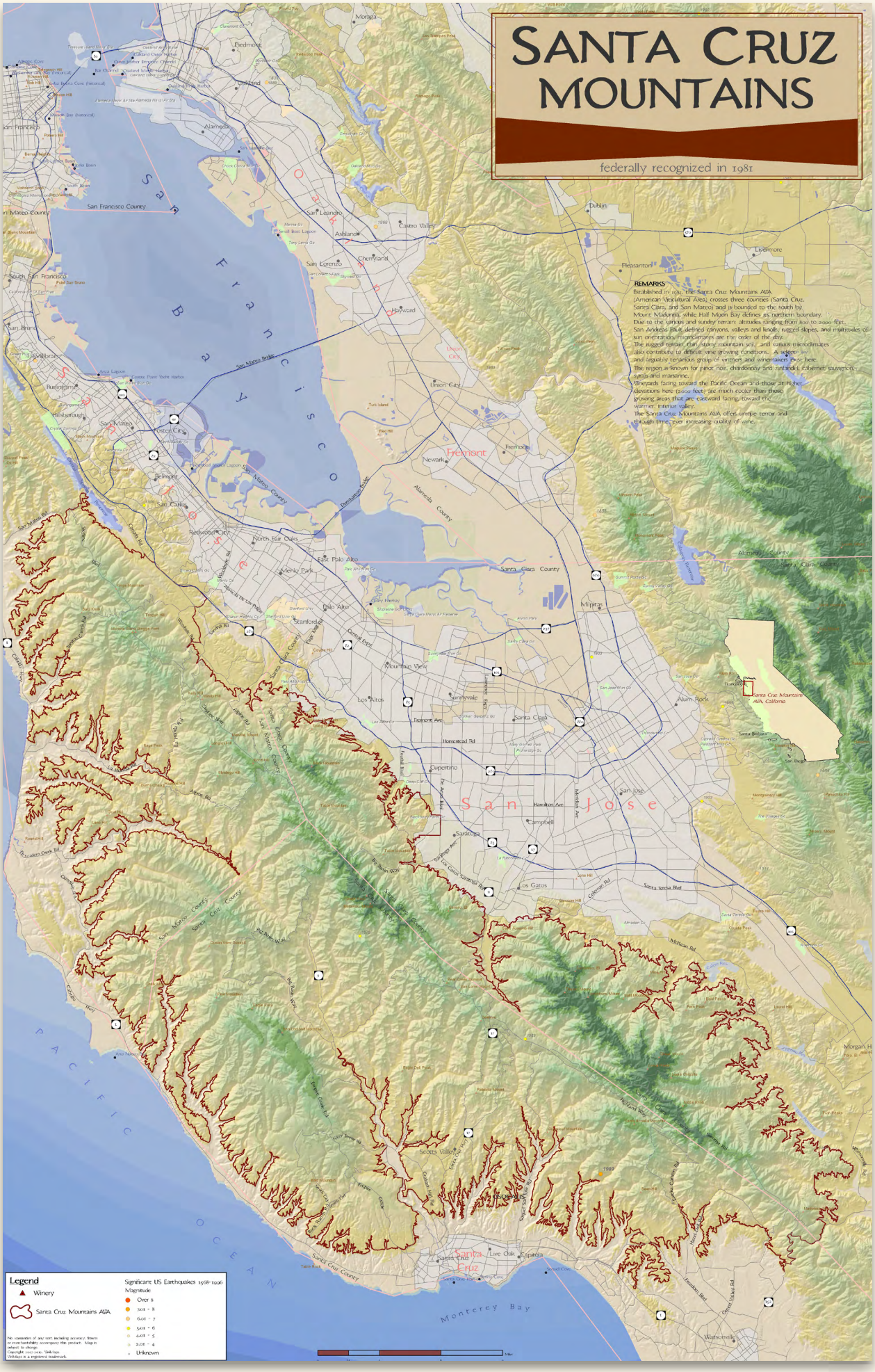
THE SANTA CRUZ MOUNTAINS STEWARDSHIP NETWORK

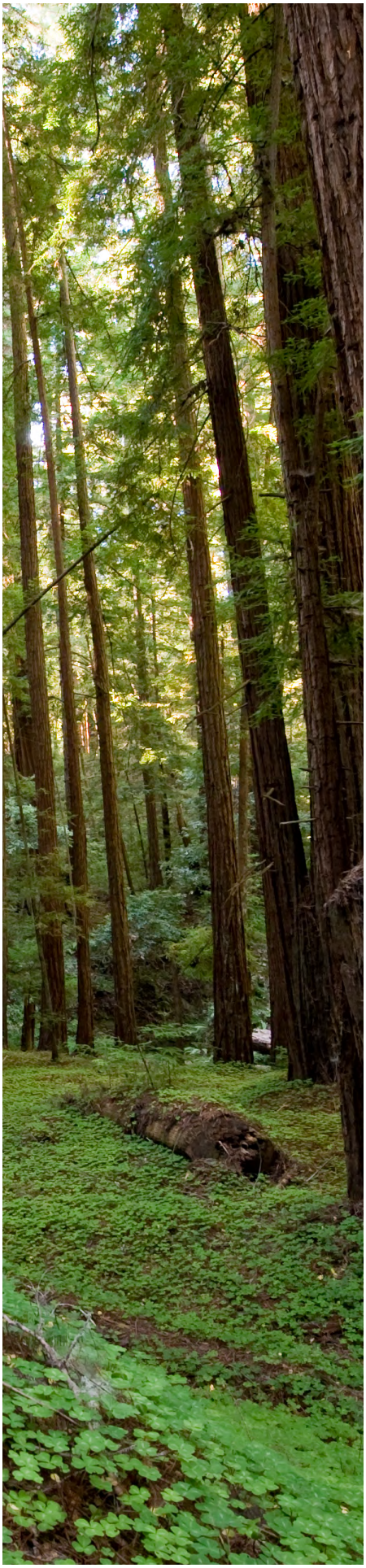
A Regionwide, Cross-Sector Approach to Conservation


SANTA CRUZ MOUNTAINS
federally recognized in 1981
REMARKS
Established in 1981, the Santa Cruz Mountains AVA (American Viticultural Area) crosses three counties (Santa Cruz, Santa Clara, and San Mateo) and is bounded to the south by Mount Madonna, while Half Moon Bay defines its northern boundary. Due to the various and sundry terrain, altitudes ranging from 800 to 2,000 feet, San Andreas fault defined canyons, valleys and knolls, rugged slopes, and multitudes of sun orientations, microclimates are the order of the day. The rugged terrain, the stony mountain soil, and various microclimates also contribute to difficult vine growing conditions. A select and arguably tenacious group of vintners and winemakers exist here. The region is known for pinot noir, chardonnay and zinfandel, cabernet sauvignon, syrah and marsanne. Vineyards facing toward the Pacific Ocean and those at higher elevations here (2,000 feet) are much cooler than those growing areas that are eastward facing, toward the warmer, interior valley. The Santa Cruz Mountains AVA offers unique terroir and, through time, ever increasing quality of wine.
Santa Cruz Mountains AVA, California
San Francisco Bay
San Francisco
San Mateo County
Santa Clara County
Alameda County
Santa Cruz County
Fremont
San Jose
Santa Cruz
Monterey Bay
PACIFIC OCEAN
Legend
Winery
Santa Cruz Mountains AVA
Significant US Earthquakes 1568-1996
Magnitude
Over 8
8.01 - 8
7.01 - 7
6.01 - 6
5.01 - 5
4.01 - 4
Unknown

CONTENTS

Narrative

Frameworks and Tools

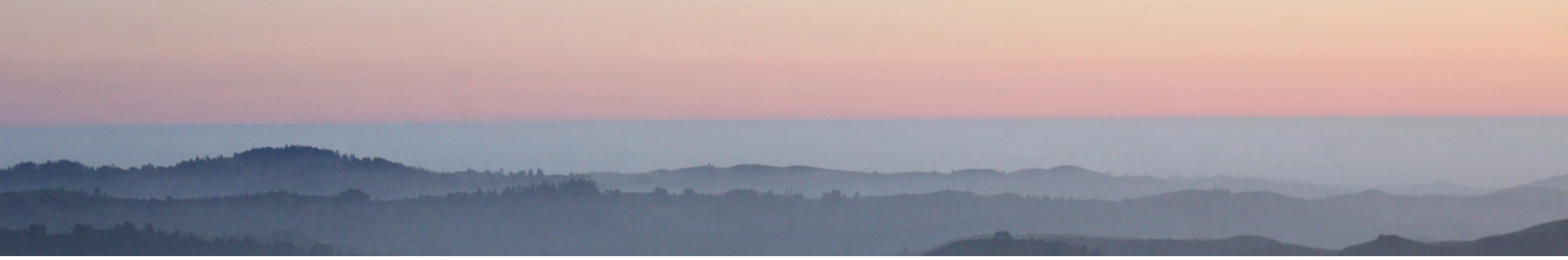


The Santa Cruz Mountains Stewardship Network is a collaboration of nineteen federal, state, and county agencies, land trusts, nonprofits, research institutes, a Native American tribal band, and a timber company, formed in 2014 to improve land stewardship in the Santa Cruz Mountains region south of San Francisco.

Rather than forming the network around a clearly-defined purpose and a set of measurable objectives, the network formation process has allowed outcomes to emerge from a process that emphasized cultivating strong trust-based relationships between participants, facilitating the right conversations, and implementing necessary leadership, organizational structures, and decision-making processes as the network evolves.

The result after two years is a cohesive group of committed participants who have overcome historical tensions in the region, are working together more closely to implement shared stewardship projects, and are formulating strategies for improving stewardship throughout the region in ways that no one organization could accomplish alone.

What follows is the story of the network's first two years—the obstacles that were encountered and overcome, the lessons learned, and the challenges ahead. The study also explains and illustrates the conceptual frameworks that were used to guide the network's formation.



INTRODUCTION

The Santa Cruz Mountains Stewardship Network (SCMSN) is a cross-sector collaboration of nineteen organizations that began in late 2014 with a focus on stewarding lands in the Santa Cruz Mountains region south of San Francisco, one of the world's richest ecosystems. The formation of the SCMSN reflects a growing recognition across all sectors that conservation and natural resource management need to be addressed on a regional or "large-landscape" scale.[1] Network members represent federal agencies, state and county parks departments, land trusts, nonprofit organizations, the region's largest timber company, research institutes, and a Native American tribal band. Collectively, members own or manage about half the protected and working lands in the region's total area of approximately 500,000 acres.

