

Fall 2022

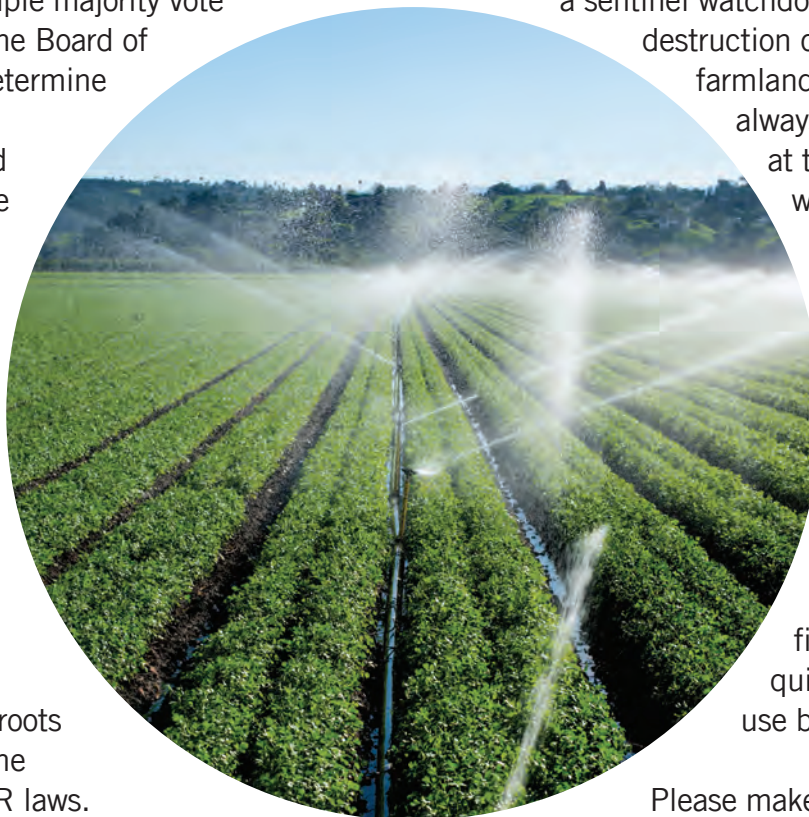


# KEEPING SOAR STRONG AFTER THE ELECTION

*When the framers of SOAR took up the enormous challenge to give voters the final say on re-zoning farmland and open space instead of politicians, it was precisely for the type of situation that confronted us in the November 8, 2022 election.*

Prior to SOAR, a simple majority vote of a city council or the Board of Supervisors could determine whether some of the most fertile farmland in the world could be re-zoned. Because of the march of urbanization that we've seen from Orange County to Los Angeles, leaders of the fledgling SOAR organization not only found a mechanism to stop urban sprawl, but a groundswell of grassroots support that led to the approval of the SOAR laws.

While so much often rides on the decisions of a slim majority of councilmembers or supervisors, usually just three people, the SOAR laws stand like



a sentinel watchdog preventing the wholesale destruction of our open space and farmlands. Yet we know there will always be efforts to chip away at these protections by those who profit from urban sprawl. They will challenge in court, they will push dishonest campaigns to mislead voters at the ballot box, and they will continue to try to elect politicians to help them get around SOAR. That is why, now more than ever, SOAR needs a strong financial base so we can quickly respond to the land-use battles ahead.

Please make your contribution today and remember it is because of SOAR supporters like you that Ventura County is one of the only counties in the nation to say no to urban sprawl. Let's keep it that way! ☆



# SOME WINS FOR OPEN SPACE

BY MELISSA BAFFA,  
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, VENTURA LAND TRUST

## Part of what makes **Ventura County** such an extraordinary place to live is the abundance of open space.

Whether one is considering natural, undeveloped space or the working land of our farms and ranches, the bucolic beauty of our region is a major reason why so many choose to live and recreate here. The first SOAR initiative passed in 1995; the nine initiatives passed in 2016 renewed the legislation through 2050.

Who knows how different our county would be without these voter-supported initiatives? One can guess; it would be totally fair to surmise that the two major acquisitions secured by the Ventura Land Trust in recent years would not be protected as open space, but would instead have fallen to development.

