



SONOMA
ECOLOGY
CENTER

IMPACT REPORT 2021



“

In 2020, I am most proud of knowing that the work Sonoma Ecology Center does is an essential service to our community. We did not slow down during the pandemic, we picked up the pace.

**—Tony Passantino
Education Manager**

Beautiful. Sustainable. Sonoma.

MISSION

Our mission is to work with our community to identify and lead actions that achieve and sustain ecological health in Sonoma Valley.

VISION

We envision a future where people, land, water, and wildlife thrive.

VALUES

Education

Sharing science-based information equips people to make the best decisions for themselves and the earth. We provide education programs for youth, teens, and adults to support an informed and empowered community.

Stewardship

Every action counts. Individual participation is essential to protect and restore our natural resources. We engage community members and other organizations as partners in our work.

Collaborate

Most problems have common-ground solutions that can be discovered through open discussion and innovation. We strive to work with all stakeholders—including residents, government, agriculture, academia, and business—to help solve our community's complex problems.

Respond to Change

We are an alert and agile organization, recognizing and responding to the evolving opportunities and needs of Sonoma Valley and the world beyond.

Sonoma Ecology Center works to address challenges related to open space, rural character, biodiversity, energy, and climate change, and strives for a better quality of life for all residents.

Since 1990, we've worked to increase people's appreciation and stewardship of Sonoma Valley's natural heritage and created measurable benefits in areas of land, water, climate change, and biodiversity.

Ecological Foundations

We value ecosystems, and the biodiversity and human systems they support. We are inspired by the beauty of Sonoma Valley. We work to protect and restore native species and habitats of our region for future generations.

Science-based

Watershed management actions should be informed by science and local empirical data. We conduct environmental monitoring to inform local and regional decisions. Adaptive management improves our effectiveness over time.

Sustainability

Economic vitality rests on a foundation of social well-being, which in turn rests on a foundation of ecological health. We seek multi-benefit solutions to the environmental, social, and economic challenges facing our community.

Lead by Example

We learn from others, and create and share models, techniques, and tools that others can use.



A Message From Richard Dale, Executive Director

2020 was a year we were looking forward to. It was our 30th anniversary year. We'd begun to catalog our best efforts from the past, and tightly focus our work for the future. We planned to present these new goals to the community at a gala anniversary event. Then came March, and, as if anything more needed to happen to our community or world, with it came the pandemic. Everything changed.

Despite the traumatic upheaval we all faced, I don't think I've ever been more proud of our organization. Just as we did after other disasters fresh in our minds, once again, we changed, too.

Everyone pitched in. Our educators were quick to shift our programs online to help teachers with remote learning, and to help parents and children with educational outdoor activities. Our parks became safe

havens, with carefully developed protocols to allow access for hundreds of community members who were all but trapped at home. We rallied to support the amazing work of other agencies and nonprofits responding the crisis while facing a shortage of volunteers, with people in high-risk groups suddenly unable to help, by creating an online portal, Sonoma Valley Volunteers, so that lower-risk community members can find current opportunities to volunteer to meet the needs of the crisis. Our Garden Park volunteers, board, and staff invented something fun and helpful for our anniversary, giving out Victory Garden kits for free to hundreds of families at a drive-through event on the Plaza on Earth Day.

We retooled our restoration work, still protecting waterways from toxic runoff and sediment from prior fires, to help with the region's growing challenges from fire. We conducted a prescribed fire, relearning how to use this challenging force as a tool to enhance biodiversity. We studied and learned much more about managing landscapes to reduce fire risk and promote ecosystem health, and began a series of workshops with our partners to share our collective knowledge all over the county. We also began working with public and private land managers to directly implement that knowledge around the Valley and region.

We were hit hard by national and local events that exposed the depth of inequities in our nation and our community. Environmental organizations like ours have a lot to learn and shift, so that our work brings closer a day when all people equitably benefit from the beauty and services that our planet provides. We are deeply committed to this outcome. In 2020, we made our outdoor offerings more welcoming for low-income and Spanish-speaking community members, planned for diversifying our Board and staff, and created a cross-sector roadmap for housing affordability in Sonoma Valley.

Our Valley's beloved Sugarloaf Ridge State Park burned for the second time in three years, closing the park again just as it was recovering from the 2017 fire. We put our recovery knowledge to use and in record time reopened the park to visitors and campers so that this large outdoor public space was available for hiking, camping, and education.

Overall, we took the challenges of this not-so-stellar year and reshaped them into solutions to help our community address its interwoven challenges. The lessons of the past year were perhaps harder than ever, but our community and our organization rallied, and so far, we are coming through with new tools and opportunities.

