



Laguna  
de Santa Rosa  
Foundation

## Strategic Plan 2017-2021

*Watershed Stewardship — in Action,  
Together*



*The Intersection of Science, Inspiration, and Community*

“For the better part of three decades, the Laguna Foundation has been a primary driver in protecting and educating our county’s citizenry about the importance of the Laguna Watershed to our county’s overall health. The Foundation has been a key partner with us in protecting the watershed’s natural resources, while continuing to educate school children and the general public about the importance of preserving the watershed.”

— **Bill Keene**

General Manager, Sonoma County Agricultural Preservation and Open Space District

“It’s a place that a lot of people see, but don’t really understand. Before I went through the docent training, to me it was ‘just a waterway.’ You’d come to a bridge and you knew there was a creek underneath, but you didn’t know the significance. I decided to volunteer not only to work with kids, but to learn more about this local landmark.”

— **Dr. Connie Ayers**

Family Practitioner,  
Sebastopol



## Our Mission:

*To restore and conserve the Laguna de Santa Rosa, and to inspire public appreciation for this Wetland of International Importance.*

## How do we serve our Mission over the next 5 years?

By setting ambitious and strategic goals (see page 8):

- 1) Lead our **diverse partners toward collaborative action** and shared goals
- 2) Resolve important **ecological problems on a watershed scale**
- 3) Educate **diverse communities** to inspire **local stewardship**
- 4) Secure a **financial future of diversity and growth**
- 5) Cultivate a strong and **creative work community** of board, staff, and volunteers

## How we work to achieve our goals:

- We think big and plan for the future.
- We make connections.
- We value partnerships and celebrate shared successes.
- We build from a strong scientific base and create measureable results.
- We promote and inspire stewardship.
- We conserve and restore native biodiversity.
- We use a watershed, systems-scale approach to ecological challenges.





Dear Friend of the Laguna,

We've worked with you over the last 26 years to help write the restoration story of the Laguna de Santa Rosa — **a state-wide treasure, internationally recognized and valued.** A story that moves from the landfills and sewage ponds of the past to the inspirational salmon young, oak groves and otter-pups of today! Twenty-six years of conservation success through partner-building and community stewardship has taken us a long way: 16,000 children inspired through the Learning Laguna program and **200 acres restored with over 50,000 native plants.** However, there is still so much more to do if our Laguna is to be a restored and sustainable ecosystem for future generations.

Today we're looking ahead, ready to take the next step: **we're writing to you about now,** and our promise to you for the *future.*

Now, we are at a crossroad. Today, water quality, sediment, invasive species and climate change are serious issues. **The Laguna is listed as impaired by the EPA.**

Over 30 species of the Laguna's plants and animals are endangered, threatened or of special concern, and our children spend too much time inside in front of screens.

**We can slide backward or move forward** — let's move forward together and step into the *next* 26 years; a future with clean water, healthy soil, restored plant and wildlife communities, and active, inspired children. With your help, **we can make the Laguna fishable and swimmable again!**

**We do not own the Laguna** — it belongs to hundreds of different property owners, and you. Every endeavor is only possible through multiple partnerships. We hope you'll take this step with us and **accept this invitation** into partnership. The goals and dreams you're about to read can only be accomplished with your generous and engaged support. We hope you are as inspired by our vision as we are energized by what we know can be accomplished **together.**



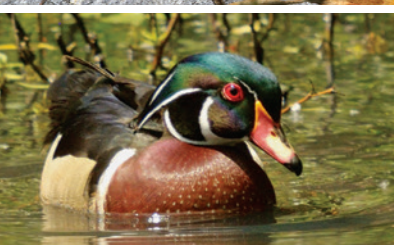
Your Partners in Stewardship,

Raini Sugg  
BOARD PRESIDENT

Kevin Munroe  
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

**P.S. Our promise to you?** We combine science, inspirational education, and *your voice* to build shared goals and a healthier Laguna. Become a part of this inspirational story — the restoration of **your** Laguna de Santa Rosa.

## The Laguna de Santa Rosa is many things: a stream, a wetland, and a watershed



**Meandering Stream** — The 22-mile long Laguna de Santa Rosa starts in Cotati and empties into the Russian River at Forestville, forming its largest tributary. Because the Laguna filters many sediments and pollutants, it's often called the Russian River's "kidney."

