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Ashley Boren, Executive Director, Sustainable Conservation. Photo credit: Kris Timken

Ashley Boren Appointed to California State Board of Food and Agriculture

Sustainable Conservation's Executive Director, Ashley Boren, has been appointed by Governor Schwarzenegger to the California State Board of Food and Agriculture. Boren was recruited for this position because of Sustainable Conservation's success integrating the business needs of agriculture with environmental progress. The 15 board members advise the governor and agriculture secretary on agricultural issues and consumer needs. Boren stated, "I am honored by the appointment, and I can't think of a more critical time for agriculture to engage in solutions that will reduce its impact on the environment while maintaining a strong California agricultural economy."

National Dairy Report Debut

The National Dairy Environmental Stewardship Council's final report, released in January 2005, features examples of dairymen around the country who are using innovative strategies to transform manure from a management headache into a financial asset. In creating the Council, Sustainable Conservation's Dairies Project staff recruited national manure management experts from the dairy industry, government, academic institutions and environmental organizations. A link to the report is available on the Sustainable Conservation website at: www.suscon.org/dairies/ndesc.asp

64,000 Mercury Switches, 140 Pounds of Mercury Removed!

Nearly 64,000 mercury switches were recovered from end-of-life vehicles during the EPA Supplemental Environmental Project that Sustainable Conservation developed with Pick Your Part Auto Wreckers during 2004. The number of switches recovered equates to 140 pounds of mercury, and represents one of the largest switch collection efforts in the United States. Rather than reaching scrap metal recyclers or solid waste landfills where mercury can be released to the environment, switches were removed and sent for proper disposal.

Governor's Award

The 2004 Governor's Environmental and Economic Leadership Award, the State of California's highest environmental honor, was presented to Sustainable Conservation at an awards ceremony on December 1, 2004. Under the Watershed and Ecosystem Restoration category, Sustainable Conservation received this award for our Partners in Restoration program in a highly competitive process. Sustainable Conservation received the award for the program's effective strategy to restore, enhance and improve California's watersheds, while promoting sustainable economic progress. Partners in Restoration provides a one-stop permit review process which reduces bureaucratic hurdles for farmers and ranchers implementing watershed conservation projects.



From left: A. G. Kawamura, Secretary, California Department of Food and Agriculture; Brian Leahy, Executive Director, California Association of Resource Conservation Districts; Ashley Boren, Executive Director, Sustainable Conservation; Michael Chrisman, Secretary, California Resources Agency; Chuck Bell, State Conservationist, Natural Resources Conservation Service; Jim Branham, Undersecretary, California Environmental Protection Agency. Photo Credit: EPA.

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Sustainable Conservation partners with agriculture, business and government leaders to find practical ways that the private sector can protect clean air, clean water and healthy ecosystems.

Restoration on Private Lands

We help land owners be good stewards of the environment by facilitating restoration projects and species protection.

Sustainable Agriculture

We promote the adoption of innovative farming practices so that farmers can protect the environment, boost their bottom line and keep their land.

Sustainable Business

We stop pollution at the source by working proactively with business and regulatory agencies to solve problems through cooperation, rather than litigation.

THE **Bridge**

LETTER FROM THE **Executive Director**

Dear Friends,

I remember visiting Elkhorn Slough in 1998, arriving on foot by a trail that leads from the visitor center to the eastern side of the slough (rhymes with "blue"). Although I was originally trained as a botanist, you don't have to be an expert to notice how ecologically rich this wetland is. The slough's tule elk are gone, but the area is still home to some 250 species of birds, 500 invertebrates, and hundreds of other animals – including seven endangered or threatened species. Endangered brown pelicans fly overhead scanning for fish; harbor seals sprawl along the muddy banks; and irresistible sea otters cavort in the water. Beneath the surface is a world teeming with life.

And yet, we at Sustainable Conservation also knew then that Elkhorn Slough had one of the worst soil erosion rates on the West Coast and was in danger of literally being buried alive by the soils of adjoining farms. That threat called us to the shores of the Slough to determine what Sustainable Conservation could do to halt, or at least slow, the erosion.

Working closely with the Elkhorn Slough Foundation, the Natural Resources Conservation Service, the Resource Conservation District (RCD) of Monterey County as well as local farmers and other key partners, we identified a major barrier to restoration and how Sustainable Conservation's Partners in Restoration program could help: streamline the process of obtaining necessary permits. Indeed, this was the missing puzzle piece and to date there have been 43 restoration projects that have prevented more than 65,000 tons of sediment from entering the slough system and helped reduced erosion by 50 percent.

Our success in the Elkhorn Slough watershed led us to replicate Partners in Restoration in other areas, working with other coastal RCDs covering the Salinas River, Morro Bay, Marin Coastal and Navarro River watersheds. We are working on additional projects in the Humboldt, Santa Cruz and San Diego counties.