The SCMSN's creation was a process of discovery that was both intentional as well as responsive to new realities as they emerged. The approach used to form the network placed a particular emphasis on enabling participants to develop relationships based on transparency and trust. The practicalities of organizing and managing the collaboration have evolved on the basis of these relationships and members' commitment to the network's objectives. The trust that members developed has held the process together throughout. Over its first two years, the SCMSN has demonstrated that it is possible to launch a robust collaboration to "cultivate a resilient, vibrant region where human and natural systems thrive for generations to come." Although the work is challenging, the process is also replicable

What is a Network?

Conservation and natural resource professionals have been accustomed for some time to collaborating with counterparts in other organizations. Multi-stakeholder or cross-sector partnerships, alliances, and coalitions are now viewed as essential strategies for addressing complex problems.

The use in recent years of network approaches to collaboration, however, has added a degree of rigor and structure to the usual practice of collaboration. Forming a network typically encourages more collaboration by a larger number of partners and to a greater extent than might otherwise have been possible.

With this renewed emphasis on the importance of collaboration have come a number of new terms for describing the phenomenon, including collective impact, aligned action, and social impact networks, among others. This study considers them all to be various forms of complex collaboration, involving participants from government, business, and the nonprofit sector. Therefore, "collaboration" and "network" are used interchangeably throughout the study.

[1] This approach, known as "large-landscape conservation," is a practice in which diverse stakeholders from across jurisdictions and sectors work together on multiple and overlapping scales to conserve natural resources. The approach requires simultaneous address to the local, ecological requirements for species protection and habitat health, and to the economic and social pressures that are primary determinants of sustainability for natural systems. For recent research on the use of networks in large-landscape conservation, see Scarlett, Lynn, and Matthew McKinney, "Connecting people and places: the emerging role of network governance in large landscape conservation," *Frontiers in Ecology and the Environment*, April 2016, 14(3): 116–125.

and affordable. And it happened more quickly and straightforwardly than anyone anticipated.

Through a sustained process of dialogue and deliberation, the network has achieved the standard measures of successful collaboration. Participants agreed on a shared understanding of stewardship as a basis for working together, forged trusting relationships, overcame historical differences, signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU), formed governance structures, secured new funding, hired a network manager, and organized project teams to address systemic issues with the potential for regional impact. Network members have formed mini-partnerships to implement over forty-five shared stewardship projects. In a recent survey, members report that the network is effectively connecting participants, leveraging knowledge and expertise, and supporting organizational and network goals.

Even with this promising start, however, the network's success is not guaranteed. Having successfully formed a complex collaboration of diverse participants, the network is grappling with how to work together most effectively to make tangible improvements in stewardship outcomes across the region. Some participants feel the network's MOU does not define a purpose that is specific enough to motivate or guide collective action. Members are experiencing difficulty making time to advance the work of collaboration. Sustaining the network's momentum is challenging. But these are concerns of the network as of the writing of this case study in the Winter of 2017, and for the future. Let's start at the beginning.

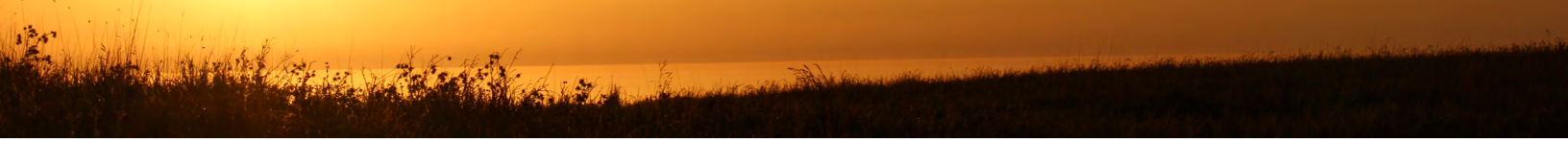
Deliberate and Emergent Aspects of Network Formation

A distinctive characteristic of the Santa Cruz Mountains Stewardship Network is the use of both deliberate and emergent strategies to form the network. Deliberate strategy sets its sights on accomplishing a series of actions that are planned to realize intended outcomes. Research shows, however, that strategy also emerges over time as planned activities are adapted to changing realities.

There is a tendency to approach network formation with the deliberate mindset of organizational management, defining objectives and organizing everyone to achieve measurable outcomes. But collaborations are typically formed to address complex or "wicked" problems, which are difficult or impossible to define or solve. As a result, problem-solving and strategic planning techniques used for managing organizations are not always effective for addressing these challenges. Networks need to "learn" their way into what needs to be done and how to do it.

Networks are not organizations, furthermore, and don't function like them. Participants in networks typically relate to one another as peers. Even when a collaboration creates organizational structures, they don't tend to be hierarchical. And true collaboration generally requires consensus decision making. These and other characteristics require that networks be managed differently from organizations.

The approach used to form the Santa Cruz Mountains Stewardship Network uses a deliberate approach to the process design for network convenings and the work that happens between convenings. While addressing the practical requirements of collaboration, network members also develop the relationships and trust that will sustain the network over time. As the work and relationships evolve, process design is adapted to accommodate the changing nature of the network. In this manner, essential components of successful collaboration—shared purpose, organizational structures, mutually reinforcing activities, staffing, and metrics—emerge on the basis of the relationships members form with one another, rather than as prescribed objectives that define the network formation process.



THE NETWORK'S ORIGIN

The idea of forming a collaboration of agencies, land trusts, nonprofits, and landowners responsible for large tracts of the Santa Cruz Mountains emerged out of changing economic conditions throughout the region, as well as a previous project that suggested that a bigger conversation about land stewardship was necessary and possible.

The immediate precursor to the SCMSN was a group of twelve regional entities brought together in 2013 by the California Department of Fish and Wildlife to develop a Santa Cruz Mountains Redwoods Conceptual Area Protection Plan (CAPP). The purpose of the Redwoods CAPP was to identify the remaining natural areas in the Santa Cruz Mountains that were not yet under conservation protection. Six organizations that contributed to the Redwoods CAPP eventually led the formation of the SCMSN. The Redwoods CAPP summarized the pressures on the region's habitats and biodiversity as follows:

> *"Despite the extensive history of conservation work, and the presence of relatively restrictive land use policies, land within the Plan Area is threatened by development and agricultural conversion… Its proximity to the San Francisco Bay Area, and the economically-prosperous Silicon Valley, renders the land desirable for rural residential development and vineyards... These and other land uses threaten to convert sensitive habitat and fragment the landscape, thus imperiling populations of many rare and endangered species it supports."*[2]

Based on the conclusions from the Redwoods CAPP, the executive director of one of region's land trusts decided to convene a larger group of landowners and land managers to do more than address threats to the region's biodiversity. He hoped that participants would find new ways to work together, coordinate activities, share resources, and eliminate duplication of efforts.

Developments in the region pointed to the need for land stewards to cooperate. In 2012, the California Department of Parks and Recreation had become engulfed in a budgetary and management crisis that crippled the agency's ability to retain staff and maintain the lands it was responsible for. Partnering with other organizations was needed to bolster the department's resources.

Land trusts were likewise feeling pressure on their capacity to steward the lands they owned or managed. Although for many years land trusts had purchased parcels and held them only until a state or federal agency could acquire them, the strategy had become less viable as government budgets at every level were slashed. As a result, land trusts are now holding more protected parcels than they had once anticipated doing, with the added responsibility to steward those lands.

Timber companies in the region practicing sustainable forestry were also feeling the pressures of development, as well as efforts by some environmentalists to restrict logging in as much of the region as possible. These foresters needed to partner with agencies, nonprofits, and private landowners to maintain access to enough stands of mature trees to sustain their businesses.

The group that came together to form the stewardship collaborative hoped that by acting together they could keep the threats to the region's natural spaces from degenerating into an ecological crisis. While this shared understanding enabled them to act with foresight, it also presented a

[2] California Department of Fish and Wildlife, *Santa Cruz Mountains Redwoods Conceptual Area Protection Plan*, Los Altos, CA, 2013, p.3.

challenge. No one could point to an absolute need for action. There was no "burning platform," no impending environmental crisis that only large-scale collaboration could address. In a statement of the stewardship initiative's purpose, the founding participants could only define their objective as a desire to create "a more unified management philosophy and begin a paradigm shift for resource stewardship in the Santa Cruz Mountains region."

"This network is exactly what I dreamed of and hoped for, for how work should happen in the region."

Jeff Gaffney
Director, Santa Cruz County Parks Department

SETTING THE STAGE

In 2014, twenty-four organizations were invited to participate in the nascent stewardship initiative, and a steering committee was formed to guide the process. By August, sufficient funds were received from two regional foundations to hire a team of "research and planning consultants," who were selected in November. In February 2015, the consultants conducted hour-long interviews with twenty-six individuals and asked participants to commit to two-day convenings in March and September and a three-day convening in June 2015. Although it is uncommon for conservation and stewardship managers to allocate that much time to what were at that point exploratory meetings, participants agreed, despite initial reluctance.

The feedback from the interviews was revealing. Nearly everyone expressed high hopes for the collaboration's ability to be effective, although opinions varied about what success should look like. While many were wary about working with so many unfamiliar people and organizations, only a few expressed actual distrust. In most cases, participants simply hadn't had the opportunity to develop the kind of deep trust that would be necessary for the collaboration to succeed. Despite concerns that others held extreme philosophical positions about environmental protection and land use, beliefs expressed during the interviews were all sufficiently moderate to ensure that discussions would be productive.

"The network has expanded my perspective on how others may comprehend a project or political situation. These viewpoints and connections have become embedded in my critical thinking skills and help me holistically evaluate alternatives and outcomes."

Steve Auten
Operations Manager, Cal Poly Swanton Pacific Ranch

Those interviewed generally agreed on the following list of priority issues to be addressed, although proposed solutions varied. The list is long because each issue was important to at least some of the participants.