**Diverse Wetlands** — Each winter this 22-mile stream expands onto its floodplain, creating a wetland complex of marshes, pools, and "lakes" enjoyed by thousands of birds and hundreds of kayakers. Sonoma County's richest wildlife area, these wetlands also bring nutrients and water to thousands of acres of farmland — helping fuel Sonoma County's spring growth and autumn harvest.

**Vast Watershed** — The Laguna Watershed collects rain from the mountains around Santa Rosa, sends it through smaller streams to the Laguna, which then carries this water to the Russian River and on to the Pacific Ocean. The rain that falls in your yard may touch the backs of whales. This 254-square-mile watershed stretches from Windsor to Cotati, Oakmont to Sebastopol, and encompasses all of Santa Rosa — California's second largest urban center north of San Francisco.

## The Laguna de Santa Rosa is many things to many people:

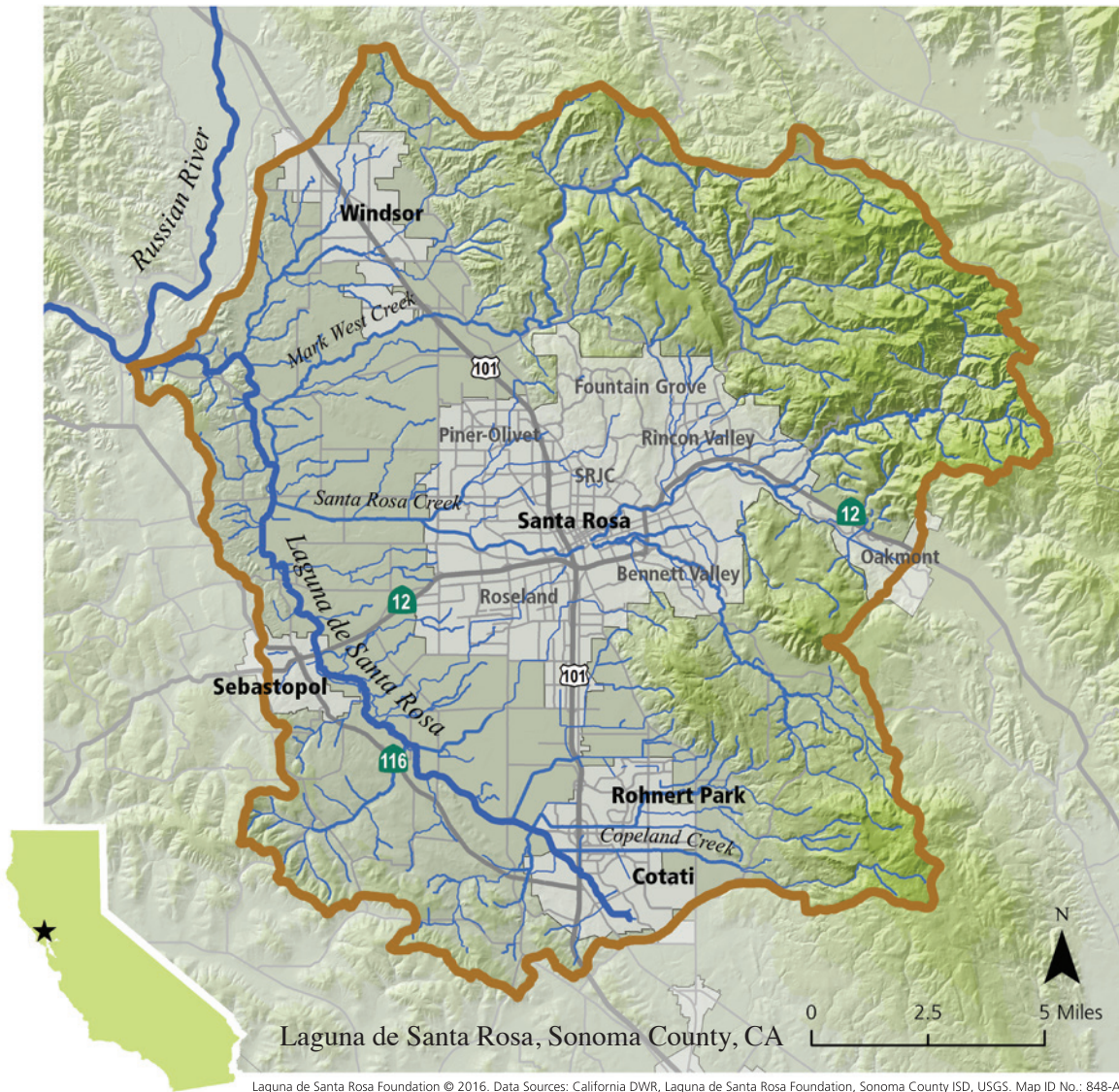
- Peaceful winter kayaking spot and year-round hiking trails
- Critical spawning and rearing habitat for salmon
- Home to Native American communities
- Heart of Sonoma County's wine country
- Vital rookery for herons and cormorants
- Mecca for artisanal foods
- Extensive floodplain that protects our neighborhoods from flooding
- Home to bears, badgers, salamanders, tree frogs, dragonflies and bobcats
- RAMSAR-designated Wetland of International Importance
- Essential resting and feeding grounds for migratory birds
- Crucial protector of water quality, groundwater resources, and erosion control
- Spectacular, diverse habitats: from wildflower meadows, willow groves and oak woodlands to tule marshes, vernal pools and winter lakes



