



Messaging Playbook

Elevator Pitches

- Unified Stewardship Efforts: "Our Network unites 25 diverse organizations, pooling resources and expertise for effective stewardship of more than 250,000 acres in the Santa Cruz Mountains, enhancing ecological health and community resilience.
- The Network's diverse membership brings expertise and resources from conservation groups, government agencies, academic institutions, private landowners, and indigenous communities, fostering a comprehensive approach to stewardship.
- Through combined brain power and collective thinking, the Network addresses pressing environmental challenges such as climate change, invasive species, and wildfire risks.

Messages

What is the Santa Cruz Mountains Stewardship Network?

The Santa Cruz Mountains Stewardship Network brings together 25 organizations to collaboratively steward the diverse ecosystems of the Santa Cruz Mountains. **The collaborative enables members to leverage their collective expertise and resources, ensuring that the entire region, far beyond the scope of any individual group's reach, benefits from coordinated, strategic stewardship.** In doing so, the Network plays an instrumental role in safeguarding and enhancing the ecological health of this vital area for generations to come.

Specifically, the Network's members focus on projects that increase wildfire resiliency and promote forest health. This can include managing invasive species, maintaining biodiversity, and adapting to climate change, while also fostering public access and strong community engagement in conservation efforts.

The SCMSN also engages in projects that support its members in stewarding the land, such as with tools like its [vegetation map](#) and projects to remove biomass from the region to reduce fuel for future forest fires.



- **EXAMPLE 1: Vegetation Map**

The Santa Cruz Mountains Stewardship Network has embarked on a revolutionary vegetation mapping project, significantly enhancing the ability of local organizations to care for the land.

This endeavor uses advanced LiDAR technology and high-definition aerial imagery, meticulously integrated ground reports from botanists to create a series of highly accurate maps and databases unique to the area.

This valuable data is multifaceted in its use. For instance, Cal Fire's Wildfire Emergency Response Team has praised the data, stating it has propelled them into the "21st century." California State Parks used the information to plan a large-scale, controlled 1,000-acre burn at Big Basin State Park to prevent wildfires. San Mateo County Parks is employing the data to strategize the conservation of butterflies at San Bruno Mountain County Park, and the San Mateo Resource Conservation District is using it for planning fire prevention and forest health initiatives across various lands.

Organizations across the Santa Cruz Mountains are leveraging this map to make informed decisions about land management. By understanding our forests better, we're not just preserving trees; we're safeguarding our communities' futures, ensuring clean air, and maintaining a home for diverse wildlife. This mapping isn't just about data; it's about protecting a legacy.

The [vegetation map](#) is a testament to how the Santa Cruz Mountains Stewardship Network is fostering cooperation to improve the pace, scale, and quality of stewardship in the region.

- **EXAMPLE 2: Regional Woody Biomass Strategy**

The Santa Cruz Mountains Stewardship Network is undertaking a significant project to devise a comprehensive regional strategy aimed at managing the vast quantities of dead trees and other combustible materials, especially following the destructive CZU fire. This initiative is a response to the acute challenge faced by land stewardship organizations within the fire's 80,000 acre impact zone, which are grappling with how to handle the increasing volumes of woody biomass. The aftermath of the fire has not only left dead and dying trees but has also spurred a vigorous resurgence of underbrush, collectively heightening the risk of severe wildfires.



The project confronts various hurdles, including stringent regulatory frameworks and the substantial costs associated with biomass management. By mapping out both potential strategies for addressing woody biomass and the obstacles to implementing these strategies, the Santa Cruz Mountains Stewardship Network aims to create a range of viable, scalable solutions. Leveraging its well-established collaborative networks, the organization will be positioned to help its members implement these strategies effectively.

The goal is twofold: to restore and maintain the ecological health of the region's forests and to reduce the threat of catastrophic wildfires to surrounding communities. This proactive approach is a testament to the network's commitment to fostering a safer, more resilient natural environment in the Santa Cruz Mountains.

Addressing the aftermath of the CZU fire isn't just about clearing debris; it's about restoring balance to our forest ecosystem and preventing future disasters. Our work ensures that these majestic lands remain a source of wonder and safety for generations to come.

How does the Santa Cruz Mountains Stewardship Network do its job?

Collaboration is the name of the game. The Network facilitates the exchange of knowledge and best practices among its members, harnessing a wide range of expertise from environmental science to land management. This collaboration fosters innovative solutions to complex ecological challenges.

