. Our new guide, designed in partnership with True Wild, includes a look at what's on the menu for these big cats, what to do if you spot a lion on the trail, and how to safely coexist with your wild neighbors.

Find the guide at egret.org/living-with-lions →



Prescribed Burning And You

A guide for landowners and land managers



Considering the use of good fire on property you steward?

Our new guide, developed in partnership with Green Valley Farm and Mill and Regenerative Forest Solutions, outlines what you need to know and do if you are interested in bringing good fire back to your land. It may help you to better assess your readiness in planning, preparing, and supporting a prescribed fire.

Find the guide at egret.org/good-fire-on-your-land →

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