- *Water quality and watershed health*
- *Invasive plant and animal species*
- *Biodiversity and endangered species*
- *Land use, access, and working lands*
- *Appropriate rural and urban development*
- *Climate change adaptation*
- *Stewardship research and education*
- *Strong human communities and citizen engagement*

In addition to positive reasons for participating in the initiative, participants also had defensive ones. There were questions about why the collaboration was being convened and the risks involved in not having a part in its formation. As the director of a county parks department said wryly when asked why he had joined the initiative, "If you're not at the table, you could end up on the menu." When asked a year later about her choice to participate, the CEO of a Santa Cruz-based timber company also expressed the importance of being "at the table." "Getting involved was more concern-driven than anything else," she said. "We feel strongly that responsible resource utilization is a critical component of region-wide land policy and that there are significant

environmental benefits to procuring local products for local markets. If we don't participate, this perspective may be left out of these important discussions entirely."[3]

Overall, participants expressed a degree of agreement and difference that was to be expected from a loosely connected group of professionals. They seemed to know enough about one another to have opinions, but not enough to know whether their opinions were correct. There were concerns about hidden agendas. Some were participating because they weren't comfortable with what might happen if they didn't participate. Every issue was of particular interest to some participants, but seldom for the same reasons, and no single issue was of interest to everyone. Although none of these differences dominated network discussions, all of them were there in the background, adding nuance and complexity throughout.

The Role of Foundations

Because the use of social impact networks is a relatively new and still somewhat experimental approach to addressing conservation issues, networks need funding partners who understand the unique challenges of network formation and management, and of regional or large-landscape conservation. A number of innovative foundations have stepped in to serve this role and are discovering that networks can be efficient and effective vehicles for achieving near-term impacts, as well as having the potential to address complex challenges over time.

The formation and ongoing work of the Santa Cruz Mountains Stewardship Network has benefited from productive relationships with two San Francisco Bay Area-based foundations: The S. D. Bechtel, Jr. Foundation and the Resources Legacy Fund. Both foundations provided seed funding in 2014 for the first year of the network's formation, with generous grants in December 2015 to fund network operations and projects through 2018.

Based on its experience funding other impact networks, with a particular focus on large-landscape conservation initiatives, the Bechtel Foundation has found that foundations can most effectively support network formation by:

- Not interfering in the network
- Allowing for flexibility in the network's objectives and deliverables
- Supporting specific network functions, such as convenings, facilitation, and network coordination
- Demonstrating network success by supporting network fundraising and early projects
- Funding case studies and network analyses that are valuable to practitioners and to the field
- Connecting various network-based initiatives with one another.

Relative to their role in launching and supporting networks, the Bechtel Foundation also recommends that foundations:

- Approach network engagement as a learning opportunity
- Articulate why, when, and how the foundation expects a network to achieve impact
- Give networks space, flexibility, and time to develop at their own pace
- View the development of trust as a valid network outcome
- "Make room" for other funders to support network projects by investing in a network's operational capacity
- Be prepared to adapt their support as networks evolve over time
- Allow networks that have fulfilled their useful life to disband.

[3] Muoio, Anna, and Faizal Karmali. "The Calculus for Commitment: The Power of Involving the Private Sector in Social Impact Networks." Stanford Social Innovation Review (online). September 14, 2016.

FORMING THE NETWORK

The creation of the Santa Cruz Mountains Stewardship Network unfolded in two phases during 2015 and 2016. The formation phase from February through September 2015 focused on connecting participants to one another, both personally and professionally, defining the network's purpose, and organizing the network to fulfill its purpose. During the second or consolidation phase, from October 2015 through October 2016, the network hired a network manager and focused on identifying strategies for making changes that would affect land stewardship on a larger scale than could be achieved by individual participants.

"I've always thought that collaboration is a good thing, but I was skeptical about larger collaborations that I saw as 'forced.' It turns out I just hadn't seen it done right. It's exciting to think about what I've learned here. A collaboration like this can be incredibly effective, and it's all built on the genuine relationships that are built through this process."

Dan Olstein
Stewardship Director, Peninsula Open Space Trust

In retrospect, the first year of the SCMSN's formation seemed to unfold according to plan. Seven months after the first convening in March 2015, the network's primary objective had been accomplished. Nineteen organizations signed a Memorandum of Understanding to work together to improve land stewardship throughout the region. Nonetheless, there were many unknowns for those who participated in the network's formation. Coming into the network's initial convening, connections between participants were generally weak. Previous partnerships among some participants had not been as successful as expected, creating misunderstanding and bad feeling. Any number of factors could have hampered the process.

The tasks to be accomplished were clear. A process was needed to enable participants to reach agreement about values and aspirations they held in common and explore how they could work together for everyone's benefit. What was not known was whether network participants would form relationships with one another that were conducive to creative thinking and cooperation, what obstacles they might encounter, and how they would reconcile the differences that would inevitably emerge.

Two frameworks were used to guide the network formation process. Throughout the engagement, the "Five Cs" framework was used to design each convening, as well as the overall evolution of the network. The Five Cs refer to five essential network activities explained in the sidebar:

- *Clarify purpose*
- *Convene the right people*
- *Cultivate trust*
- *Coordinate existing actions*
- *Collaborate for systems impact*

A simpler framework was also used to describe the network's formation to its participants. Throughout three two- to three-day convenings held in March, June, and September of the first year, four questions were used to help participants understand how their conversations were moving them toward their desired goals:

1. **Why** was the network needed?
2. **Who** was participating?
3. **What** was the network going to do?
4. **How** would the network achieve its objectives?

The “Five Cs” Network Formation Framework

The list of activities below, referred to as the Five Cs framework, was used throughout the formation of the Santa Cruz Mountains Stewardship Network to design the network itself, each of the six convenings conducted during the first two years, and the tasks accomplished between convenings.

The Five Cs framework is based on the premise that a network’s effectiveness depends on constantly managing the following activities:

- Clarify Purpose
- Convene the Right People
- Cultivate Trust
- Coordinate Existing Actions
- Collaborate for Systems Impact

The five activities define the deliberate aspect of network formation. The emergent aspect, which the Five Cs doesn’t explicitly describe, is the sensemaking that is necessary to accomplish each of the five activities. Although the five activities appear to be simple, the sensemaking required to effectively complete them is sufficient to guide even the most complex collaboration.

Although the five activities are usually engaged chronologically, they are not strictly sequential. They influence one another and should be regularly reviewed to consider whether a network’s evolution has altered its purpose, the people who should be involved, the trust between them, or how they can work together most effectively.

Clarify Purpose

Convincing people to work together requires an initial statement of the problem they are being invited to address, and why a collaborative effort is needed. The problem, as well as participants’ understanding of it, will tend to evolve over time. Therefore, network leaders should always be alert to the relevance of a network’s purpose, and to the shared values that underlie it. Organizations of all kinds have foundered because they were addressing the wrong problem. A clear purpose, on the other hand, is a powerful tool for holding together a group of diverse individuals.

Convene the Right People

Convening the right people means bringing together whoever is needed to tackle the problem. They should also represent a broad cross-section of the system that needs change. That being said, the “right people” are also just the people who show up and stay engaged. Like a collaboration’s purpose, the people involved in a network will generally evolve over time.

Cultivate Trust

Although everyone knows that trust is important to a collaboration’s success, the common assumption is that it is a by-product of other activities, and that it takes a long time to develop. As a result, cultivating trust is where most collaborative efforts fall short, and why most do not live up to their full potential.

In contrast, deliberately building trust among participants is the cornerstone of the Five Cs approach to network formation. Enduring, trust-based relationships are viewed as the most important ingredient for successful collaboration. Approached deliberately, cultivating trust-based relationships doesn’t have to take a long time.

Trust should not be confused with “liking” or “agreement.” The purpose of trust building is not to get people to like each other or to agree about everything. The purpose is to build trust for action or impact—to develop the capability to work together productively. Trust for impact can enable diverse stakeholders to hold the tension through difficult conversations, engage in generative conflict, and find enough common ground to make collaboration a reality, not just an aspiration.

Coordinate Existing Actions

Once people begin to trust each other, they are more likely to follow through on opportunities to partner with other members of a collaboration. Trust enables participants to coordinate the work they are already doing to address a problem. In this way, members begin to share best practices, pool resources, and eliminate duplication of efforts, thereby achieving quick wins that demonstrate the immediate value of the collaboration.

Collaborate for Systems Impact

To collaborate for systems impact, members of a complex collaboration begin by identifying “leverage points”—places in a system where, as systems theorist Donella Meadows has said, “a small shift in one thing can produce big changes in everything.” Leverage points are also those opportunities where participants can have greater impact by working together than they can by working alone.

Once leverage points have been identified, members partner with others on self-selecting teams to implement plans for influencing a system or effecting change. Members typically join teams where they feel they can have an effect, and where their organization’s priorities align with the shared priorities of the collective.

Almost as much time was allocated at each convening to developing relationships and shared understanding between members as it was to conducting the practical business of organizing the network. Close attention was paid to how network members were grouped for exercises, to ensure that everyone was given maximum exposure to one another. Ample time was also allotted for unstructured social interaction at meals and a happy hour.

Although some participants were initially skeptical about the focus on building relationships and eager to "do stuff," they were soon won over to what the facilitators called "going slow now to go fast later"—taking time at the beginning to build trust as the basis for the decision making that would soon be necessary. At an early convening, one participant was overhead at breakfast saying, "I might leave at mid-day today. Especially if we're doing trust falls." Something had changed by lunchtime, when they were heard to say, "This is transformational. I totally get why we started with relationships."

The first two-day convening in March 2015 focused primarily on the Who and the Why of collaborating—providing numerous ways for participants to get to know one another and consider why a network might improve land stewardship throughout the region. Participants began by assessing the region's challenges through an analysis of strengths and weaknesses, consideration of real and potential threats to ecosystems and biodiversity, a review of the region's history, and an evaluation of scenarios for the region's future. On the evening of the first day, in designated groups of five, participants told one another their "Life Story"—in seven minutes.

By the second day, participants were ready to consider the future of the network in practical terms. They addressed three questions identified as critical for continuing the initiative: What did participants mean by "stewardship," given all the approaches their organizations practiced? What governance and decision-making structures were needed to organize the network's activities? And where could they find funding to continue their efforts beyond the first year? Working groups were formed to discuss each question and report on their conclusions at the next convening.

While not all differences were ironed out at the first convening, by the end of the second day participants were optimistic about their ability to agree on a purpose for the network. They discovered, despite their differences, that they shared similar convictions about the characteristics of good stewardship and deep commitments to protecting the region's natural assets.

A particularly significant outcome of the first convening was the recognition that everyone, conservationists and private landowners alike, agreed that effective stewardship of the region's natural resources required a "mosaic approach"—one that accommodated a variety of land uses, including preservation, recreation, and working lands. This understanding was an essential step toward diffusing the concern among some participants that the network might become a vehicle for advancing a narrow environmental agenda. It was an early and important indication that the network was going to be inclusive of the many ways that network members conceive of and practice land stewardship.