As we face the year ahead, with the pandemic continuing, a record drought and fire season in progress, and likely other challenges ahead, we now also know we have gained something we never could have had without this difficult year. Our community's connectedness to each other, and I would argue, to nature, is stronger, deeper, and more hopeful than ever. That connectedness, when we use it, is strong and adaptable to almost any challenge, and even to a year full of them.

Armed with this simple, powerful tool, we're looking forward to the coming year. We may even have a chance to celebrate our anniversary.

Thanks for being an important part of making this beautiful place more healthy for people and for the living world that supports us.



Richard Dale
Executive Director

Sonoma Ecology Center does its work on the traditional territories of the Wappo, Miwok, and Pomo peoples, who have stewarded this land for generations.



“

The pandemic made more people value and cherish the benefits of outdoor activity. Many park visitors expressed gratitude for our efforts to remain open and how we made the park safe and welcoming, even during the most trying times.

**—John Roney
Sugarloaf Ridge State Park Manager**

Sugarloaf Ridge State Park

Recovery from the Glass Fire

In September 2020, almost 75% of Sugarloaf Ridge State Park burned in the Glass Fire. With the help of a matching gift from the Sonoma Ecology Center Board of Directors, we raised over \$120,000 to heal, rebuild and reopen the park.

Wildfires swept through Sugarloaf Ridge State Park in both 2017 and 2020, each time burning approximately 75% of the 4,900-acre park.

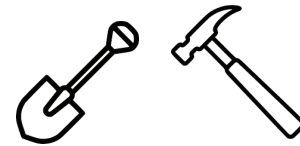
We are forever grateful to the brave firefighters of Cal Fire, Kenwood Fire and other agencies for stopping the Glass Fire from destroying the main Sugarloaf Complex.

Sugarloaf Ridge State Park was a major battleground in preventing wildfires driven by October 2020's hot and dry inland winds from scouring Southern Sonoma Valley. The meadows and basin of the upper park are ideal staging areas for firefighters. They are situated halfway from the valley floor to the ridge top. Existing fire roads within the park provide easy access for fire trucks to connect to other fire roads along the ridge.

During the pandemic, public parks were a refuge from isolation. We worked hard to keep park visitors, volunteers and staff safe during their visit.

We are forever grateful for the support that made safe evacuation, rapid reopening, and rebuilding of Sugarloaf Ridge State Park possible. Thanks to Team Sugarloaf, State Parks, our supporters, volunteers, and visitors, all park functions have been restored and are thriving.

With the support of donors and volunteers, we...



Rebuilt **5** retaining walls



Cleared **30** miles of trails



Reopened the park in less than **2 months** after the Glass Fire

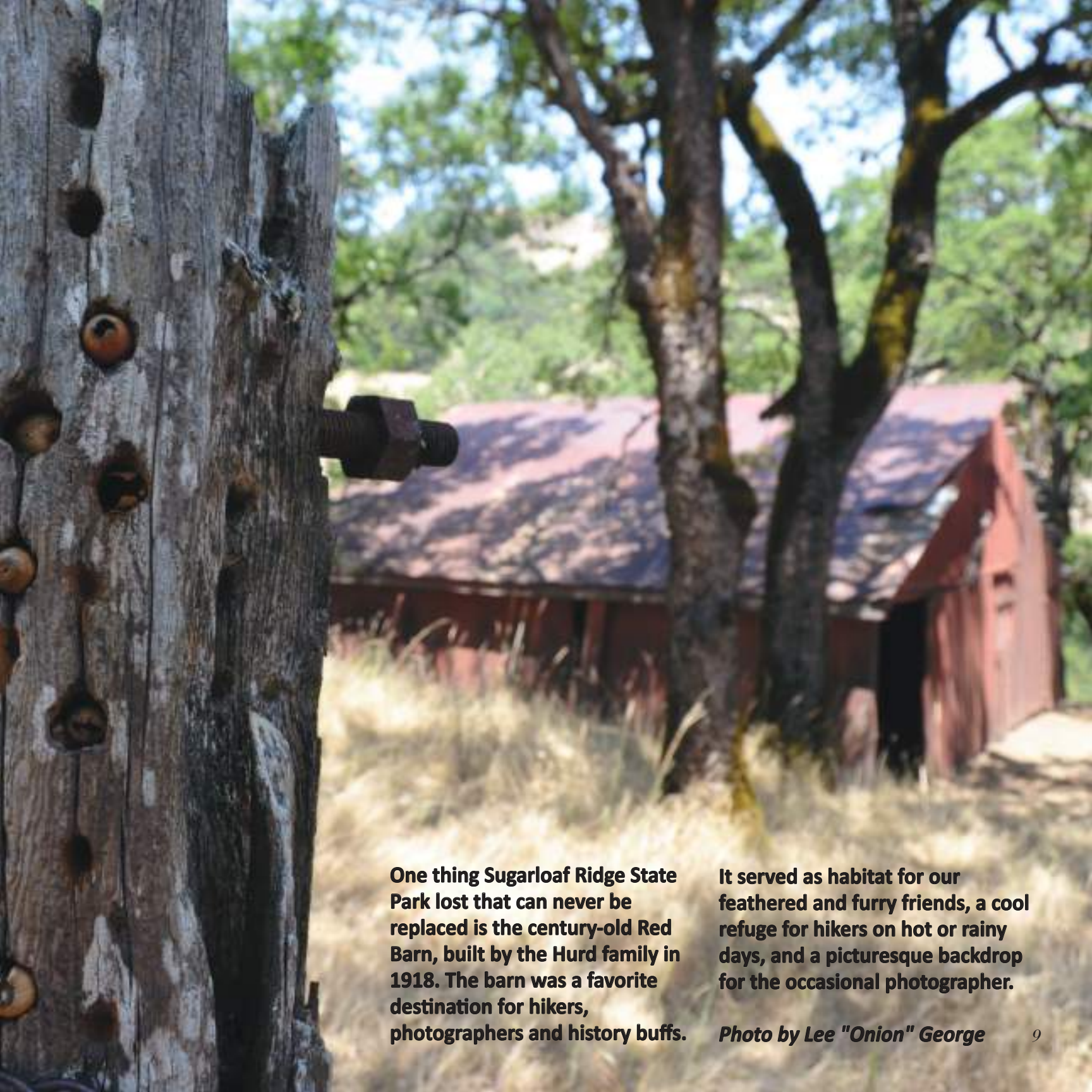
A Special Thank You To Sugarloaf Ridge State Park Fire Recovery Donors

