

# Sutter Buttes Regional Land Trust

## Stewardship Policy

### **Mission**

The mission of the Sutter Buttes Regional Land Trust (SBRLT) is to work to protect the land and natural resources of the Sutter Buttes and the surrounding region for present and future generations. The mission of the Stewardship Committee is to manage SBRLT's conservation easements and in-fee properties.

### **Management Philosophy**

The management of SBRLT properties will be completed in a way that promotes regional biodiversity, agriculture importance, public educational awareness, and natural ecosystems. Management tasks will be completed in a manner that is ecologically appropriate and uses financial and natural resources efficiently.

### **Baseline Report**

It is a policy of SBRLT to conduct a baseline field study of each in-fee property and conservation easement prior to closing that will be signed by the landowner and land trust at the time of closing. The Stewardship Manager will use the Baseline and Management Plan Template and baseline documentation to create a draft, incorporating management practices listed below. The report shall include an outline of all property features, photos, and inventory of all flora and fauna documented on site. See *Baseline Policy* for additional information. The Baseline and Management Plan is created and finalized prior to the closing date of the project. If management plans are not complete by closing, the baseline documentation will be used. At a minimum, the baseline template must include a general management and monitoring section, which outlines when monitoring will take place and what objectives must be completed within one year of closing (such as boundary signage installation).

### **Management Plans**

The Stewardship Program Manager is responsible for drafting the management plan, which is then reviewed by the Stewardship Chair (board member) and Land Conservation Manager. The qualifications of the Stewardship Program Manager would include a degree in natural science or related field (biology, geology, landscape restoration, etc.) as well as experience and/or training in land management.

The Management Plan shall address the current and future plans for the site while maintaining a sustainable approach that conserves the natural, cultural, and historic attributes of the property.

Each Management Plan will be reviewed by the Stewardship Committee and updated on an annual basis.

SBRLT staff and the Stewardship Chair (board member) determine which uses and activities are permitted on each in-fee property. Permitted activities are based on SBRLT mission and goals, stewardship capacity to manage those uses, conservation goals and objectives for the property, and financial capacity. Permitted activities must not impair conservation values but may restore ecological functions or provide educational opportunities.

The management plan for each property contains short-term and long-term goals. Short-term goals must be completed in 1-2 years and long-term goals must be completed in 3-5 years (or longer, depending on the goal). Each plan is reviewed on an annual basis to adjust or add new goals as needed. Threats to conservation values, goals and objectives will have a high management priority and will be dealt with immediately. The Stewardship Program Manager is responsible for reviewing management plans annually and creating a Work Plan to address each management goal.

### **Management of Fee Properties**

The Stewardship Program Manager and Land Conservation Manager are responsible for documenting management concerns. If the management concerns are minor, the Stewardship Manager and Stewardship Chair shall inform the board via email of the action to be taken and then complete corrective actions. If needed, the Board will discuss at the next scheduled Board meeting.

If the management concerns are major, the Stewardship Chair and Executive Director or Board President/CEO shall be notified immediately, before any action is taken. Staff, Executive Director or Board President/CEO and representatives from the Stewardship Committee will meet to develop recommended corrective actions to be implemented by staff, Stewardship Committee and/or volunteers. In some cases, the work may need to be contracted by a professional. Activities may need approval from the board if there are associated costs.

### **Management Practices**

The following are current management practices:

- Monitoring natural, cultural, and historical features of each site.
- Monitor habitat quality and species diversity
- Monitor areas of special concern (vandalism, trespassing, misuse, etc.)
- Establish and maintain trails, parking lots and public gathering areas
- Restoration of oak woodlands, streams, wetlands, etc.
- Establish Best Management Practices for sites when water quality or runoff issues occur
- Sustainable agricultural and grazing practices
- Mowing and/or controlled burns for agricultural purposes and natural biodiversity
- Removal of exotic species by hand or other controlled methods

## **Monitoring Documentation**

All sites shall be ground or aerial monitored annually. Remarks on the overall property condition will be noted through the use of a GPS unit, photos and “Conservation Easement Monitoring Report” or “In-Fee Monitoring Report”. See *Monitoring Policy* for additional information.

Monitoring Report will include:

- Overall property conditions; natural and/or man made
- Photos from established photo points
- All compiled field data including flora, fauna and identified site violations

## **Stewardship Team**

The stewardship team shall consist of trained volunteers or staff. Training should come from an individual with at least 3-5 years of previous stewardship experience and/or possess familiarity with SBRLT property locations and background information and past monitoring criteria.

## **Site Visit Protocol**

- ☒ Contact landowner 2 weeks prior to any conservation easement site visit.
- ☒ Review baseline report and background information prior to the conservation easement site visit.
- ☒ Load charged GPS unit(s) with property boundary, photo points and other relevant data.
- ☒ Print pertinent Aerial and/or USGS topographical maps with clearly defined boundaries.
- ☒ Print “Inspection Report” sheet to fill out while monitoring the site.
- ☒ Bring a copy of the deed if the team plans on meeting with any landowners or agencies.
- ☒ Bring a camera and back-up batteries.

At the end of each site monitoring, a complete report of all collected data and photos will be compiled and saved in both electronic form and a paper copy in the appropriate binder. The final stewardship report and findings will then be presented to the Board of Directors for review and action (if necessary). In the case of a conservation easement violation, the Stewardship Manager, Stewardship Chair and Executive Director or Board President/CEO shall discuss and notify the landowners as needed to resolve issues quickly. Landowners shall be notified in writing of any violations or to report the easement is in compliance.

## **Enforcement Procedures**

SBRLT will monitor and properly document all properties, including easement violations or changes. Violations or changes will be noted through written records, photo documentation, measurements, signed and dated field notes, and comparison to the baseline study. An “Incident Report” will be filled out and provided to the Executive Director or Board President/CEO in the case of a violation. If there is an easement violation, the Executive Director or Board President/CEO and Landowner should be notified immediately in writing and if necessary, arrange to meet on-site to resolve the issue as quickly as possible. In the rare case of court action, SBRLT will seek legal resolution through Terrafirma RRG LLC and Land Trust Alliance. See *Enforcement Policy* for additional information.

### **Public Use of Conservation Easements and In-Fee Properties**

Access may be allowed contingent upon the easement management agreement. SBRLT conservation easements and in-fee properties will not be open to the general public.

### **Signage**

As defined under the terms of each easement agreement or management plan, a property will have its boundary and access points marked.

### **Amendment Procedures**

If land ownership is transferred, land use changes, or new laws enacted, an amendment request may be made to update and/or modify the terms of the easement. An amendment request will comply with the SBRLT conflict of interest policy and SBRLT staff, volunteers, or board members may not directly benefit from an amendment. Amendment requests must be reviewed and approved by the SBRLT Board. See *Amendment Policy* for additional information.

### **Storage of Data**

SBRLT will keep three hardcopies of the original Baseline Report (land trust fireproof file, landowner, and stewardship binder). All property owners will receive a copy. Digital copies of all baseline reports, management plans, monitoring reports, and other stewardship tasks will be kept on a secure SBRLT electronic device and backed-up remotely. A digital copy will also be kept in a fireproof file via USB external hard drive. Two copies of the annual monitoring report will be printed for the working file and permanent file.