Enough momentum had been developed at the first convening for participants to get down to business at a second convening in June 2015. The three-day meeting focused on What they could do together as a network, while continuing to deepen understanding of Who members were, personally and professionally. So much common ground had already been identified that the twenty-four participants began by critiquing a preliminary Memorandum of Understanding drafted by the consulting team. Network members approved of the document as an initial formulation of the network's purpose and objectives. Everyone agreed that, with suggested changes, it could probably be ratified at

the next convening.

Teams were also formed to develop strategies for improving stewardship region-wide. An Awareness team was formed to educate elected officials and policy makers about the need for good land stewardship. A Projects team considered how to identify opportunities for greater collaboration among members, and a Resource team focused on potential sources of network funding.

Participants also identified fourteen opportunities for collaboration between two or more organizations. In a round-robin process, each organization presented one to three priority stewardship projects and others with relevant resources offered assistance. Finally, network members spent two-and-a-half hours making decisions about fifteen critical governance issues. Decisions included whether to hire a network manager, how often to meet, how to select network leaders, decision-making rights and processes, and who else should be participating in the network. Five members were elected to serve as a Core Team, a leadership council that would meet monthly with the consulting team to review issues and make decisions between convenings.

The need to deal directly with controversy became evident at the network's second convening. Fault

Deliberately Cultivating Trust

Deliberately developing trust requires understanding people's internal context as well as their external context. An individual's external context is whatever can be perceived about them—their organization and title, their gender and skin color, how they speak and behave, their apparent degree of education. These and other characteristics are powerful determinants of the opinions individuals form about one another. Developing deep trust requires learning about an individual's internal context—their values and motivations, what gets them up in the morning, the experiences that have made them who they are. Learning these qualities enables people to discover the commonalities they share as human beings.

A number of exercises were used throughout the network's formation to ensure that network members got to know and connect meaningfully with one another.[4] Participants were asked to respond, in pairs or in groups of five or six, to one or more direct questions about personal or professional challenges, and concerns and aspirations for the network. "What is a challenge you are currently experiencing at work?" "What is a recent personal accomplishment that you are proud of?" What's on your mind?" "What are your concerns for the future of the network?" Sometimes, participants were invited to share with the whole group what they had discussed.

Because most people are not accustomed to discussing these types of questions with others they don't know well, these exercises tend to draw participants into a feeling of uncommon openness. Over time, this openness enables participants to discuss the hard questions that collaborations frequently need to address.

An exercise that epitomizes this deliberate approach to cultivating trust is one that focuses either on "Life Stories" or "Professional Stories." In groups of four or five, network members are asked to tell the story of their life or how they got to where they are today professionally—in five to seven minutes. Participants are instructed to tell the true story of their personal or professional life—not the sanitized version, not the résumé version, the real version. During each story, the other members of each group are not permitted to ask questions until the speaker is finished. Those listening then have one minute to reflect on what they have heard or learned. Have you ever shared the true story of your life with a group of strangers, in seven minutes? Try it sometime. It can have an uncanny effect on everyone.

[4] For additional discussion on deliberately cultivating trust in networks, see Sawyer, David, and David Ehrlichman. "The Tactics of Trust." Stanford Social Innovation Review, vol. 14, no. 1, Winter 2016, pp. 61-62.

lines had surfaced with the potential to undermine the network. At lunch on the first day, some members privately shared concerns about power dynamics in the network. Some felt they had not received fair treatment in previous partnerships with other organizations in the network. They were worried that the network would be highjacked to serve private interests.[5] One of the facilitators engaged a few key individuals to understand these tensions and prepare for an open dialogue about the issues.

"We've always had a hard time trusting institutions. By being a part of this network, and through the collaborative efforts we've been a part of, I now have relationships with all the groups here. And I recognize that people in conservation share the Native Americans' love for the land. They also want to take care of it. And that I can trust. That's a big change for me."

Valentin Lopez
Chairman, Amah Mutsun Tribal Band

Disagreements between representatives of three prominent organizations were the topic of conversation during the first evening of the three-day convening in June 2015. Although the conversation was respectful, real disagreements and issues were openly acknowledged and discussed. Strong feelings were expressed. Those not aware of the history of conflict were surprised by its depth. The whole group was sobered.

Based on the evening's discussion, five network members who were specifically party to the conflict met for an unfacilitated three-hour conversation after the convening. During that conversation, the participants honestly shared their perceptions of one another and the sources of disagreement and mistrust. Although the issues were not resolved, everyone came to a better understanding of their respective points of view and established a more informed basis for working together and developing trust over time.

Although this was not the last critical conversation network members would have, no subsequent conversation has required such deliberate address. The surfacing of these tensions and their discussion by the whole network was as significant an accomplishment as any during the first year. It addressed a threat to the network before it could derail the effort. Key participants demonstrated their commitment to the network by dealing with issues among themselves that threatened the network's potential for everyone. Members now understood that no topics were out of bounds, too difficult, or too sensitive for the network to address. A critical threshold of trust had been crossed.

The third and final convening of the SCMSN's formation phase took place over two days in September 2015. The convening refined the definition of What network members proposed to accomplish, with an additional focus on How they intended to achieve it. Project teams continued to clarify their purposes, strategies, and objectives. New teams were formed to oversee the writing of a grant proposal to fund the network through 2018, draft the network's by-laws, and lead the search for a network manager, assuming the network secured new funding. Network members spent another session discussing governance issues, including membership criteria, financial contributions by members, and creating a fund for network projects.

The ratification of the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU), however, was the convening's most significant accomplishment. It was the milestone network members had been working toward for seven months. The MOU was aspirational in its definition of the network's purpose as helping "cultivate a resilient, vibrant region where human

[5] The phenomenon known as "network capture," in which a network is used by some members to advance a private agenda, is a concern that is not unique to the Santa Cruz Mountains Stewardship Network. See Bixler, R. Patrick, Dara M. Wald, Laura A. Ogden, Kirsten M. Leong, Erik W. Johnston, and Michele Romolini, "Network governance for large-scale natural resource conservation and the challenge of capture," Frontiers in Ecology and the Environment, April 2016, 14(3): 165–171.

and natural systems thrive for generations to come." It embodied the understanding that the many forms of stewardship practiced by network members are all valid and complementary forms of conservation and land management. And it committed members to no specific actions or outcomes other than "practicing effective stewardship on their own lands and coordinating their efforts with other land stewards to enhance stewardship on a regional level." As a statement of the network's purpose, the MOU was broad and indeterminate. But it was as specific as the network could agree to. Given the diversity

Historical Tensions in the Santa Cruz Mountains

Essential to the success of the SCMSN was network members' willingness to engage with contentious issues. Although no one shied away from addressing tough questions during the more practically-oriented daytime sessions, evenings were often reserved for conversations about concerns about the network and its future. On some occasions, participants simply responded to an open question, such as "What is something the network needs to discuss?" On other occasions, the facilitators presented an issue for discussion that had surfaced in conversation with individual members. One such conversation that became apparent at the second convening was a need to openly discuss a conflict that was rooted in both historical and recent tensions between several members.

Since at least the 1960s, environmentalists and Santa Cruz County residents who worked the land for their livelihood had been pitted against one another in an archetypal conflict over how to care for the region's redwood forests. For decades, environmental groups and land trusts had pursued a "preservationist" mission to restrict timber harvest throughout the region and "save the redwoods." The preservationist approach was opposed by timber companies who had used techniques of selective harvest since the mid-twentieth century to create sustainable businesses in lumber from redwoods and other native species. It turned out while forming the SCMSN that although the conflict was real, it was not as substantive as many had believed.

Land trusts and other conservation organizations had concluded in recent years that preservation-only strategies are not as effective as once thought. With responsible management, natural systems tend to be healthier and more vibrant, as Native American peoples in the region have known for eons. Therefore, in practice, land trusts have generally abandoned their strict preservationist stance and embraced selective timber harvest as an essential component of responsible forest management. Where the conflict does survive is in the preservationist messaging some land trusts still use to promote their work and solicit donations, to the irritation of the region's timber companies.

The conflict between the land trusts and the timber companies was further complicated by the differences between the two sides of the Santa Cruz Mountains. Santa Clara County on the east side is home to Silicon Valley, with its economic power and political influence. In Santa Cruz County on the west side, people live in mostly rural settings, some making their living off the land or from the ocean. The region's biggest land trusts are primarily located in Santa Clara County. Timber companies and their employees tend to live and work in Santa Cruz County.[6]

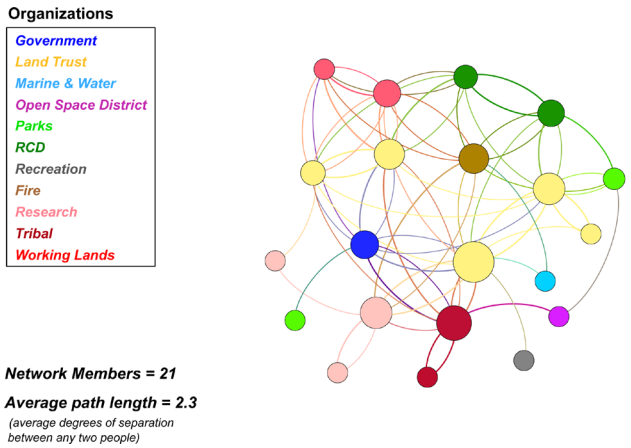
Some Santa Cruz County residents perceive the land trusts as interlopers, who cross the mountains to buy property and take it out of production, whether in timber or agriculture. There is resentment in some quarters that outsiders are influencing local ways of life without taking those who live there into account.

[6] Participants in the network who were advocating for the interests of Santa Cruz County residents could be viewed as championing what is known as "community-based conservation." Community-based conservation is a movement that emerged in the 1980s, particularly in developing countries where attempts to protect biodiversity often ignored the interests of local communities. Whereas the approach to conservation in the developed world was originally based on a concept of nature as separate from human culture, the objective of community-based conservation is to include improvement in the lives of local inhabitants as a component of conservation efforts. See particularly Alexander, Steven M., Mark Andrachuk, and Derek Armitage, "Navigating governance networks for community-based conservation," Frontiers in Ecology and the Environment, April 2016, 14(3): 155–164.