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Dawn Angelosante
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One thing Sugarloaf Ridge State Park lost that can never be replaced is the century-old Red Barn, built by the Hurd family in 1918. The barn was a favorite destination for hikers, photographers and history buffs.

It served as habitat for our feathered and furry friends, a cool refuge for hikers on hot or rainy days, and a picturesque backdrop for the occasional photographer.

Photo by Lee "Onion" George



“

The pandemic caused most of the Education Program to go virtual. Our EnviroLeader program grew in response to the increased demand as many teens were eager to socialize and get outside after their zoom classes.

**—Tony Passantino
Education Manager**

Education Program

Meeting Students Where They Are

Our Education Program grew and innovated to play a critical role in helping the students and families of Sonoma Valley cope with the social, educational and economic challenges of this past year.



2020-21 Watershed Education reached **840** 2nd, 4th, 5th, and 6th graders in virtual learning environments.



An all-time high of **25** Sonoma Valley teens worked as EnviroLeaders for at least one semester of environmentally focused training at Sonoma Garden Park.



A new youth empowerment club called "Earthlings" creates environmental change through education, hands-on projects and community building.



40 youth and adult students completed the California Naturalist course, re-imagined to offer a virtual lecture series.

A Special Thank You To Our 2020 and 2021 Summer Scholarship Fund Donors

We were able to offer **25%** of our campers a scholarship to Summer Science Camps at Sugarloaf Ridge State Park and Sonoma Garden Park this year.

Susie Albrecht
Janet Bruno
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Steve Eckert
Nancy Evers Kirwan and Kyle Kirwan
Debra Forton
Fay Gallus
Marie Hansen
Chris and Daniella LaRocco
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Jane Nakasako
Cynthia Pisenti
Lynn Ravazzini
Michael and Mary Schuh
Suzie Silverman
Mary Sweeters
Len Tillem and Susan Fegan
Corey and Tiffany Wing
Alison Young
Suzanne Zahedani
Matthew and Patresa Zwerling



“

Heading out to Sugarloaf State Park to conduct ecological research has not only been beneficial for my professional career, but it has also been a life-enriching venture.

**—Alexandra Huerta
NEST student**

NEST

New Ecological Scientist Training

NEST was created to help students from underserved communities bypass longstanding barriers to scientific careers.

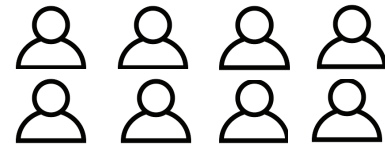
Sonoma Ecology Center provided eight science interns from underrepresented communities with the tools they needed to produce and publish original peer-reviewed science: training, research mentors, collaborators, access to a field site, editing, and guidance.

Producing original science is a tremendous and rewarding challenge, but to launch a career in science, it takes mentorship, research experience, and getting published.