The 2,123 acre Harmon Canyon Preserve, on the east side of Ventura's foothills, first opened to the public in June 2020. It currently welcomes an estimated 175,000 visitors per year. In addition to providing much-needed open space for human recreation, the preserve is also home to a variety of animals: mule deer, coyotes, foxes, skunks, raccoons, kangaroo rats, bobcats, and a wide variety of birds and reptiles are spotted regularly at the preserve. Surprisingly, black bear and badgers have also been spotted on wildlife cams!

The 1,645 acre Mariano Rancho Preserve, stretching from Grant Park to the left tree of Ventura's Two Trees landmark, is the property that inspired the formation of the Ventura Land Trust (originally called the Ventura Hillsides Conservancy). This preserve, also acquired in 2020, was under repeated threat of development and was secured largely because SOAR gave citizens a voice in that process. The community spoke loudly on behalf of its beloved hillsides. Now those hillsides will be protected in perpetuity.

Mariano Rancho Preserve, although protected, is not open to the public quite yet. Planning is currently underway to determine important decisions regarding access, parking, trail placement, conservation plans, and more. Ventura Land Trust has projected a 2025 opening date and encourages the public to weigh in as we make these important decisions.

To learn more about the planning process for Mariano Rancho Preserve, or how to visit Harmon Canyon or one of Ventura Land Trust's other preserves, please visit [www.venturalandtrust.org](http://www.venturalandtrust.org). ☆



# WILD BIRDS IN OUR OPEN SPACE

WHITE-CROWNED SPARROW  
PHOTO AND ARTICLE BY BONNIE CLAREFIELD-BYLIN

## Have you noticed the return of white-crowned sparrows?

They left us in mid-spring to raise families in the far north, Pacific Northwest, and western mountains. They migrated back to Ventura County when late summer gave way to early autumn. This is an annual cycle. White-crowned sparrows are common wintering songbirds throughout most of North America. If you are unfamiliar with white-crowned sparrows, these are the medium-sized songbirds with bold black and white striped heads that are often found foraging on the ground

**Cool fact: Alaskan white-crowned sparrows travel 2,600 miles to Southern California each non-breeding season.**

or in shrubs in our yards, parks, and open space. Adult white-crowned sparrows have black and white facial stripes with a white crown and a cone-shaped orange bill. In winter, they are flocking birds and can be found with other types of sparrows during the day. White-crowned sparrows are often heard as the first feathered denizens to welcome the morning sun. At dusk, they gather by the dozens and roost in thick shrubs and trees. While they are often invisible, a cacophony coming from the vegetation announces their presence. ☆



## What We Can Do to Reduce Global Warming

### #1: COMPOSTING FOOD WASTE

We all want to do what we can to reverse global warming, but did you know you can play a part in reducing greenhouse gases simply by putting food scraps in your greenwaste can or combining with leaves and wood chips in your own backyard compost bin?

Here's why: To begin with, by recycling food waste not only do we reduce the amount of waste filling our landfills, but we also reduce the climate-warming gases created when the food waste decomposes.

It's fascinating and true that your corn husks, onion skins, apple cores and the like emit 20 times more carbon dioxide in a landfill than in compost. Composting also produces biofuels that can be used instead of fossil fuels. ☆



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## Follow Us at



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## ENVIRO-MICRO GRANTS!

As part of its ongoing commitment to addressing climate change impacts and enhancing wildlife habitat, the County of Ventura is providing a new program to give environmental grants to small community organizations, schools, and nonprofits.

**Apply soon** for funding to implement shovel-ready projects that support wildlife habitat restoration, species conservation, environmental stewardship, and/or address climate change impacts. Eligible grant awards will receive up to \$15,000. **The easy application is due 12/20/22 with any remaining funds rolled over to another cycle.**

For more information go to [sustain.ventura.org](http://sustain.ventura.org).  
Contact Heather Allen at [heather.allen@ventura.org](mailto:heather.allen@ventura.org) for additional information.



## KEEPING SOAR STRONG

Preparing for the future battle to extend the SOAR laws so they don't expire is essential. That's why SOAR needs to raise financial resources and increase our support base and volunteers.

Please use the enclosed envelope to contribute what you can to SOAR now. It is one of the more rewarding things you will do today! Also, if you know of friends who also want to be a part of saving natural open spaces and farmland in Ventura County, jot down their names and addresses and include in the same envelope with your check. Then we'll add them to our newsletter mailing list so they can learn about SOAR and the critical work they too can support.

Contact us at [info@soarvc.org](mailto:info@soarvc.org)  
to include SOAR in your planned giving.