## The Laguna Watershed is all these things and more

The vast Laguna Watershed is home to more than 400,000 people, as well as countless plants and animals. It's the foundation of a successful Sonoma County economy, estimated as worth \$27 billion in 2017 (Gross County Product). Its beauty greatly enhances the desirability of Sonoma County as a place to visit or live. We all depend on a healthy watershed — not just to live, but *to live well*.

**Are you in the Laguna Watershed? Find where you live on the map!**



### Did you know that the following are in the Laguna watershed?

Screamin' Mimi's Ice Cream, Russian River Brewing Co., Sonoma State University, Santa Rosa Junior College, Annadel State Park, Sonoma County Airport, Luther Burbank Center for the Arts, and Safari West.

## What are the problems facing our Laguna Watershed?



*Despite the Laguna's problems, it is well worth saving.*

By the 1970's, the Laguna Stream channel was declared devoid of life. Many of its creeks had been channelized. Ninety percent of forests along the creeks were gone. Together, we've come a long way in our restoration work since then, but **there is still more to do.**

**Polluted Waters** — The Laguna is listed as impaired by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency for nutrients, sediment, temperature, dissolved oxygen, pathogens, and mercury. It is not safe to swim in most of the Laguna, or to eat fish out of its waters.

**Endangered Species** — The Laguna Watershed is home to a variety of endangered plant and animal species including Sebastopol meadowfoam, the California tiger salamander, and coho salmon. In total, over 30 of our watershed's plants and animals are listed as threatened, endangered, or of special concern.

**Floodplain Sedimentation** — As a society, we are creating more sediment in the upper watershed and changing the way it is deposited in the lower watershed. Stormwater runoff brings more pollutants and increased flooding.

**No "Hub"** — Other worthy groups are working on these problems separately, often unconnected. We could all be more effective through collaboration. Partners and patrons have suggested the Laguna Foundation is uniquely qualified to be the coordinating organization, and have asked that we increase our leadership role in watershed conservation.

**Climate Change** — Higher temperatures affect our water supply and result in both crops and native plants requiring more water. Hotter summers affect public health and our general quality of life. Climate change leads to extreme weather, which means an increase in both flooding and droughts. This sends more sediment and pollutants into the Laguna, affects natural cycles of fish, birds and other wildlife, and makes both ecosystems and crops more vulnerable.

**Invasive Species** — Ludwigia, feral pigs, and sudden oak death are changing physical and biological systems throughout the watershed. Invasive species are capable of severe economic and environmental damage, affecting the entire watershed.

**Lost Connection** — Today's children spend too much time in front of screens and are often disconnected from the land. Interactive, hands-on, outdoor experiences are less and less a part of this generation's daily life.

**What Watershed?** — Many Sonoma County residents are unaware of how the Laguna's health touches their daily lives, and don't know where or what it is. Not enough people are aware of the wonders and the problems of our watershed.