Measuring Connectivity and Trust

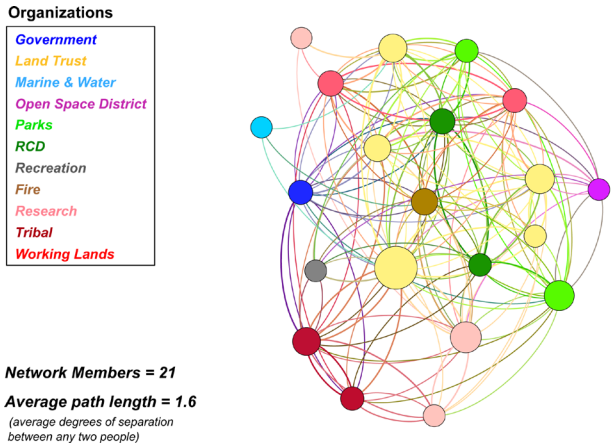
Connectivity between network members as a measure of a network's effectiveness is usually measured and evaluated through network analysis, using network maps. The questionnaire used to construct a network map asks each member to identify every other member they know, the frequency of their contact, and how meaningful the connection is. Because members rate connections in terms of the likelihood of their partnering with a contact, network maps can also be viewed as a measure of trust, understood as something people do rather than something they feel.

SCMSN Connectivity - March 2015



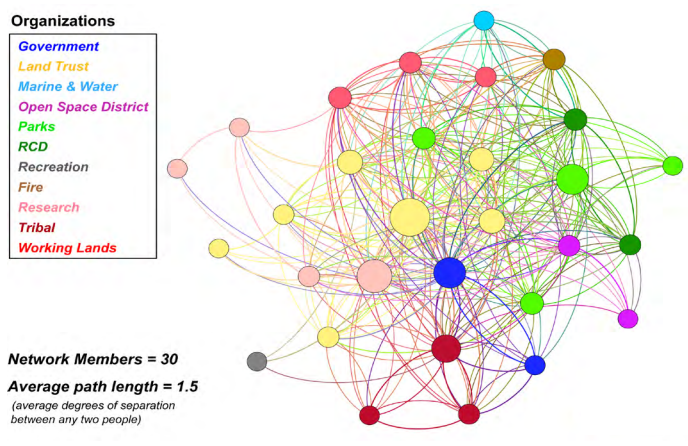
This first network map shows a network analysis conducted just before the SCMSN's first convening in March 2015. Each circle or "node" is a participant in the network. The colors indicate the different types of organizations they represent, and the lines connecting the nodes signify a meaningful connection between two members. As the map suggests, the region was pretty fragmented prior to the network's initial convening, particularly in the lack of connections between different types of organizations.

SCMSN Connectivity - September 2015



This network map shows connections between network members after only two convenings, during which network members were given significant time to build genuine relationships. Clearly, at this point in time the system is more interconnected, relationships are deeper, and communication is more frequent. The average path length between any two members—a primary measure of the connectivity of a network—dropped dramatically from 2.3 to 1.6. Even if the network had never met again, the system is much more resilient than it was six months prior.

SCMSN Connectivity - October 2016



Just over a year later, the network had expanded from 21 to 31 members, still representing 19 organizations, and network members had developed an even greater degree of connectivity, as illustrated in this network map.

The connectivity displayed in these network maps is one of the primary outcomes of a collaborative effort, and the invisible glue that holds it together.

of members' involvement in and opinions about conservation in region, the MOU was a meaningful achievement.

Participants reviewed the most recent draft and made final changes in real time. Network members representing twelve organizations signed the MOU at the convening. Within sixty days, seven additional members obtained their organizations' approval to sign the agreement. In the end, the MOU was signed by all nineteen of the organizations that had remained in the network since March.

HIRING A NETWORK MANAGER

After the September 2015 convening, network members shifted from a focus on reaching agreement about the network's purpose to organizing themselves to act on it. A grant application was submitted in late November and word was received in December that just over $660,000 had been awarded to fund the network for another three years. In particular, the grants provided funding to hire a fulltime network manager. With funding now guaranteed, the seven-member Selection team—five network members and two consultants—began the search and selection process.

The Selection team's task was to find a network manager to replace the team of five consultants who had been leading the network. The transition was critical. With the right person, the network could continue to grow and flourish; with the wrong leadership, the network could dissipate.

Although some participants in a collaboration can be expected to have hiring experience in an organizational context, few are likely to have participated in one conducted by a committee of people from different organizations, for an organization that is just beginning to form, and that

The Network Manager Skillset

A network manager needs skills to convene, catalyze, coordinate, support, and communicate with and for the network. Given the breadth of the aptitudes needed to effectively exercise any of these skills, it is uncommon that any one individual will have an equal capability for all of them.

To help the Selection team visualize the ideal candidate, the position's complete skill set was summarized in terms of "front of the house skills," "middle of the house skills," and "back of the house skills."[7]

"Front of the house skills" are those needed to serve as the network's leader and ambassador. This means championing the network's purpose and helping the collaboration evolve over time. The network manager must also be able to represent the network to a range of external contacts: public officials, policy makers, funders, the media, community leaders, local constituents and stakeholders, and other relevant organizations and networks. Overall, a network manager must exercise his or her authority in the spirit of what has been called the "servant leader," one who "wants to serve first, rather than be leader first."

"Middle of the house skills" refer to a network manager's responsibilities for designing and facilitating network and project team meetings, cultivating relationships between network members, brokering exchanges of information and resources, and serving as a mediator in disputes.

"Back of the house skills" are the capabilities needed to handle logistical tasks, including network communications, planning convenings, overseeing finances, and providing tech support for communications platforms and network databases.

[7] For research on the types of leadership needed in large-landscape conservation initiatives, see Imperial, Mark T., Sonia Ospina, Erik Johnston, Rosemary O'Leary, Jennifer Thomsen, Peter Williams, and Shawn Johnson, "Understanding leadership in a world of shared problems: advancing network governance in large landscape conservation," Frontiers in Ecology and the Environment, April 2016, 14(3): 126–134.

only exists as a tangible entity three times a year. The team needed a process that would prepare them for a hiring decision in a network context.

The Selection team spent six months designing the selection process, reviewing applications, interviewing candidates, checking references, and deliberating about the final selection. The job application was more like a college exam than it was an employment application. Despite the demands of the application process, seventy-five highly-qualified individuals submitted résumés with answers to a series of essay questions. Eleven candidates were granted phone interviews, and four were eventually granted in-person interviews, where they were asked to respond to scenarios scripted by network members.

Although the search process was rigorous, there was nothing to guide the final decision but intangibles—feelings, perceptions, judgment, experience. The decision was further complicated when team members realized that the decision didn't rely on which candidate was the "most qualified," for which there might have been "objective" criteria. Selecting the best candidate was more about "best fit" and elusive questions about the network and its future—Where was the network in its evolution? What type of person was needed to lead the network's next phase?

One contender was strongest in leadership and public advocacy, with solid capabilities in facilitation. The other front-runner was strongest in facilitation, with good leadership experience and an aptitude for logistics. After several days of back-and-forth, the network members on the Selection team decided to select the second candidate as someone who could facilitate the network's deliberations and evolution, and manage network logistics. They were less attracted to someone who might want to exercise their own capabilities as a leader or define the network's direction rather than enabling members to discover it themselves.

Each step in the selection process helped the team reflect on hiring for the network, rather than for an organization. Members gradually developed the discernment to evaluate elusive differences between candidates. The application and screening process also provided the Selection team with a rich array of information about each candidate's experience, capabilities, aspirations, and temperament.

The new network manager was hired in time to participate in the network's convening in June 2016. At the March convening, network members had selected one of the region's Resource Conservation Districts (RCD) to act as fiscal agent and host for the manager, paying his salary and benefits and providing an office. The RCD was chosen as a "neutral" entity in the network because, as compared with other member organizations, it is a relatively small nonprofit entity that provides conservation services to all types of clients, including private landowners. In selecting the RCD as the manager's host, network members were making a pragmatic and prudent decision to ensure that no organization with resources or influence could be perceived as being in a position to influence the network's agenda or evolution.

EXPANDING THE NETWORK AND GOING PUBLIC

A potential liability of building collaborations on trust and relationships is that they may become insular, failing to engage with the communities of individuals and organizations around them.

Members of the SCMSN had been aware from early in the formation process that at some point they would need to present their work to the world outside their circle and include others in it. But members had difficulty imagining how anyone who hadn't participated in the network's creation would be able to integrate with it. There was also concern that broadening network membership might attract environmental activists with disruptive agendas and no responsibilities for owning or managing land and

natural resources. Like other aspects of the SCMSN's formation, the network's evolution beyond this apparent impasse occurred quite naturally through two unanticipated developments.

First, at the March 2016 convening, network members discussed the possibility of inviting additional members from their own organizations. More than one representative would ensure organizations' participation at each convening. Having primary and alternate representatives would also ensure continuity in the event of job changes or retirement. And a number of organizations had individuals on staff with skills the network needed.

The other development that opened the network outward was the recognition that the SCMSN was acquiring a reputation as an interesting new development in the region. Network members were being asked by board members and community leaders when they could meet the people engaged in this endeavor.

As a result of these developments, network members agreed to bring a colleague from their organization to the business portion of the convening in June, as well as to invite up to two senior decision makers to a "Meet the Network" event that would occur after the meeting.

Both initiatives were successful. Several network members brought a colleague to the business part of the June convening. Project teams were energized by the perspectives brought by new participants, two of whom volunteered for and were elected to a new Core Team. The addition of new participants also marked a transition of the SCMSN from a network of individuals to a network of organizations. By involving more people in the network, organizations were integrating more deeply with its purposes.

The "Meet the Network" event was attended by twenty board members and community leaders. After a social hour, network members answered their guests' questions about the network. The clarity of members' answers and convictions about the network were as much a testimony to the success of the Santa Cruz Mountains Stewardship Network as any objective measure might have proven to their audience. During the previous year, members had frequently remarked how ill-equipped they felt to describe the network and what they were doing. In the Q&A, they found their voices, explained the network, and championed their work.

In the end, integrating new members and assuming a public presence didn't turn out to be such difficult challenges after all.

ORGANIZING FOR SYSTEMS IMPACT

When the SCMSN's new network manager started work in June 2016, his first task was clear and simple: meet each network member, find out how the network is benefiting their organization, and identify issues they thought the collaboration should address. During July and August, the network manager spoke with all twenty-seven participants from nineteen organizations in interviews that varied in length from thirty to ninety minutes. The feedback was illuminating and somewhat surprising.