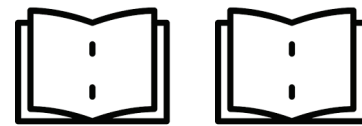
NEST students learned the methods and concepts of fire ecology at Sugarloaf Ridge State Park. Luminaries such as Sonoma Ecology Center board members Dr. Bernie Krause and Dr. Jennifer Palladini and conservation broadcaster Doug McConnell.

Under the guidance of Sonoma Ecology Center's Dr. Dan Levitis, they designed and carried out their own studies which are now working toward submission for publication.

The 2020-21 NEST program...



8 interns published original research



2 scientific papers related to the recovery of vegetation following the 2017 & 2020 fires



Free to all participants



Transportation stipends offered



“

This year, more than half of the families that came out had never been camping, or it was the first time camping for someone in their family group. About a third of the families had never been to Sugarloaf Ridge State Park. Over 100 campers came to the Park for our first-time camper program.

**—Alma Shaw
Bilingual Events Coordinator**

Senderos Naturales

Outdoor Events In Spanish

In 2020, a grant from Parks California expanded our Spanish language outdoor program, Senderos Naturales.

Many of the students and families who live within 15 miles of Sugarloaf Ridge State Park have never visited it. They face barriers to accessing Sugarloaf Ridge State Park, including transportation, cost, language, and a lack of culturally relevant outreach.

We expanded Senderos Naturales during the pandemic to address barriers to access, and encourage more students and families from diverse backgrounds to visit Sugarloaf Ridge State Park.

Sonoma Ecology Center also joined with others to rise to the challenge of providing the Latinx community with information about how to stop the spread of COVID-19, coping with wildfires and smoke, food resources, rental assistance, and vaccine clinics.

As the pandemic goes on, we have seen Latinx families recreate in nature in larger numbers than before. As families continue to attend Senderos Naturales events, they are more likely to return on their own and visit other natural areas.

As a result of expanding Senderos Naturales we hosted...



41 first-time campers

11 families with first-time campers



63 first-time visitors to
Sugarloaf Ridge State Park



33 youth participants



“

Sonoma Garden Park is a blossoming center for education and activities related to gardens, horticulture, and food because of the support of our wonderful volunteers.

**—Ivana Nedelchev
Sonoma Garden Park
Bilingual Volunteer Coordinator**

Sonoma Garden Park

Creating Community Around Local Produce

In the past year, Sonoma Garden Park gave people access to fresh, locally grown produce and a beautiful place to safely get outdoors, volunteer and connect.

It is thanks to our wonderful volunteers that Sonoma Garden Park continues to...



Build community in a beautiful public setting, connecting more than 200 youth and adults through volunteering and community service.



Host a weekly Harvest Market with produce from Sonoma Garden Park and other local products.



Demonstrate ecologically sound practices in gardening, landscaping and water use.



Host workshops with Master Gardeners and other experts.

To celebrate Sonoma Ecology Center's 30th anniversary on Earth Day 2020, we gifted 300 Victory Gardens at a social distanced event on the Sonoma Plaza.



Host Summer Science Camps that teach children about sustainable agriculture, water conservation, biology, geology, and climate.



Distribute biochar produced by our Sonoma Biochar Initiative to improve soil.

A photograph of firefighters in a dry, grassy field. Several firefighters in yellow and orange gear are visible, some holding hoses. A large plume of white smoke rises in the background against a blue sky. A white pickup truck is partially visible on the right side of the frame.

“

Sonoma Ecology Center brings a host of services and resources that can help people manage their landscapes and provide protections for the community at large. I thank Sonoma Ecology Center for maintaining the beautiful Valley we live in.

**—Ted Bucklin, Family Member
Van Hoosear Wildflower Preserve**

Restoration Program

Creating Healthier Land and Safer Communities

In 2020, our growing Restoration team stewarded over 4,000 acres of private and public land in Sonoma Valley and beyond.



We increased community-wide fire resilience through ecologically informed fire fuels treatments, including:

- Prescribed burns at Van Hoosear Wildflower Preserve in 2020 and 2021
- Forest thinning at Pacific Union College in Angwin
- Sheep grazing at Sonoma Overlook Trail and Montini Preserve
- Hosted events for **500+** participants on fire-wise, biodiverse landscapes in the defensible space zone around homes



We removed invasive weeds to make way for native plant communities in key places, including:

- The wildlife corridor at Sonoma Developmental Center
- The Nathanson Creek Preserve through the City of Sonoma