## The Laguna Foundation was created to solve these problems

We are a place-based organization focused on the Laguna de Santa Rosa's condition and future. We are scientists and teachers, restoration technicians and seasoned field crews, passionate volunteers, and dedicated board members. Together with you, we are watershed stewardship and leadership in action. We are your partners. **Here is how** we solve these problems:

**Restoration and Conservation** — Through scientific research and “in-the-field” project success, we work with our partners to:

- restore critical wetlands
- help endangered species recover
- address climate change
- preserve our remaining vernal pools
- manage invasive species
- establish essential wildlife corridors
- plant acres of diverse riparian buffers
- bring back native biodiversity
- return the waters of the Laguna to a clean, swimmable, and fishable condition

**Walks, Talks and Outdoor Adventures** — We offer dynamic educational programs to the public on topics such as badgers, dragonflies, stream morphology, native plant identification, climate change, geology, and art to name a few. We guide nature explorations and provide access to special properties, with hikes, kayak adventures, and wildlife viewing.

**Learning Laguna** — Our innovative, hands-on school program allows Sonoma County teachers to meet ecological literacy goals while working with trained docent volunteers to inspire a new generation of watershed stewards. Over 16,000 students from 49 schools covering 95% of our watershed's districts have participated. (Don't miss teacher and student perspectives on Learning Laguna on page 15.)

**Volunteer Community Experiences** — On-going opportunities with school groups, adult programs, and hands-on restoration projects in the Laguna involve the community in solving these problems. You and your friends can make a difference, **one project at a time.**

“The Laguna Watershed faces many immediate threats including invasive plant species, urban sprawl, climate change and pollution which can all drastically alter our local ecosystems. These threats can be contained through ecological restoration and the efforts of the Laguna Foundation's Restoration Program. We put boots on the ground every day to ensure the fight is alive to secure the well being of our local watershed and help it thrive for years to come.”

— **Paul Weber**, Restoration Field Supervisor, Laguna de Santa Rosa Foundation



## Strategic Plan 2017–2021

### Mission — our guide and purpose:

*To restore and conserve the Laguna de Santa Rosa, and to inspire public appreciation for this Wetland of International Importance.*

### Vision — what we plan to achieve:

- The Laguna Foundation’s diverse partnerships lead to ambitious, innovative projects with sustainable results and shared community goals throughout the watershed.
- This results in the Laguna de Santa Rosa and its tributaries supporting a thriving mosaic of healthy, resilient natural communities, increased native plant and animal populations, and restored ecological function.
- Sonoma County’s diverse communities are inspired and personally committed to watershed stewardship, leading to a healthy and vibrant Laguna: clean water, healthy soil, and restored plant and animal life for all.



## GOAL 1 Lead Our Diverse Partners Toward Collaborative Action and Shared Goals

In collaboration with our partners, we will increase and diversify our partnerships, and lead initiatives throughout the Laguna watershed. We will continue to support our partners by serving as a model of watershed stewardship, and cultivate our role as a hub of cutting-edge restoration, conservation, and education.

### Action Strategies:

- a) Develop project teams of **multiple and diverse** partners throughout the watershed.
- b) Share our **technical expertise** by providing trainings, workshops, and other public programs geared towards professionals and our partners.
- c) Foster **expanded relationships** with native peoples that honor ecological expertise, knowledge of place, and shared goals.
- d) Develop and celebrate partnerships with the **agricultural community** to demonstrate the interdependencies between a sustainable economy and the environment.
- e) Participate in early stages of project planning with our partners to help **shape and steer projects** from the ground up.





## GOAL 2 Resolve Important Ecological Problems on a Watershed Scale

We will prioritize, develop, and implement long-term solutions to the most pressing environmental issues in the Laguna Watershed. We will use strategic, biological-systems planning to develop sustainable, landscape-level solutions — grounded in innovative, science-based research with measurable results.

### Action Strategies:

- Develop **long-term solutions** to water quality issues by reducing current sources of pollution, ameliorating the impact of historic pollutants, and improving stormwater management.
- Promote conservation, groundwater banking, and sustainable groundwater management to ensure **adequate water supply for the future**.
- Preserve and **restore native biodiversity** to return ecological function to the Laguna, including restoration of rare species, management of invasive species, and support of diverse successional plant communities.
- Create **climate adaptation strategies** to minimize the impact of climate change and foster resilience in human and natural communities.
- Develop and implement projects that strategically connect parcels to maximize size, connectivity, and effectiveness of **habitat corridors**.