> *"The network immediately comes to mind now whenever I'm planning my day-to-day work. I think of everybody in the network, the skills they represent, and who I should be talking to."*
>
> *Laura McLendon*
> *Director of Land Conservation, Sempervirens Fund*

The interviews revealed that, after spending the previous year agreeing on the network's purpose, network members were not of one mind about what the network should focus on doing, nor exactly how they should decide. Although some felt the network should create a vision and develop strategies to achieve it, and some felt that the network should at least identify its strategic priorities, others felt that undertaking any kind of strategic planning process

would be a waste of time. So, although everyone wanted the network to do something, there was resistance to developing a vision and strategies to figure out what that something was.

In retrospect, it's understandable that members felt unsettled about the network's future. They had made great strides in the first eighteen months. Not content with their successes and all the work they had done, however, members were asking how they would actually make a difference. The SCMSN was not in crisis. Rather, a year after they had begun, network members were still in a process of discovering the network's potential for impact.

In the Five Cs framework, addressing a complex problem begins with identifying leverage points—"places in a complex system where a small shift in one thing can produce big changes in everything." It's often easier to define what a leverage point is, however, than it is to identify and act on one in real life.

Although the work to improve stewardship throughout the region had begun at the first convening in March 2015, it took network members more than a year to identify projects that had the potential to influence conservation outcomes throughout the region. Part of the challenge was the difficulty of identifying actions that would advance the network's purpose, which was long-range and aspirational: "working together to help cultivate a resilient, vibrant region where human and natural systems thrive for generations to come." Fulfilling that ambition was going to take time.

Between June 2015 and June 2016, the Awareness team stood out as having identified a topic that consistently inspired everyone's support as fulfilling a network objective—creating and conducting tours of signature conservation projects for public officials and policy makers to educate them about the importance of effective stewardship. The idea was given a test-drive in May 2016 when fifteen network members participated in a trial tour, followed by expert panels on fire prevention techniques and selective timber harvest as a stewardship strategy. All the participants gave the experience high marks as a prototype for future tours.

Compared with the Awareness tours, however, other project teams have taken longer to settle on a productive focus. At the network's second convening, several participants raised the need to develop methods for evaluating stewardship projects and the network's long-term impact. Conversations at several more convenings were required to formulate a substantive proposal, the specifics of which are still under development. Scientists in the network originally proposed that the network collect stewardship data and create a database of member projects. There was initial resistance to the proposal, however, from members with more hands-on responsibilities for land management. People objected that the proposal would add to already demanding reporting requirements from regulatory agencies. There was also disagreement about how to evaluate stewardship and restoration projects. Rather than collecting data, foresters, land managers, and stewardship directors made decisions based on experience, often passed down over decades. Why a science-based approach to evaluation was needed was not clear to everyone.

There were similar concerns about creating a "Story Map" of the region—an interactive, GIS-based web application that combines maps with text, graphics, and multimedia. The map, it was argued, would increase users' ability to identify opportunities for collaboration and enable outside researchers to learn about network activities. Although a prototype was praised at the March 2016 convening, there were questions about whether the network had the resources to maintain it.

A year later at the June 2016 convening, new members energized the work on leverage points and project teams. Projects were identified that engaged members with their potential to affect the larger

system. Finally, there seemed to be enthusiasm for more than just the Awareness tours.

A team was formed to provide input to the Santa Cruz County Board of Supervisors about proposed guidelines for "responsible" cannabis cultivation. Virtually every member knew from first-hand experience the damage illegal cannabis operations were inflicting on the Santa Cruz Mountains, where growers were clear-cutting swaths of forest and diverting streams to support lucrative crops. Another team proposed to address the convoluted system of environmental regulations and permitting that often complicates the implementation of stewardship projects. In a typical Catch-22, a project to restore the habitat of an endangered species is denied an implementation permit by a regulatory agency because the restoration activities would disrupt the protected species' habitat. An Asset Mapping team was also formed to inventory network resources to more systematically coordinate their use. There was even support for new, more developed proposals

Balancing Self-Interest and Shared Interest

Collaborations are not successfully sustained purely by the altruistic commitment of their participants to serving the common good. On the contrary, a fundamental principle of network success is that the shared interest of the collective must coincide with the self-interest of each network member. Network members' personal and organizational objectives must be served in some way by the work of collaboration, or they will not be able to justify their commitment to network activities.

The Five Cs framework used to guide network formation defines two types of work a network can do that serve members' self-interest. It can "Coordinate Existing Actions" or it can "Collaborate for Systems Impact."

Coordinate Existing Actions

Coordinating existing actions is often the first indication of what members are going to get from their participation in a collaboration. Involving other members in work they are already doing enables participants to enhance their own effectiveness. Self-interest and shared interest are both served.

Between the SCMSN's June 2015 and June 2016 convenings, collaborations on stewardship projects between two or more organizations had increased from fourteen to forty-five. But mini-collaborations like these can seem to members like obvious outcomes that should already have been happening, and therefore might have happened without the network. In this way, members can become somewhat unimpressed by the effectiveness of their own network.

The purpose of an impact network is to enable participants to work together to affect the system in which they function. For an impact network to maintain members' commitment, it must enable them to fulfill this aspiration.

Collaborate for Systems Impact

One of the things that differentiates Collaborating for Systems Impact from Coordinating Existing Actions is that Collaborating for Systems Impact does not necessarily manifest an immediate benefit to members, and thereby serve their self-interest. Instead, when network members work together to change a larger system, they are often acting on faith that everyone will benefit if they succeed.

For this reason, collaborating for systems impact has also been referred to as "collaborating generously."[8] When engaged in systems level collaboration, network members are generally not measuring what they are giving to the endeavor and what they are getting back in return. In other words, they are not calculating the equation between their self-interest and the interest shared by all the network's members.

[8] Ehrlichman, David, David Sawyer, and Jane Wei-Skillern. "Five Steps to Building an Effective Impact Network." Stanford Social Innovation Review (online). November 11, 2015.

from the Story Map and Science & Monitoring teams.

At the October 2016 convening the new project teams seemed to have made more progress than anyone had anticipated. Part of the change could be attributed to the presence of a fulltime manager, who made sure each team met at least once before the convening and that their proposals and plans were clear and persuasive.

> *"Wherever I end up in the future, whatever wicked problem I end up facing, I'll be able to use my experience in this network and the knowledge of what a network can accomplish. It's an incredibly powerful tool across a lot of different domains."*
>
> *Kevin Woodhouse*
> *Assistant General Manager, Midpeninsula Regional Open Space District*

The passage of time and the deepening of relationships had also made a difference. During 2015, projects were often evaluated in terms of whether they might impose burdens on the network or its members. At the June 2016 convening, however, no one raised these concerns. By October, network members were generous in their support for projects. There seemed to be a tacit recognition that it wasn't necessary to control what the network did. Teams could explore anything they wanted. If the benefits of a project weren't clear, members were not likely to support it. The network was not going to become an institutional presence independent of its members that was going to constrain their activities or make them do things they didn't want to.

By the end of the October convening, the network had a clearer focus, articulated through six project teams that proposed to undertake activities with the potential to positively affect land stewardship on a region-wide scale.

- The Awareness team is developing a long-range strategy for securing resources for stewardship throughout the region.
- The Permitting and the Responsible Cannabis Cultivation teams are positioning the network to influence policies and regulations with potential for improved stewardship outcomes.
- The Story Map and the Science & Monitoring teams are developing data collection and evaluation protocols for assessing stewardship projects, as well as the network's impact.
- The Asset Mapping team is developing a basis for more systematic management of network members' combined resources.

Viewed as a single network strategy, five of the six teams are developing plans for improving conservation outcomes throughout the region by increasing public awareness, influencing public policy, and advancing evidence-based decision making and evaluation. The objective of the sixth team is to more effectively coordinate organizational resources.

When the network manager had spoken with members during the summer, there was disagreement about whether the network should create a vision and develop strategies to achieve it. What no one seemed to notice was that the network had been doing something like that since its first convening in March 2015. Although no one had explicitly said, "Now we're going to create a strategic plan," the design and sequencing of the conversations conducted at each convening were steps in a deliberate process in which outcomes were allowed to emerge.

The network had, in fact, engaged in steps that were similar to strategic planning processes that organizations undertake, but with characteristics specific to the needs of networks. Participants began by clarifying why they had convened, thereby establishing an identity. At the first convening, members conducted an "environmental scan." Low-hanging fruit were identified in the form of existing activities that could be coordinated. Over time, the network has identified and developed strategies for influencing the system in which it operates.

What is unique to network strategy as compared with organizational strategy is that networks don't always develop a single, unifying goal that is specific enough to define the network's activities. Because networks are attempting to engage with and influence complex or wicked problems, there

Network Structure

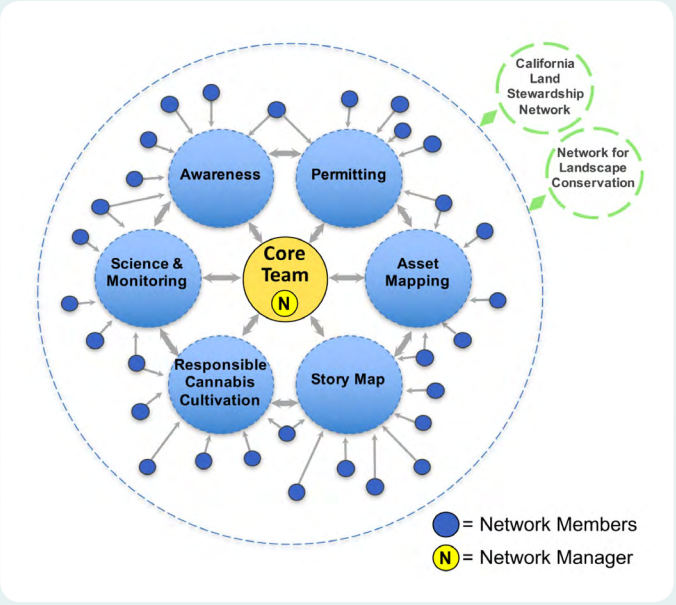
A network needs just enough management and organizational structure to effectively channel the creative impulses of its members and enable them to achieve their desired objectives.

Networks can accomplish a lot without much structure. A learning network, for example, can exchange information, best practices, and even share resources with no more organization than is needed to bring members together for convenings. It is even possible for organizations to coordinate existing activities through an informal process conducted face-to-face.