- **The Network brings members together to coordinate stewardship activities across the region.** It facilitates this by creating a platform for dialogue on critical issues, promoting the sharing of insights and strategies. This collaborative environment nurtures peer learning and the development of innovative programs. For instance, the SCMSN's Fire and Forest Health Team shares in-depth information on projects with each other – including costs, timelines, barriers, names of contractors, and forest treatment practices – to create a pool of collective knowledge that can improve projects across the region.

Another example: the SCMSN is currently engaging in a State of the Trails study in which the trails of all the SCMSN member organizations are being looked at as a single system of trails in order to find out whether trail users needs are being met, how recreation is



balancing with preservation of biodiversity, and how equitable the system is. Results of the study will help inform trail planning individually for organizations as well as highlighting opportunities for collaboration.

Where does the Network operate?

The Santa Cruz Mountains Stewardship Network operates in the Santa Cruz Mountains region: Santa Cruz County, San Mateo County, and the western, forested, part of Santa Clara County. Bounded to the east by the Santa Clara Valley and the Pacific Ocean to the west, this region encompasses a diverse array of ecosystems including ridge tops, alluvial fans, old growth forests, saltwater lagoons, marshes, mudflats, and intertidal zones.

The area is characterized by a mix of public and private lands, including parks, open space preserves, timber, and agricultural lands, as well as rural and urban communities.

The Santa Cruz Mountains Stewardship Network partners collectively own an area of approximately 250,000 acres in the Santa Cruz mountains. Individually, the largest manages just 70,000 acres. Members also help private landowners steward their properties, increasing their impact substantially.

Who are the members?

The Santa Cruz Mountains Stewardship Network comprises a diverse group of 25 members, each bringing unique interests, abilities, and goals. These members include:

- **Land Trusts:** Sempervirens Fund, Peninsula Open Space Trust, Save the Redwoods League and Land Trust of Santa Cruz County — focusing on protecting natural habitats and biodiversity.
- **Indigenous Groups:** Amah Mutsun Land Trust — practicing traditional land stewardship and cultural preservation.
- **Government Agencies:** California State Parks, Cal Fire, Resource Conservation Districts, and the Midpeninsula Regional Open Space District — managing public lands.
- **Academic Institutions:** UC Santa Cruz, Stanford's Jasper Ridge Biological Preserve — conducting ecological research and contributing academic expertise.



- **Private Landowners and Businesses:** Big Creek Lumber, Redwood Empire — Managing forest resources in an environmentally sustainable way.
- **Water Utilities:** San Jose Water, Valley Water, the San Lorenzo Valley Water District — working to improve water quality which can be degraded by a number of reasons including wildfire and climate change.

Each of these members plays a vital role, contributing a range of interests, abilities, and goals that enhance the Network's collaborative stewardship efforts.

The importance of active stewardship

The devastating CZU Wildfire of August 2020, which affected 86,000 acres, highlighted the inadequacy of a hands-off approach and underscored the need for more proactive management.

- The land has been stewarded by people for at least 11,000 years. The current state of forests is unnatural, and with the impacts of climate change, that makes them more susceptible to natural disasters like wildfires. Old growth redwood stands have 25-30 trees per acre. Second-growth stands, which grew after clear cutting in earlier eras, have hundreds of trees per acre, resulting in a dense forest with skinny trees. This reality means that the forest needs to be actively stewarded, which in some cases means the forest needs to be thinned. Collaborative active stewardship efforts not only safeguards the region's unique ecosystems but also protects communities and infrastructure.
- The central coast region of California is a fire-adapted landscape. Indigenous people worked with the landscape ecosystemically by burning the land on a regular basis. Fire suppression efforts put in place since European colonization have resulted in an overgrown understory, making the forests more susceptible to catastrophic wildfire.
- Strategic practices like controlled burns and selective logging are not only about maintaining forest health but also about safeguarding our communities from wildfires and other climate-related threats. These practices are essential in addressing the challenges posed by a century of wildfire suppression, dense forest regrowth, and the increasing stressors of climate change.



- This strategy moves beyond the “leave nature alone” paradigm, integrating hands-on practices like controlled burns, selective logging, biomass removal, and creating fuel breaks to enhance forest health and resilience.
- Healthy, resilient redwood forests provide significant environmental benefits, including buffering against wildfires, absorbing heat, generating local precipitation, and replenishing aquifers. They are not just recreational spaces but essential components of the region's ecological and human health. The future of the Santa Cruz Mountains depends on embracing innovative conservation techniques and traditional ecological knowledge in a united effort to adapt to and mitigate the impacts of climate change.