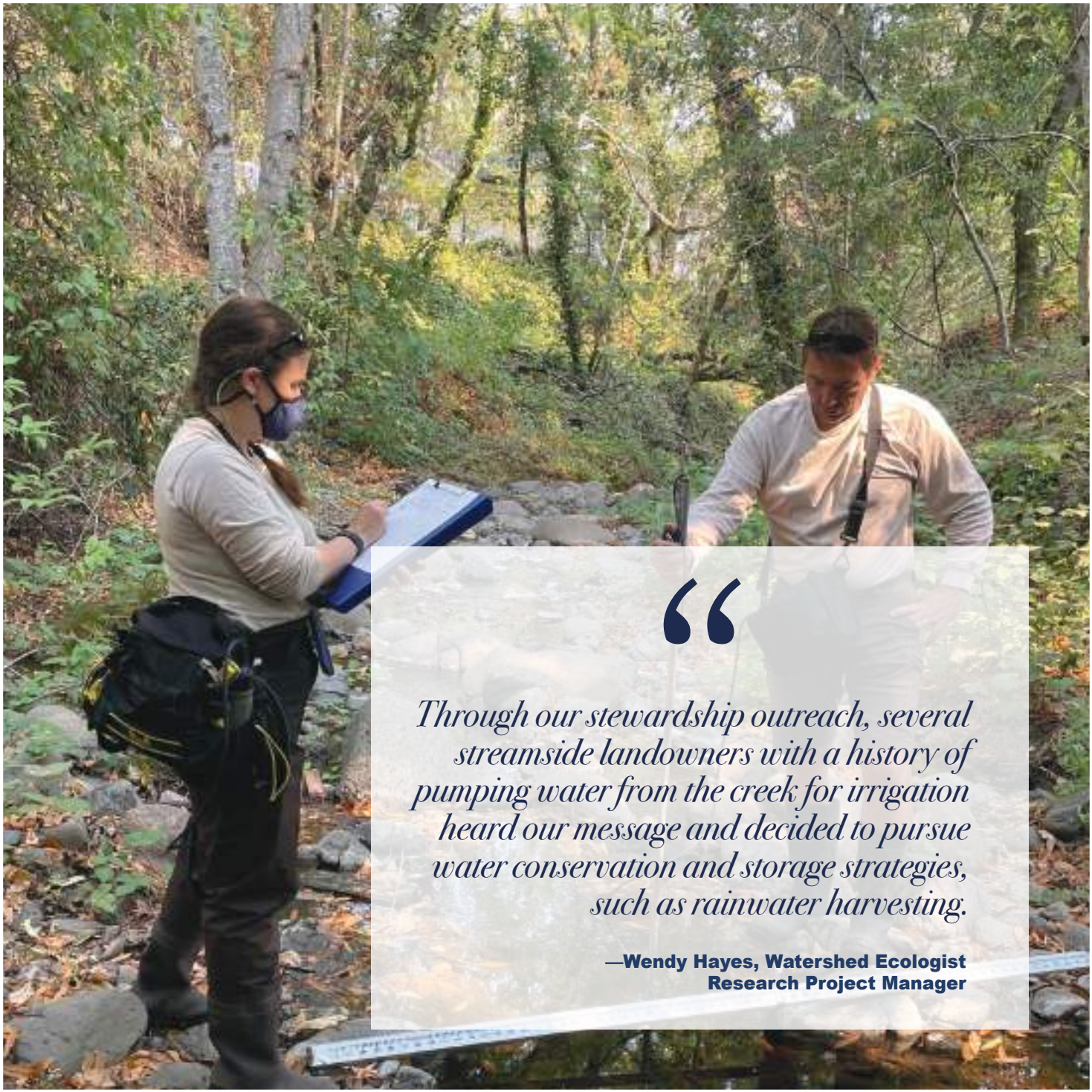
We propagated over **80 native plant species at our Native Plant Nursery at Sonoma Garden Park to:**

- Restore native plant communities and wildlife habitat to be ready for drought and resilient to fire
- Control erosion
- Stabilize streambanks



After the Glass Fire, we relaunched our Watershed Protection Program to keep toxins from burned structures out of creeks, including:

- Sonoma Creek, Santa Rosa Creek and Mark West Creek



“

Through our stewardship outreach, several streamside landowners with a history of pumping water from the creek for irrigation heard our message and decided to pursue water conservation and storage strategies, such as rainwater harvesting.

**—Wendy Hayes, Watershed Ecologist
Research Project Manager**

Research Program

Science-Driven Stewardship

We gained critical insight into the state of our local watershed to help mitigate the impacts of drought.

Real-time local data that informs decisions



70+ stream
monitoring stations

We continued collecting streamflow and water quality data at over **70** sites throughout the Sonoma Creek Watershed. Our data informs decision-makers who manage water and land at Sonoma County Water Agency, the Groundwater Sustainability Agency, and Permit Sonoma.