## GOAL 3 Educate Diverse Communities To Inspire Local Stewardship

We will expand our education programs and public awareness efforts to new and diverse communities throughout the Laguna Watershed. As a result, we will inspire people to become stewards of their watershed by demonstrating personal connections, and facilitating direct experiences with nature.

### Action Strategies:

- Encourage and facilitate **local stewardship** of watershed issues and projects.
- Use streams and wildlife to illustrate **tangible and dynamic links** between nature and people's neighborhoods.
- Provide opportunities for **hands-on, project-oriented work** that help connect people to their watershed, including Laguna Foundation restoration and Citizen Science projects.
- Develop **watershed-awareness campaigns** that reach large and untapped audiences.
- Strengthen outreach efforts to **reach specific groups that are new to, or underserved by**, the Laguna Foundation — both geographically and demographically.
- Fully **utilize the Laguna Environmental Center** as a dynamic setting for watershed awareness and Citizen Science projects.
- Develop our **marketing and external communications** to increase our public profile and engage more people in our mission.



## GOAL 4 Secure a Financial Future of Diversity and Growth



To allow our projects, programs and partnerships to flourish, we will build a diverse funding structure that allows for change, investment in the future, and growth. We will strengthen and diversify our funding sources by exploring additional fee-based services, pursuing new grant sources, and expanding initiatives for our advancement.

### Action Strategies:

- a) Create a **Future Fund** that grows each year and allows for investment in our future.
- b) **Expand our fundraising** to include a larger, more diverse audience, increased major gifts, and ongoing donor cultivation.
- c) Increase and **diversify our membership** by reaching out to new audiences.
- d) Improve our use of **grants and contracts** by pursuing new funding sources.
- e) Advertise and expand our **Legacy Society** by raising the profile of estate planning and recognizing our Society members.
- f) Expand our fee-based **revenue capacity** with new programs, facility rentals, sales, and professional services.

## GOAL 5 Cultivate A Strong and Creative Work Community of Board, Staff, Volunteers

We will attract and maintain a diverse, dedicated and professional team of staff, board and volunteers that grow with the organization. We will be innovative, seek challenges, and maintain a culture of creative problem-solving and adaptive management. Our strategic planning will create a nimble infrastructure that evolves with new challenges.

### Action Strategies:

- a) Foster an internal culture of **creative problem-solving**, adaptive growth, and collaborative team-building.
- b) Attract **motivated and diverse board members** through recruitment and engagement.
- c) Increase our **volunteer capacity** with new methods of recruitment and volunteer enrichment.
- d) Retain exemplary staff by **employee training**, competitive compensation, and collaborative merit reviews that encourage **professional growth**.



## Accountability and Future Planning

Strategic Plans are not only implemented, they're evaluated. Our evaluation loop allows for real-time adaptation of the current plan, as well as improving the next. This is a continuous process — each cycle builds upon the next.

- Five Strategies are chosen each year (one from each Goal), and evaluated with metrics developed collaboratively by staff, board, volunteers, and our partners.
- The results from those evaluations are presented once a year to our board and the public, with a request for input and feedback.
- We know our failures teach us more than our successes — we look forward to learning from them and making each plan better than the last.