Climate change language

The forests in the Santa Cruz Mountains are crucial in the fight against climate change for several reasons:

- **Carbon Sequestration:** These forests, especially the redwoods, are highly efficient at absorbing and storing carbon dioxide, a key greenhouse gas contributing to climate change. Coast redwoods capture more carbon dioxide from our cars, trucks, and power plants than any other tree on Earth. In fact, two mature redwoods remove and store roughly 1,600 tons of carbon from the atmosphere, as much as the average American produces in a lifetime through their carbon dioxide emissions.
- **Climate Regulation:** The dense foliage and unique ecosystem of these forests play a vital role in local climate regulation, influencing precipitation patterns and maintaining regional temperature stability.
- **Biodiversity Preservation:** By sustaining a wide range of plant and animal species, these forests maintain ecological balance, which is essential for resilience against the impacts of climate change.
- **Natural Buffer:** Forests act as natural buffers against climate change impacts, protecting against soil erosion, enhancing water retention, and providing habitats that can adapt to changing environmental conditions.

In summary, the Santa Cruz Mountains' forests are not only critical for their inherent ecological value but also as a natural defense against the advancing impacts of climate change.



Funding language

The Santa Cruz Mountains region, encompassing a million acres of breathtaking beauty, boast immense biodiversity and ecological significance. This unique region is home to a rich tapestry of wildlife, including rare and endangered species, and plays a crucial role in regulating California's climate.

The Santa Cruz Mountains Stewardship Network unites 25 independent organizations, each dedicated to the responsible stewardship of this invaluable land. **Together, they own more than 250,000 acres and steward even more**, and the Network leverages their diverse expertise and resources to tackle pressing environmental challenges on a regional basis.

The Network tackles a wide range of critical issues, including:

- **Combating climate change and protecting our forests:** The Network implements innovative practices to mitigate climate change impacts, such as forest restoration, which can help maintain the forests in the region as carbon sinks.
- **Enhancing biodiversity:** Through habitat protection and restoration efforts, contributes to the flourishing of diverse plant and animal species.
- **Protecting communities from wildfire risks:** The Network actively engages in fire prevention and mitigation initiatives, safeguarding communities from the threat of wildfires.
- **Maintaining and promoting forest health:** Network members work on maintaining the health of the forests, which is crucial because healthy forests are more resilient to wildfires, improve wildlife habitats, safeguard vital water sources, and help counteract the effects of climate change.

By funding the Network, you enable:

- **Implementation of innovative stewardship practices:** Funding allows SMSCN to implement cutting-edge solutions to environmental challenges across the vast region.
- **Sustainable management of a unique ecosystem:** Your support contributes to the long-term sustainability of the Santa Cruz Mountains, ensuring its continued ecological and economic value.



- **A legacy for future generations:** By investing in the Network, you play a pivotal role in preserving this irreplaceable natural treasure for generations to come.
- **Regional Impact:** By investing in the SCMSN, people are investing in our combined efforts and expertise, so our large number of diverse members can continue to collaborate regionally and develop strategies and solutions for the region as a whole.

Internal stakeholder messaging

The Santa Cruz Mountains Stewardship Network is a collaborative of 25 diverse organizations uniting to manage and protect the Santa Cruz Mountains.

- **Collaborative Stewardship:** The Network leverages collective expertise and resources from its members, including conservation groups, government agencies, academic institutions, private landowners, and Indigenous groups, to strategically steward more than 250,000 acres in the Santa Cruz mountains. Without the network, the organizations affiliated with the several projects happening in the area would be less connected and, therefore, less efficient and effective. The network helps people collaborate quickly, share best practices, and bring resources together to better conserve the land.
- **Regional Impact:** Focusing on enhancing water quality, managing invasive species, maintaining biodiversity, and climate change adaptation, the Network's coordinated efforts significantly extend beyond individual capabilities, illustrating the power of collective action in conservation.

Boilerplate

About the Santa Cruz Mountains Stewardship Network

The Santa Cruz Mountains Stewardship Network, formed in 2014, is a collaboration of 25 organizations engaged in land stewardship in the Santa Cruz Mountains of California. Its mission is to foster coordination and collaboration in the service of cultivating a resilient, vibrant region where human and natural systems thrive for generations to come. Visit www.scmsn.net.