Tracing water pollution sources: We are wrapping up a five year effort to understand and address impairments to water quality in the Sonoma Valley watershed, including unhealthy levels of sediment, pesticides and pathogens. We are beginning a similar five year effort in the Petaluma Valley.

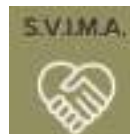
Analyzing and recognizing trends helps our community plan for better water use strategies.



2 detailed plans published
that keep creeks flowing
and fish swimming

The **Upper Sonoma Creek Restoration Vision** lays out a vision for **14** major restoration projects along Sonoma Creek from upstream of Kenwood down to the Sonoma Developmental Center, to improve conditions for threatened steelhead trout, other sensitive aquatic species like beaver, and the innumerable species who rely on healthy riparian forests.

The **Sonoma Creek Streamflow Stewardship Plan** uses findings from two years of streamflow data to recommend actions that sustain dry-season streamflows, such as capturing rain in tanks for later use.



Sonoma Valley Volunteers was key during the 2020 shelter-in-place with volunteers for our food distribution sites, providing more than half of our volunteer force giving out produce and groceries. We were among many non-profits providing direct services that benefited from this support, especially in the first stages of responding to the pandemic.

**—Maricarmen Reyes
Sonoma Valley Community Health Center**

Sonoma Valley Collaborative

Economy, Environment and Equity Working Together

Sonoma Valley Collaborative (formerly Sustainable Sonoma) convenes over 30 leaders across health, tourism, social justice, local business, government, schools, environment, and nonprofits to respond to the greatest challenges facing Sonoma Valley's economy, equity, and environment.

SONOMA VALLEY
VOLUNTEERS

We launched Sonoma Valley Volunteers to connect emerging volunteer opportunities with a new volunteer force to respond to the crisis.

During the pandemic, we...



This blueprint shows how we can have housing that is affordable for people who live or work in the Valley, within already developed areas, to create diverse, safe, complete neighborhoods.

Helped prevent homelessness

Sonoma Valley Collaborative brought together multiple groups to co-design with Catalyst Fund a pilot program to prevent evictions in Sonoma Valley. Now, organizations and volunteers from inside and outside the Valley are stabilizing renter households, which helps renters, employers, and landlords.

Influenced philanthropy

The Collaborative influenced local philanthropists who then launched Sonoma Valley Catalyst Fund, and then brought partners, funding needs, and solution ideas to the Fund to consider for funding.

Promoted a win-win-win future for Sonoma Developmental Center

The Collaborative developed—and keeps refining—a consensus around a future for the Sonoma Developmental Center campus that provides better-paying jobs to diversify the economy, homes that people who live and work here can afford, and a design that helps the climate, water, and wildlife.



“

We discovered that many fire professionals embrace our message of enhancing biodiversity. We have created strong partnerships within the fire community, which inform our message and expand our outreach across the North Bay.

**—Ellie Insley
Sonoma Ecology Center Board Member**

Resilient Landscapes Coalition

Protecting Homes From Fire and Promoting Biodiversity

Resilient Landscapes means...

- Fire-wise, fire-ready landscapes in the defensible space zone around homes
- Enhancing biodiversity and wildlife habitat
- Conserving water, soil, energy, and carbon

We continually research and report on the best practices for ecologically sound fuels management. We're leading the way in bringing together fire-fighter expertise with fire research, conservation, and landscape design.

Resilient Landscape workshops teach people to use native, drought-resistant plants to create beautiful, sustainable, fire-wise landscapes that can protect homes and lives, and also provide food and shelter for wildlife, in particular many species of insects and birds that are in severe decline, like the Monarch butterfly.

We led workshops and collaborated with the Grove Street Fire Safe Council, Bennett Ridge Firewise Community, Oakmont Firewise Community, Glen Ellen Forum, and other neighborhood groups who are doing impressive work to help protect their communities.



Together with our partners, we produced...

- ✓ **5** virtual workshops for landowners across Sonoma County
- ✓ **3** neighborhood tours
- ✓ **500+** total participants

Sonoma Ecology Center is grateful to our supporters, partners, volunteers, and board members for making it possible for our staff to adapt and continue their work without pause, through the pandemic and wildfire season.

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January 1 to December 31, 2020

Your support enables our team of scientists, educators and community leaders to adapt our programs to Sonoma Valley's evolving needs.