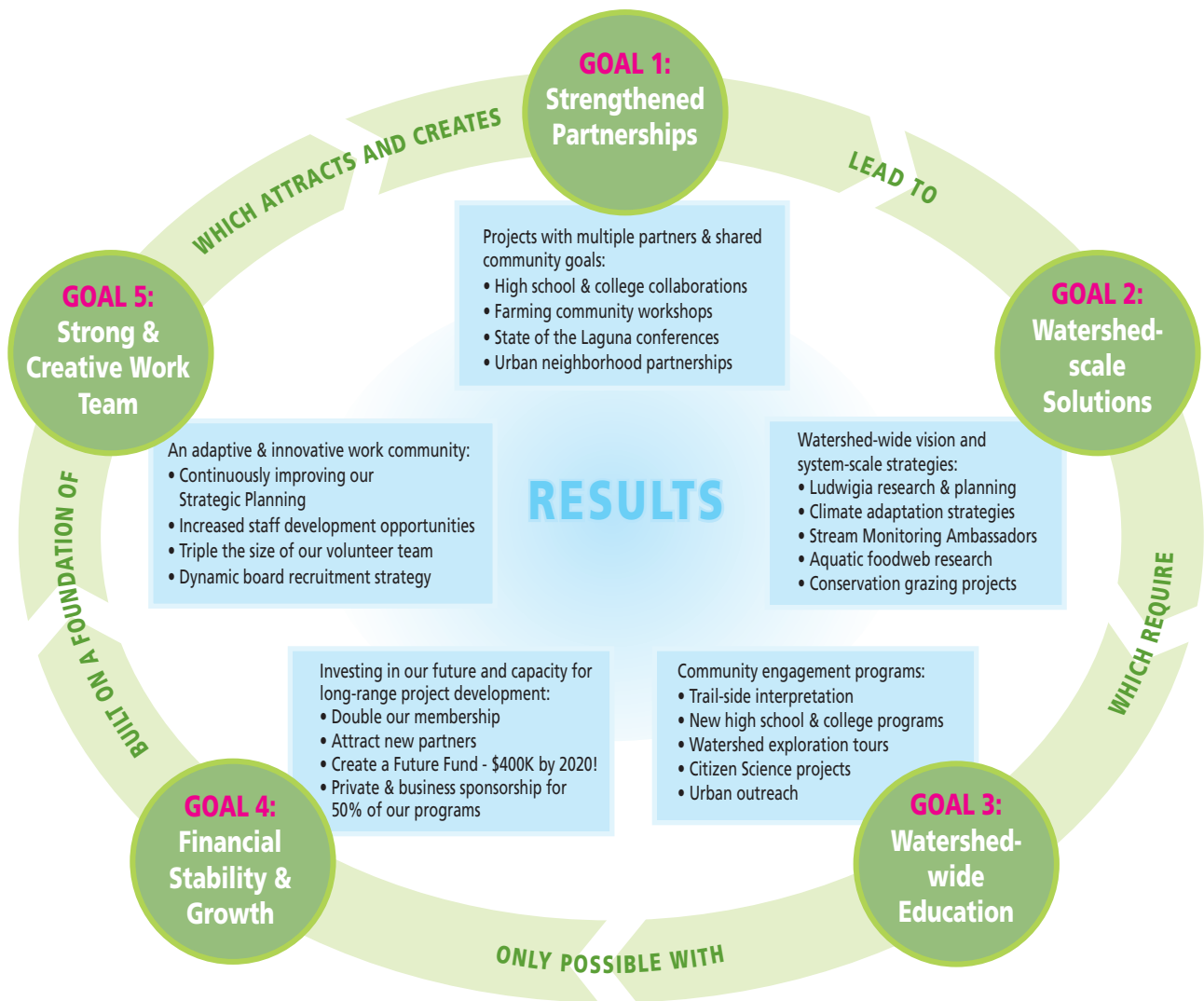
Like to learn more?  
Visit our website for  
a 26-year timeline  
of our benchmark  
accomplishments.



Laguna de Santa Rosa 2015 Garbage Clean-Up project coordinators: (left to right) Kevin Munroe (Laguna de Santa Rosa Foundation), Supervisor James Gore (Sonoma County 4<sup>th</sup> District), Michael Thompson (Sonoma County Water Agency), Karen Fies (Sonoma County Human Services), Matt Martin (Social Advocates for Youth), and David Kuszmar (North Coast Regional Water Quality Control Board).

# Connected Goals Create Results

In our Strategic Plan, no goal stands on its own — each is connected and creates a sustainable cycle that builds on itself for long-term results.



