

Fall 2023



# SOAR WORKS FOR YOU SO YOU CAN DECIDE

Certainly, the most intense work the SOAR organization does is getting SOAR approved at the ballot box. It involves fundraising to ensure we have sufficient funds to run multiple campaigns at once, drafting nine SOAR initiatives, organizing signature gathering throughout the county, defending challenges in the courts, and running the campaigns to see the initiatives are successfully voted into law. The SOAR organization has done this twice, once in 1998 and again in 2016 when we enhanced the law and extended it beyond its 2030 expiration date. While the next round of re-upping SOAR laws so they don't expire is moving forward with fundraising, we also remain active monitoring government and developers to make sure they're adhering to the voter-approved SOAR laws.

The following are three examples of SOAR's continuing efforts to protect open space and farmland and your right to vote:

## 1 MONITORING GOVERNMENT ADHERENCE

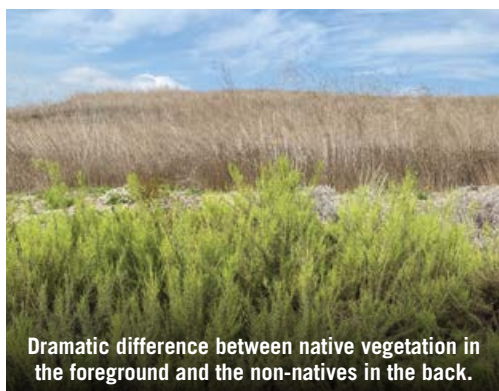
SOAR recently completed a review to see if the 2016 SOAR laws that were approved by voters were ever incorporated into city and county General Plans as required. SOAR laws are officially General Plan Amendments and once the voters approved them in 2016, they should have been added as amendments to General Plans. Our review found that the County and most of the cities followed the law and incorporated the updated SOAR laws into their General Plans. However, the



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# WHAT LIES IN THE GROUND WAITING

## A STORY OF RESTORATION by Nora Aidukas



Dramatic difference between native vegetation in the foreground and the non-natives in the back.

Beginning in mid-November of 2018, motivated by fear of the dry mustard and thistle on the hill behind our house catching fire, my husband and I began clearing what hadn't already burned there during the Woolsey Fire. We cleared a fire break 100 feet surrounding our home, which juts into open space. Soon, however, rains came and with the rain, the hill was carpeted with green growth; the dead mustard and thistle we removed just

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(Continued from page 1 – A Story of Restoration)

months before was growing back. We set to work pulling them out by their roots, the rain soaked soil easily giving up the non-natives. Yet, there

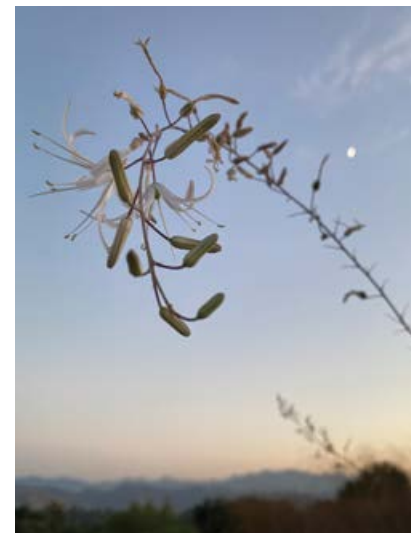


were unfamiliar seedlings amongst the fire-prone weeds. With the help of a retired park service ranger and a master gardener, we identified these native plants that were able to grow vigorously

without the non-natives competing for sunlight and moisture. The seed bank for these natives was already in the ground, waiting for this very opportunity.

Our fear had turned to delight. This June, one particular plant rewarded our hard work with a spectacular show of post meridiem blooming, the wavyleaf soap plant (*Chlorogalum pomeridianum*). Each small, star-like white flower bloomed in the evening, remained open all night, then closed forever by morning.

By July, all the flowers on the seven-foot tall stalks had gone to seed. According to the U.S. Forest Service, it takes ten years for a soap plant to grow from seed to flower. If there's a lesson from this story, it may be that it takes patience to appreciate what is waiting in the ground, waiting for its chance to dance in the moonlight. *Photos and story by Nora Aidukas*



## MEET OUR NEW BOARDMEMBERS!

This year we added three new directors. They have been there for us through

### MIC FARRIS

Mic has rejoined the SOAR Board to help guide and strengthen the organization. He is the Senior Director of Business Intelligence at The Trade Desk, providing expertise in data science, machine learning, and artificial intelligence. Mic helped pass both the 1998 and 2016 SOAR Initiatives, as well as his own initiative, the successful Thousand Oaks Right to Vote Initiative. Mic's dedication to public service and citizen participation includes serving on various Ventura County and City of Thousand Oaks commissions. He currently serves on the Thousand Oaks Planning Commission. Mic holds a doctorate in Space Physics from UCLA.