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\$49,999 to \$10,000

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 Gordenker Farms
 Homegrown Bagels
 Jackson Family Wines
 Nugget Market
 Paul's Produce
 Sprouts
 Valley Bar + Bottle

Government Agencies

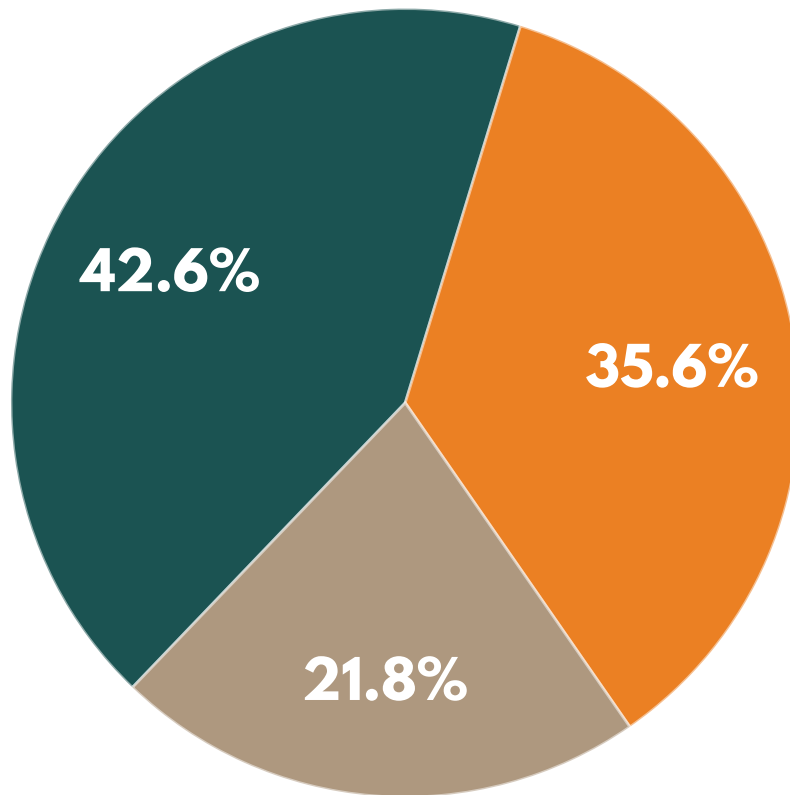
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California Dept Fish and Wildlife
 California State Parks
 California Coastal Conservancy
 California Department of Water Resources
 California Wildlife Conservation Board
 City of Sonoma
 Delta Conservancy
 Mendocino County Resource Conservation District
 Napa County Resource Conservation District
 National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration
 North Coast Resource Partnership
 Permit Sonoma
 San Francisco Bay Regional Water Quality Control Board
 San Francisco Estuary Project
 Sonoma Clean Power
 Sonoma County Ag + Open Space
 Sonoma County Regional Parks
 Sonoma County Water Agency
 Sonoma Resource Conservation District
 Sonoma Valley Groundwater Sustainability Agency
 Sonoma Valley Unified School District

Organizations and Foundations

California State Parks Foundation
 Community Foundation Sonoma County
 Fire Safe Sonoma
 Gaia Fund
 Impact100 Sonoma
 Jack London Yacht Club
 Kakatu Foundation
 Kimball Foundation
 Manitou Fund
 Marin Community Foundation
 Napa Communities Firewise Foundation
 Oakmont Village Association
 Pacific Union College
 Parks California
 Rose Foundation for Communities and the Environment
 Pepperwood Preserve
 Rebuild Northbay Foundation
 Redwood Forest Foundation, Inc.
 Rotary Club of Sonoma Valley
 Rotary Club of Glen Ellen and Kenwood
 Scott River Watershed Council
 Sonoma County Vintners Foundation
 Sonoma Land Trust
 Sonoma County Master Gardeners
 Sonoma Valley Education Foundation
 Speedway Children's Charities
 Wild Oak Homeowners Association

2020 Revenue Highlights



We raised 35% more in 2020 than in 2019, allowing our organization to pivot in response to the challenges of this past year.

● Memberships and donations	\$889,715
● Program fees	\$544,623
● Grants and contracts	\$1,062,742

2020 Statement of Activities

For the Year Ended December 31, 2020

	2020 Total	2019 Total
SUPPORT AND REVENUE:		
Government contract revenue	\$ 1,062,742	\$ 1,133,755
Memberships and donations	889,715	573,353
In-kind donations	150	104
Program fees	544,623	519,974
Investment income (loss), net of fees	61,954	71,969
Gain (Loss) on disposal of assets	-	1
Reimbursable income	361,881	270,851
Other income	66,577	73,705
Net assets released from restriction	-	-
Cost of goods sold	(20,657)	(40,989)
Total support and revenue	<u>2,966,985</u>	<u>2,602,723</u>
EXPENSES:		
Program	1,777,205	1,677,160
Management and general	557,316	349,423
Fundraising	289,844	170,696
Total expenses	<u>2,624,365</u>	<u>2,197,279</u>
CHANGE IN NET ASSETS	342,620	405,444
NET ASSETS, BEGINNING	869,074	463,630
Prior period adjustment	-	-
Net ASSETS, BEGINNING RESTATED	<u>869,074</u>	<u>463,630</u>
NET ASSETS, ENDING	<u>\$ 1,211,694</u>	<u>\$ 869,074</u>