More structure is needed, however, for network members to affect a system in new ways. This activity of "Collaborating for Systems Impact" requires the formation of project teams to work on specific initiatives. Project teams should form when a need arises, and disband when they've completed their objective. Each project team needs a Team Lead, who is responsible for developing a team charter and making sure the team achieves its goals. The network manager also holds teams accountable for making progress.

The leadership function for the collaboration as a whole is served by a Core Team, Steering Committee, or Leadership Team that is composed of a diverse selection of network members elected by all the collaboration's participants. Between network convenings, the Core Team meets monthly to make preliminary decisions about network business, which are communicated to the whole network for a final decision. Important or contentious decisions are postponed for deliberation at the next convening. Although people are often wary of making decisions in large groups, in a network where trust has been established, the "fist of five" method of consensus decision making works remarkably well.[9]

Just like the organizations participating in a network, the collaboration itself can't exist in isolation and expect to thrive. Over time, a collaboration needs to engage with related or complementary efforts, particularly those within the same geographic area. In the case of the SCMSN, this has meant joining the California Land Stewardship Network, a network of conservation networks throughout California that includes the Peninsula Working Group, the Tamalpais Lands Collaborative, the Tahoe Regional Planning Agency, the Irvine Ranch Conservancy, and the North Coast Initiative. The SCMSN is also connected with the Network for Landscape Conservation (www.largelandscapenetwork.org), a national alliance of conservation professionals dedicated to stewarding regional landscapes.



The SCMSN's management structure illustrated in this diagram is typical of structures commonly used to organize networks.

[9] Calabrese, Jake. "Learning with Fist of Five Voting." Agile For All. September 23, 2014. Web.

isn't usually one best way to change the system. The nature of wicked problems is such that "there is no silver bullet," as the saying goes, "there's only silver buckshot."

This broad approach to network purpose is not only justified by the nature of wicked problems, but also by the character of members' participation. It is rare that a diverse group of stakeholders is going to agree on a single, specific goal as the guiding purpose for a network. To accommodate the diverse perspectives in a network and unite participants, it is often necessary that a network's purpose be defined as a high-level goal, which has been the case for the SCMSN.

In the Santa Cruz Mountains Stewardship Network, a number of members have consistently challenged suggestions that the whole network should do one thing together, partly out of concerns about who will decide what that one thing is. The value of the network for many is the respect accorded to the different approaches to stewardship represented in the network, the resulting exchange of ideas, and the emergence of opportunities for learning and collaboration within this diversity. Although that process has taken time to congeal, there has been a logic to the manner in which it has evolved.

At the close of the October convening, one member summarized the results of the day for everyone. "I feel like we have gone from talking about what we are going to do," she said, "to actually doing it."

Evaluating Networks

Evaluating network effectiveness is challenging because a network is primarily a system of relationships sustained over time.[10] Tangible outcomes can take years to manifest, and are often difficult to attribute to specific network activities.

As a result, the principal method for evaluating networks is the ongoing process of sensemaking and assessment that is critical to the success of any network's formation. Sensemaking and assessment depend primarily on observations about what happens at convenings and between convenings, and on conversations with and feedback from network members. This ongoing assessment process addresses questions such as:

- *What is emerging as the network takes shape?*
- *What seems to be working or not working?*
- *What dynamics are apparent between network members and their organizations?*
- *What variations are apparent in members' participation?*
- *What network activities need adjustment or more attention?*
- *How should network activities be adapted in response to changing circumstances?*
- *How is the network perceived within the larger system?*

One measure of network effectiveness used throughout the first two years of the SCMSN was whether network members continued to attend network convenings. Although the measure is simple, arguably it is also robust. Members' choice to participate in the network was a tacit endorsement of its value, its objectives, and the progress being made. As the superintendent for California State Parks for the Santa Cruz Mountains region remarked at the convening in October 2016, "One of the reasons I keep participating in the network is so I can come to these convenings and see what happens next."

Of the twenty-four individuals from twenty-two organizations who attended the first convening in March 2015, twenty-one individuals from nineteen organizations were still participating twenty months later in October 2016. The three individuals who withdrew from the process after the first convening all had reasons other than mere lack of interest. Either they were not the right person with the right level of authority to participate, or their organization had no direct contribution to make to the network and its activities.

In addition to this anecdotal measure, a more rigorous evaluation protocol was also developed for the SCMSN, based on a leading framework developed by Network Impact and the Center for Evaluation Innovation. The protocol tracks three factors as measures of network performance: network connectivity, network vitality, and network results.

Network Connectivity

As discussed in an earlier sidebar on "Measuring Connectivity and Trust," network analysis using network mapping is the standard method for evaluating network connectivity. Annual network maps can track the evolution of connectedness between a network's members in terms of the number of connections between individuals, frequency of contact, and the meaning individuals assign to each connection.

The previous examples of network maps for the SCMSN between March 2015 and October 2016 show the dramatic increase in connectivity achieved in the course of the network's history to date. This data reinforces the anecdotal evidence—that increased connectedness contributes to greater effectiveness and improved outcomes.

Network Vitality

A Network Vitality Survey, also conducted annually, consists of thirty-one questions designed to measure members' satisfaction with the network in terms of its purpose, governance, and activities, participation by other network members, contributions to their own work, and progress toward achieving long-term goals.[11]

In responses to vitality surveys during the first two years, SCMSN members have consistently expressed strong satisfaction with the network and its evolution. The surveys have also revealed weaknesses in the network. Members report that they are having difficulty making time for network activities, and only two-thirds of members state that network activities are integrated into their organizations' strategic plans or operations.

Network Results

Like the evaluation of network connectivity and vitality, the challenge in measuring a network's impact is overcoming the subjective component. How, for example, does one measure progress toward the SCMSN's long-term aspiration to "cultivate a resilient, vibrant region where human and natural systems thrive for generations to come"?

To resolve this issue, the evaluation protocol assesses impact in terms of whether network activities are achieving interim outcomes on the way to fulfilling longer-term goals, and whether members are demonstrating support for those activities.

As noted earlier, network members are working together on more stewardship projects as a result of connections they have made through the network. In addition, reports given by project teams at the October 2016 convening suggest that the network is beginning to develop strategies that could improve stewardship regionally.

The three approaches to network evaluation reinforce what members have indicated through their participation. The network is fulfilling their expectations relative to the value of the relationships they have formed, the way the network functions, and its work toward achieving long-term goals.

[10] For the challenges of evaluating large-landscape conservation initiatives that use network governance structures, with a proposed framework for evaluation, see Bixler, R. Patrick, Shawn Johnson, Kirk Emerson, Tina Nabatchi, Melly Reuling, Charles Curtin, Michele Romolini, and J. Morgan Grove, "Networks and landscapes: a framework for setting goals and evaluating performance at the large landscape scale," Frontiers in Ecology and the Environment, April 2016, 14(3): 145–153.

[11] The Network Vitality questionnaire includes several questions developed by A. E. Mickel and E. Erickson in Tamalpais Lands Collaborative: Five-Year Longitudinal Study, Year 1, unpublished manuscript (2015), a study of a multi-stakeholder conservation partnership in Marin County, California.

CONTINUING TO EVOLVE THE NETWORK

Since the October 2016 convening, progress continues, along with the emergence of new challenges. In late 2016, network members scheduled three convenings for 2017, including one two-day meeting, a change from 2016 when network convenings were only one day. Members agreed that one extended convening per year was needed to allow time for more in-depth conversations and to maintain and deepen their relationships with one another. During 2017, the network manager will be approaching foundations about funding for the network beyond 2018.

Most of the project teams continue to advance their work, making headway to varying degrees. The Awareness team has drafted a detailed plan and is promoting a series of tours for 2017. Applications for participation in the first round of tours are already being received through the network's website (www.scmsn.net). Some teams continue to refine strategies, while others are moving gradually toward implementation. Progress on some teams is slow or suspended due to members' lack of availability.

The network manager reports that, in general, members continue to express optimism about the network's ongoing value. Collaborations between organizations continue to increase. A state and a federal agency have entered into an agreement to share the use of an industrial-strength wood-chipper, rather than both of them buying one. The Amah Mutsun tribal band is working with several organizations on applying Native American stewardship techniques to contemporary conservation challenges. Smaller conservation organizations that have felt ignored or undervalued by larger members are feeling acknowledged and more respected for the contributions that they make.

The Science & Monitoring team is making plans to prepare a GIS basemap of land uses throughout the region—preserved forests, working forests, recreation, agriculture, residential, urban, etc. The hope is that the map will provide network members with insights into regional patterns that will instigate more region-wide approaches to conservation planning and implementation.

Nonetheless, both survey data and conversations reveal that members are having difficulty making time to respond to emails, schedule meetings, and achieve progress on network issues that are important to them. To address these challenges, the network manager intends to engage members in reimagining their participation in the network. Rather than viewing the network as "extra work," how could members integrate the network into their day-to-day responsibilities? He will also be recommending small fixes—like scheduling all team meetings at convenings—together with more ambitious proposals, like developing policies and seeking funding to compensate member organizations for staff time dedicated to network projects.

The Importance of Trust

Everyone who has participated in the Santa Cruz Mountains Stewardship Network knows the importance of the relationships and the trust that members have developed with one another. Trust and mutual understanding have held the group together through the movement over two years from discussion to action. It is difficult, nonetheless, to convey the importance that trust plays in a network's formation to anyone who has not participated in such a process.

> *"When I first joined this network, I tended to make assumptions about other people's intentions, especially when I didn't see eye-to-eye with them. It turned out that nine times out of ten, I was probably wrong. Early on, I started to realize that I didn't have a clue what people's intentions were, and that I had to be far more forgiving about what I thought. Now I'm much more careful about what I think a person's intentions are."*
>
> *Philippe Cohen*
> *Executive Director Emeritus, Jasper Ridge Biological Preserve, Stanford University*

Trust is the element that makes possible all a network's other virtues and accomplishments. It contributes factors to a network's success that are provided by no other activity. Specifically:

1. **Trust creates a virtual organization while a collaboration's more formal structures and processes are being formed.**

   Forming a complex collaboration takes time because participants need to adapt to a decision-making context unlike most they are familiar with. Everyone needs to learn how to listen, and to speak so others will understand. Trust provides the cohesion that sustains a collaboration while understanding matures and participants develop the capability for organizing and managing themselves.