### ROBERT O'RILEY

Robert's roots in Ventura County moved from Indianapoli to assist SOAR's signature gathering effort. His a protections of treasured open space lands, to people, thereby furthering the democratic pro in marketing and advertising to political can currently serves as the Chief of Staff for Ventu also served in that role for the late Chair of the



cities of Thousand Oaks, Ventura and Simi Valley have yet to do so, and SOAR has put them all on notice. We continue to follow these three non-compliant cities to see that they follow the law.

## 2 SUPPORTING THE RIGHT TO VOTE

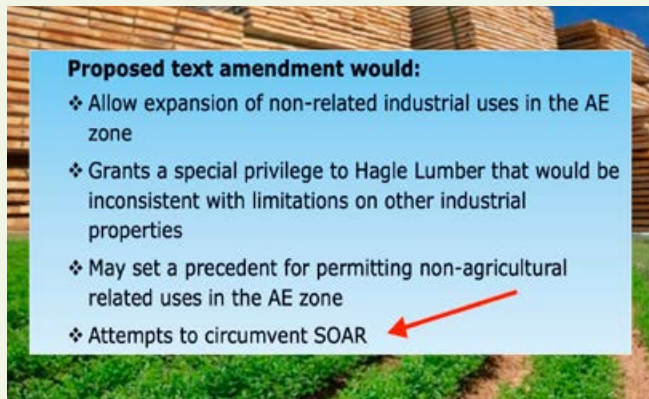
Over the years there have been attempts to skirt a SOAR vote of the people and allow development to sprawl into SOAR-protected farmland and open space. One such effort would exempt large scale battery storage facilities from a vote of the people, including a proposal to build one of the world’s largest on farmland outside of Moorpark. While battery storage is critical to fighting climate change, hundreds of



thousands of feet per facility is clearly industrial and that’s why they’re currently only allowed in industrial zoning. Still the Board of Supervisors voted last month to expedite developing them on farmland and open space without going through the required General Plan Amendment and SOAR. We’re thankful for those on our email alert list and social media followers who quickly responded asking the Board of Supervisors to let voters have a say. We also have a blog ([soarvc.org/blog](http://soarvc.org/blog)) on this if you’d like more information.

## 3 BLOWING THE WHISTLE ON ILLEGALLY PAVING FARMLAND

It’s been over two decades since Hagle Lumber violated the County laws and SOAR by paving over prime farmland to expand its lumber operations in Somis. They attempted to remedy their violation by asking the Board of Supervisors to approve storage of finished lumber products on farmland by finding it equivalent to growing trees on farmland. The Board of Supervisors denied their request. Now Hagle wants to ask the same of the new Board of Supervisors, even though County policy prohibits re-hearing the same issue. SOAR has put the County on notice to not allow paving over SOAR-protected farmland without a vote of the people.



tors to our SOAR Board: Mic Farris from Thousand Oaks, Robert O’Riley from Ventura, Karen Schmidt from Ojai. n some of our toughest battles and we are honored to have their wise guidance as members of the SOAR Board.

ura County are intricately tied to SOAR. He olis to Ventura County in 2016 specifically appreciation for SOAR goes beyond its SOAR’s role of requiring a vote of the ocess. Robert has applied his background mpaigns and citizen engagement. Robert ura County Supervisor Vianey Lopez, and Board of Supervisors, Carmen Ramirez.

### KAREN SCHMIDT



Karen joins the SOAR Board after being our Executive Director for two decades. Her recent position as Director, Rates and Strategy at our nation’s most successful clean energy provider, Clean Power Alliance, led Karen to step down from the Executive Director position at SOAR, but we convinced her to join our Board. Karen was instrumental in passing the 2016 SOAR renewal initiatives. Her career has spanned energy, climate change, land use, biological conservation, and sustainability issues. She has worked with The Nature Conservancy, Rocky Mountain Institute, American Farmland Trust, Los Angeles Food Policy Council Task Force, and numerous agricultural and renewable energy organizations. Karen holds an MBA from the Kellogg School at Northwestern University and an MS in biology and a BS in biology and environmental earth sciences from Stanford University.





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# KEEPING SOAR STRONG

The SOAR organization continues to work hard for you. All of our costs are paid for with donations from our wonderful supporters. Please consider making a contribution today, or sign up for monthly autopay on your credit card. We also have a robust planned giving approach for those who wish to add SOAR to their wills. We are thankful to our supporters who continue to contribute and keep SOAR strong.

Contact us at  
[donate@soarvc.org](mailto:donate@soarvc.org)