2020 Statement of Financial Position

For the Year Ended December 31, 2020

	2020	2019
ASSETS		
Current assets:		
Cash and cash equivalents	\$ 391,482	\$ 383,881
Accounts receivable	593,542	317,589
Prepaid expenses	37,003	37,056
Total current assets	<u>1,022,027</u>	<u>738,526</u>
Fixed assets:		
Furniture and equipment	110,055	101,575
Building	150,000	-
Leasehold improvements	81,628	90,025
Vehicles	87,224	61,061
Subtotal	<u>428,907</u>	<u>252,661</u>
Less accumulated depreciation	<u>(161,064)</u>	<u>(152,445)</u>
Net fixed assets	<u>267,843</u>	<u>100,216</u>
Other assets:		
Restricted investments	<u>409,610</u>	<u>391,965</u>
Total assets	<u><u>\$ 1,699,480</u></u>	<u><u>\$ 1,230,707</u></u>
LIABILITIES AND NET ASSETS		
Current liabilities:		
Accounts payable and accrued expenses	\$ 278,975	\$ 113,233
Deferred revenue	208,811	248,400
Total current liabilities	<u>487,786</u>	<u>361,633</u>
Net assets:		
Without donor restriction	757,760	395,602
With donor restriction	453,934	473,472
Total net assets	<u>1,211,694</u>	<u>869,074</u>
Total liabilities and net assets	<u><u>\$ 1,699,480</u></u>	<u><u>\$ 1,230,707</u></u>

Staff

Thanks to our supporters, Sonoma Ecology Center was able to retain and even grow our staff, making it possible to meet the evolving needs of Sonoma Valley and its communities.

RICHARD DALE
Executive Director

ROSS ADAMS
Restoration Project Manager

RAYMOND BALTAR
Biochar Project Manager
Sonoma Biochar Initiative Director

CELINA BRIGGS
Human Resources Manager

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Sonoma Garden Park Manager

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Nursery Specialist

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Sonoma Valley Collaborative Director

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Fire Specialist

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Naturalist

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Sugarloaf Ridge State Park
Operations

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Sonoma Valley Collaborative Coordinator

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Research Program Manager

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NEST Lead Instructor

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AYLA MILLS
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Sonoma Garden Park Bilingual
Volunteer Coordinator

TONY PASSANTINO
Education Program Manager

JOHN RONEY
Sugarloaf Ridge State Park Manager

ALMA SHAW
Sugarloaf Ridge State Park Bilingual
Events Coordinator
Assistant Park Manager

ERICA WARREN
Project Specialist

CADY WATTS
Marketing and Communications
Specialist

TIFFANY WING
Development Director

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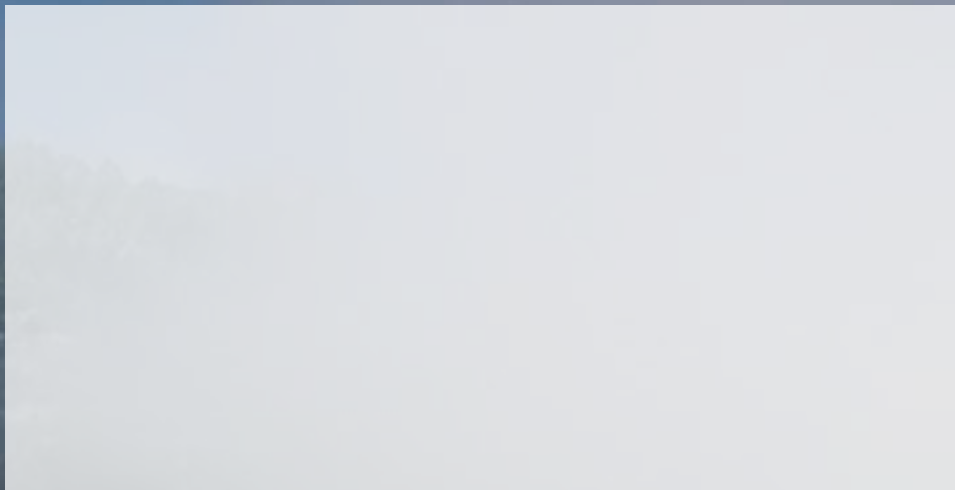
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