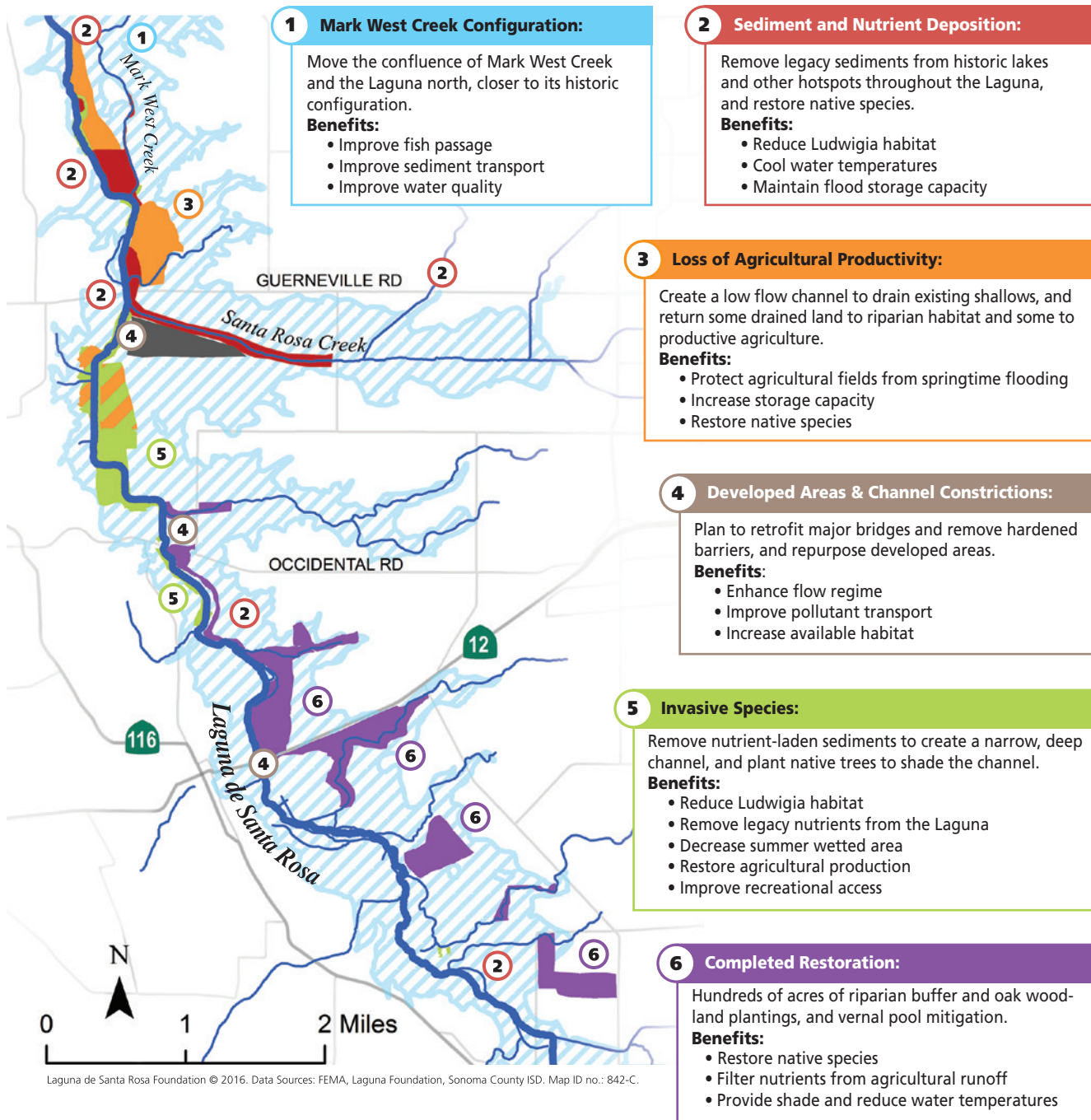
“The Laguna de Santa Rosa Foundation is one of those understated yet extremely effective non-profit organizations that has consistently achieved its goals of protection, restoration, and enhancement of the internationally recognized Laguna de Santa Rosa wetlands. The Laguna Foundation has also contributed significantly to the public awareness and knowledge of this critically important habitat area through its Education and Outreach Programs.”

