



## Case Study

# PARTNERING TO BUILD FUTURE CAPACITY BIG SUR, CALIFORNIA

*Helping a small non-profit 'dream big' serves The Nature Conservancy's long-term conservation goals in an iconic California region.*

In 2001, the 10,000-acre Palo Corona Ranch came up for sale in the Big Sur area, an iconic winding viewscape of coastal California. The Nature Conservancy was interested in the property for its significant biodiversity value and its strategic link to 13 other protected properties. However, at \$37 million, the financial and opportunity costs of the complicated deal seemed too high for The Conservancy to justify the purchase.

There was a smaller, younger nonprofit organization in the area, the Big Sur Land Trust (BSLT), which had been active in protecting viewsheds in the region but was not science-driven. BSLT was interested in the property, but had never been involved with a transaction of that scale. The land trust also did not have strong capacity in conservation science; however, it was a well-established organization with substantial resources to grow. The BSLT Board of Directors was a strong team with outstanding support from the local philanthropic community.

The Conservancy realized that partnering with the BSLT would not only help accomplish the conservation of the Palo Corona Ranch, it would also help transform the conservation capacity of this local non-profit in a way that would change the face of conservation in the region far into the future. The Conservancy team realized that they needed the BSLT now to partner in fundraising. But they also realized that BSLT would be a stronger partner in the future if could become more science-driven and more secure in accomplishing larger land transactions. The Conservancy and the BSLT decided to partner informally to protect the Palo Corona Ranch. The deal was structured to inspire the BSLT Board to embrace biodiversity conservation, step up to a larger vision, and, ultimately, to be the first step towards a long-term formal partnership.

The purchase of the Palo Corona Ranch was successful, and despite some early staff upheavals within the BSLT, and today the partnership continues. The BSLT now owns an historic building in downtown Monterey, and continues to be a driving force in regional science-based conservation, including more critical acquisitions and easements. The Big Sur Land Trust has expanded its scope and impact by introducing innovative approaches to conservation work and by developing a wide network of community partners to engage in its efforts. The BSLT works to make protect and make nature accessible for a broad spectrum of people – hikers and ranchers, children and property owners, as field workers, campers, farmers and researchers – and to sustain the natural world that supports the region's unique quality of life.