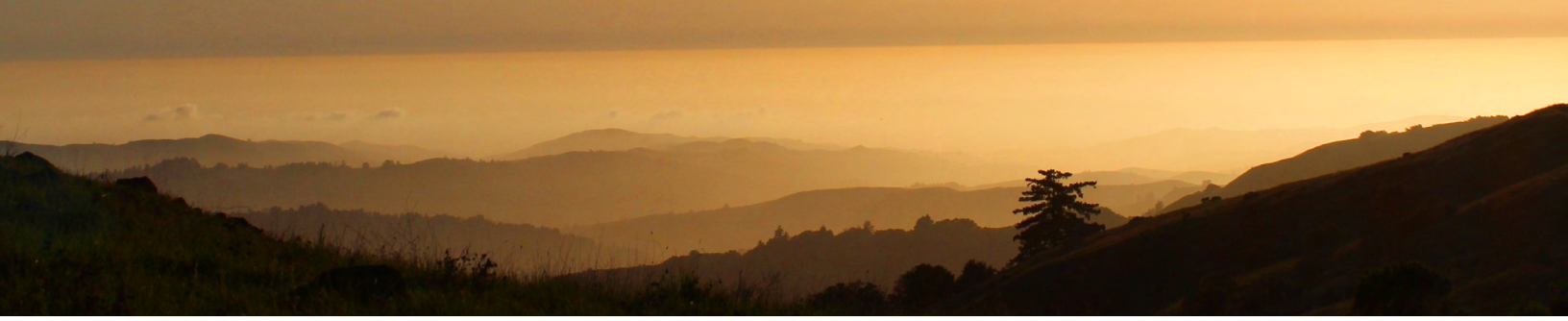
2. **Trust enables a collaboration's participants to explore options without having to commit to any of them.**

   Trust makes possible the conversations from which collaboration is formed. Management wisdom says that freedom of exchange can only flourish if participants are assured of "psychological safety," which is just another term for trust. Trust-based relationships relieve collaborative efforts of the need for certainty, of trying to figure out how things will unfold. In short, trust enables groups to experiment, to explore, to reflect, and to self-correct.

3. **Trust ensures that a group exercises its capability for collective intelligence, and avoids the pitfalls of conformism and groupthink.**

   Despite everything we have been warned about "groupthink," under the right conditions, groups are capable of exhibiting discrimination and collective intelligence greater than that of any single individual. Mistrust, however, is arguably the greatest obstacle to a group's ability to think and act intelligently. Our tendency in the absence of trust is to believe that assumptions and projections are valid, that we know what others are thinking and feeling without asking them, that maybe we are the only sane person in the room. Trust, in contrast, enables network members to test assumptions, discern reality, and make informed decisions.

In these ways, trust initiates and sustains collaborative initiatives, creates space for the sensemaking that is critical to complex problem solving, and ensures that groups function with the intelligence that is the potential of effective human systems.



CONCLUSION

The Santa Cruz Mountains Stewardship Network is, inherently, a long play. Its members have committed themselves in the network's Memorandum of Understanding to helping "cultivate a resilient, vibrant region where human and natural systems thrive for generations to come." If this were an organization, it would be difficult to know how to manage to that statement as an expression of purpose or to define objectives to fulfill it.

But the SCMSN is not an organization. It's a network—a relatively new approach to addressing problems in contemporary society. Although networks function like organizations in some respects, they are also a lot like communities. Because of this dual nature, for which there are not many precedents, harnessing the power of networks to solve complex problems is still something of an experiment. Therefore, it's challenging to assess a network's success, its impact, or the next stage in its evolution.[12]

In terms of network building, it's safe to say that the SCMSN has successfully completed the formation phase. There has been a certain magic in witnessing network participants coming together, cultivating trust, finding others with similar challenges, and seeing the positive outcomes those synergies can produce. The network has devoted significant time to addressing what are essentially political issues in the network—concerns about disparities in resources and influence, and about whether the network will become a mechanism for control, rather than a means to work together more openly. A recurring issue raised at convenings throughout the network's first two years has been the need to ensure that conservation policies and practices take into account the people in the region who are affected by them. In these ways, the SCMSN has established prerequisites for more substantive collaboration over time.

The SCMSN is currently in a transition from network formation to network action, in which participants are asking how the network can most effectively improve land stewardship on a regional scale. Members are having difficulty making time for the network activities that are needed to advance that work. And there are questions about whether the broadly defined purpose that attracted and sustained members' participation at the beginning is focused enough to galvanize members' commitment to the next phase of the network's evolution.

One source of guidance for answering questions about the SCMSN's future is the Five Cs framework, which was used to guide the network's formation. As stated at the beginning of this case study, the Five Cs framework is not merely a set of sequential steps for forming a network. The activities identified by the framework are intended to guide a network throughout its lifecycle.

Current developments in the SCMSN suggest that it's time for the network to revisit the Five Cs from the perspective of its present evolution. Members have been asking questions about the network's purpose since the summer of 2016. The network has been aware since its inception that the collaboration

[12] For research on the developmental lifecycles of networks, see Imperial, Mark T., Erik Johnston, Melinda Pruett-Jones, Kirsten Leong, and Jennifer Thomsen, "Sustaining the useful life of network governance: life cycles and developmental challenges," Frontiers in Ecology and the Environment, April 2016, 14(3): 135–144.

would be stronger with participation from more private landowners, as well as representatives of the region's underserved communities. Some have suggested that there are controversial issues in the region that need to be discussed. Members continue to consider how they can make best use of their shared resources to improve stewardship throughout the region.

In other words, to maintain the success of their collaboration, the SCMSN's members must continue to:

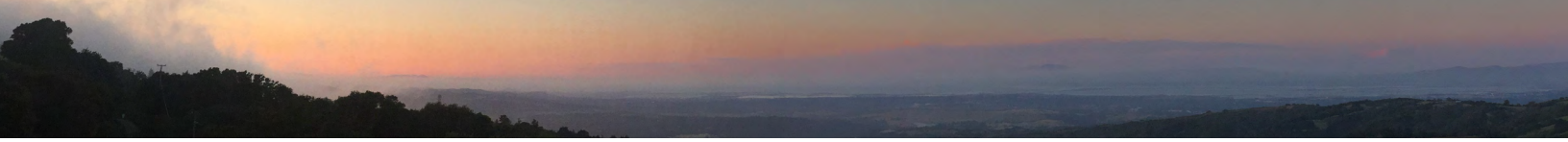
- Clarify Purpose
- Convene the Right People
- Cultivate Trust
- Coordinate Existing Actions
- Collaborate for Systems Impact

Although the Five Cs identify the broad tasks that are necessary for a network's formation and development, they are less specific about how to sustain a collaboration over time. Therefore, when considering what the Santa Cruz Mountains Stewardship Network must do to maintain its positive momentum in the years to come, it is important to also consider the lessons members learned that contributed to the collaboration's success to date.

The lessons that members learned and observed throughout the network's formation can be summarized in the following eight practices:

1. Never stop cultivating trust. Make strong relationships a priority.
2. Be comfortable with ambiguity and the emergent nature of network results.
3. Stay fluid—let people, teams, and projects come and go—but keep the core strong.
4. Honor self-interest, individual initiative, and entrepreneurship.
5. Deepen organizations' engagement with the network.
6. Be skillful decision makers. Close every consideration with a decision.
7. Deliberately engage with the network's periphery and consciously evolve the network.
8. Keep having the next critical conversation.

Together, the Five Cs and the eight network practices summarize the activities and the mindset that were used to form the Santa Cruz Mountains Stewardship Network. The Five Cs describe a network's deliberate process, and together with network leadership, structures, and decision-making protocols, characterize the aspects of network management that are most like organizational management. The eight practices describe a network's emergent process—the mindsets and behaviors necessary to maintain an effective culture of collaboration over time. In this way, a network is also like a community—a living system that maintains a cultural signature as it adapts and evolves to meet the needs of its members and match the challenges of the day.



The Santa Cruz Mountains Stewardship Network

The following organizations participated in the formation of the Santa Cruz Mountains Stewardship Network during 2015 and 2016.

Amah Mutsun Tribal Band of Ohlone/Costanoan Indians

Big Creek Lumber

CAL FIRE San Mateo – Santa Cruz Unit

California Department of Parks and Recreation

Girl Scouts of Northern California

Jasper Ridge Biological Preserve, Stanford University

Land Trust of Santa Cruz County

Midpeninsula Regional Open Space District

Peninsula Open Space Trust

San Lorenzo Valley Water District

San Mateo County Parks Department

San Mateo County Resource Conservation District

Santa Cruz County Parks Department

Santa Cruz County Resource Conservation District

Save the Redwoods League

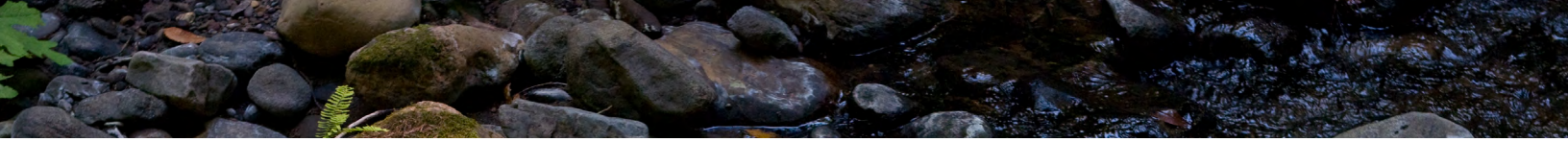
Sempervirens Fund

Swanton Pacific Ranch, Cal Poly

UC Berkeley Department of Anthropology

UC Santa Cruz Natural Reserves

US Bureau of Land Management



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The following articles are referenced in footnotes throughout the case study. The articles on the use of network governance in the implementation of large-landscape approaches to conservation complement many of the experiences and lessons discussed in the study.

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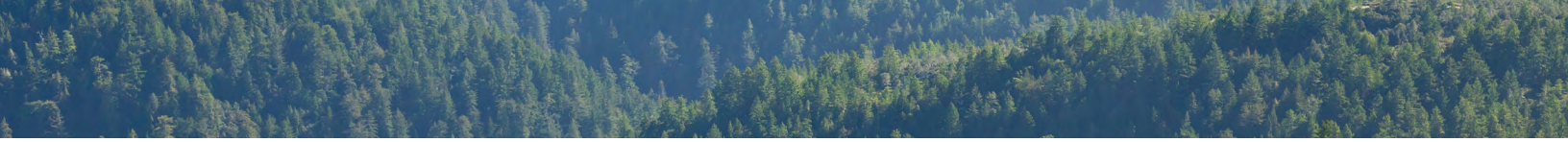

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SCMSN MEMBER ORGANIZATIONS