— **Eric J. Larson**, Ph.D., Environmental Program Manager  
Bay-Delta Region, California Department of Fish and Wildlife

## Results: Large-scale and Long-term

Connected goals, each strengthening the next, lead to larger-scale results: the potential for multi-year, multi-partner, multi-million dollar projects that restore the health of the watershed. The following is a possible

plan for restoration along three of our streams — still in the early stages of project development. **Long-term projects like this can only succeed with your partnership and on-going support.**



## What will be the result of this work?

Working together, our **goals** combine to create a **healthy, thriving, and beautiful Laguna** for all, once again:

- **Clean Water...for otters, osprey, and our children.** *Imagine* waters we can fish and swim in again! All three species of local salmonids feeding on healthy aquatic foodwebs, sharing our streams with egrets, tree frogs, fishermen, and families.
- **Restored Habitat...for native plants, wildlife, and recreation.** *Imagine* streams, riparian forests and marshlands with awe-inspiring flocks of migrating and nesting birds, happy kayakers and hikers, and shaded oak groves. Bees and butterflies pollinating our gardens, and beneficial predators like owls and dragonflies providing natural pest control in our neighborhoods. Restored habitat also means more natural beauty — why we love living here and why so many people love to visit.
- **Healthy Soils...for farmers, backyard gardeners, and lush marshlands.** *Imagine* soils full of life, producing oak groves and native wildflowers, and rich wildlife corridors. Living soils support our strong economy, allowing it to grow with prosperous farms, ranches, and vineyards able to produce the very best artisanal foods and world-class wine and brews.

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**Watershed Stewardship — in Action, Together**

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## We Need Your Help

Here's what **you can do** to help create a thriving Laguna for all:

**Make a generous donation of time or money** — Be part of our ambitious programs for these next five exciting years. Become a Member, new Partner, Donor, or Board Member. Become a Docent, Guide, Steward or Garden Day Volunteer.

**Get connected, involved, and learn about the Laguna** — Tell us what you think! Please share your thoughts with us about this plan and the Laguna's future. Join us at an upcoming event or program; visit our website to see our current offerings.

**Make a lasting difference in your community** — Reduce fertilizer and pesticide use, expand planted buffers along local streams, use native plants to support birds and beneficial insects, conserve water, and get involved with a Laguna Foundation restoration project!






**And don't forget to get outside** — Take a walk in your Laguna. Enjoy our internationally recognized wetland: it's an ecological wonder and Sonoma County jewel!

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## Join the Conversation...

“Learning Laguna is an amazing program! My students benefited greatly from both the classroom visit and the field trip — they loved the experiences and learned a lot. As a teacher with 22 years of experience, I was impressed with the docents’ first-class science knowledge, and how they kept the students engaged and thinking. Students learned to connect human interactions with a healthy ecosystem, and to appreciate the rich biology of our local habitat. The program ties in well with curriculum content standards. My heart is full of gratitude — please continue this program!”  
— **Lesley Van Dordrecht**,  
Mark West School, September 2015

### Learning Laguna student quotes:

“I learned that the Laguna is a very special place for all living things like animals and people.”

“My favorite part was when I walked by myself! I got to see and smell things that I had not noticed before.”

“We saw a hawk in the nest! A woodpecker made holes on a log to find bugs. I learned swallows make their nest with mud.”

“At the end, I now know that I am the key to the future and can possibly make the world better.”



“Having the Green Business Awards reception at a location surrounded by nature is a great reminder of why it’s important to conserve resources. It’s great to know that the proceeds from the event will help educate others about protecting the environment.”

— **Kevin Kumataka**, Program Coordinator, Sonoma Green Business Program, and **Ben Stone**, Director, Economic Development Board

## ...and Make a Difference

“What amazes me is knowing the work we do today will forever impact the people of tomorrow. Restoration has its benefit to the natural environment, but is also a way to combine efforts of scientists, aspiring students, volunteers, and community members into a joint effort with one common goal. One of the most fulfilling things anyone could experience in a lifetime is watching a restoration site grow into a young forest before your eyes, knowing it improves this world we call home.”

— **Aaron Nuñez**, Ecological Project Manager,  
Laguna de Santa Rosa Foundation



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*Watershed Stewardship — in Action, Together*

The Intersection of Science, Inspiration, and Community

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Become a part of this inspirational story: the restoration of your Laguna de Santa Rosa. Read on to discover how we combine the best science, engaging education, and **your voice** to build shared goals and a healthier Laguna... the ecological jewel of Sonoma County!