We're pleased that Sustainable Conservation has found innovative ways to support private landowners in their efforts to be good stewards of their land and provide healthy habitat for native creatures. And, we're proud that Governor Schwarzenegger singled out our work for the prestigious 2004 Environmental and Economic Leadership Award. (See back page.) I have no doubt there is more good news to come.

Ashley Boren,
 Executive Director

Elkhorn Slough, Monterey County, California
 Photo credit: Elkhorn Slough Foundation

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Sustainable Conservation



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Working Farms Create Healthy Landscapes

Sustainable Conservation goes to work in California's scenic, biologically sensitive watersheds to help keep habitat healthy on and around working farms and ranches.

We launched our Partners in Restoration program in 1998 to make it easier for private landowners to carry out habitat restoration and species protection projects, which is crucial because much of California's remaining habitat is located on or alongside privately owned working landscapes. Partners in Restoration dramatically

simplifies a complex regulatory review process so that private landowners can obtain permits much faster, easier and cheaper for projects that protect clean water and restore the natural ecosystems on their land.

Partners in Restoration staff and their regulatory partners – Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) and local Resource Conservation Districts (RCDs) – work together to get a master “pre-approved” permit for a specific set of appropriate conservation measures that local landowners can undertake without going through the normal process of submitting permit requests to multiple agencies. This partnership ensures that projects meet all regulatory requirements, while the participating landowners save a tremendous amount of time, money and uncertainty.

Sustainable Conservation takes the lead in developing the permitting strategy and facilitating interagency communication and agreements. NRCS and RCDs take the lead in identifying necessary conservation practices and conditions acceptable to the regulatory agencies, as well as building relationships with landowners and developing project plans.

“Sustainable Conservation's effective leadership has created Partners in Restoration programs that span the length

of California. These programs have made it possible for private landowners to install more than 65 Natural Resources Conservation Service and the Regional Conservation District designed projects,” stated Daniel Mountjoy, Area Resource Conservationist with the USDA – Natural Resources Conservation Service. In addition to restoring miles of streams, this work has prevented tens of thousands of tons of soil from eroding and entering waterways, destroying habitat and degrading water quality.

Working collaboratively with the NRCS and RCD, Sustainable Conservation's Partners in Restoration program takes a tact that is both refreshing and effective: the program is a win for landowners, government agencies and the environment.

Landowners praise Partners in Restoration because it eases the road to restoration on their property by providing one-stop permitting for restoration projects. Because regulations place the same requirements on restoration projects as construction/development projects, the complexities of obtaining permits for conservation projects often discourage landowners from taking these important positive steps.

Regulatory agencies advocate for the program because once the

programmatic approvals are in place, the upfront, coordinated review means that regulatory agency staff are able to review project applications more efficiently. Plus, Partners in Restoration helps agencies fulfill their mandates to protect the environment.

The environment benefits because Partners in Restoration results in critical restoration projects that protect and restore water quality, creekside vegetation and the natural functioning of essential habitat for wildlife.

“Everyone at the table, including landowners, regulators, even local environmental groups, is so used to battling each other that it can take several months to build goodwill,” comments Carolyn Remick, Program Director for Restoration on Private Lands. “It has been so rewarding to have landowners, for example, eagerly respond to the opportunity to reduce erosion by collaborating with regulatory agencies.”

Sustainable Conservation's success is drawing tremendous interest from farm, government and environmental groups seeking to promote conservation practices that improve water quality and enhance habitat on private lands. In response, Sustainable Conservation is developing cost-effective ways to reach even more working landowners throughout California. (See sidebar.)



Training Expands *Partners in Restoration's* Reach

As word has spread about the effectiveness of the Partners in Restoration program, requests for the program have come in from other parts of the state including the Central Valley and far northern California.

In order to expand the program quickly and cost-effectively (it takes an average of two years to set up the program in a new local area), Sustainable Conservation decided to explore other options including sharing our permitting expertise. Partners in Restoration staff developed a week-long training program for Resource Conservation District (RCD) and Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) staff from around the state and held the first training in January 2005 at Alameda County's RCD headquarters.

People like Linda Juntunen, of the West Lake RCD, attended the January training and explained, “We're looking forward to seeing this program implemented in Lake County because we believe it will benefit the ranchers and farmers who live here.” She added, “The long-time farmers are frequently our best stewards of the land; the land really matters to these people. So many times they want to do the right thing, but they end up trying to jump bureaucratic hurdles that they just don't have the time or money to overcome, so the improvements just don't get done. I hope to assist them and help them see what can be accomplished through the Partners in Restoration program.”

The training program was attended by 39 people, mostly from the Central Valley and coastal watersheds, where they are encountering the “permitting wall” as they try to carry out restoration projects in their watersheds. Carolyn Remick, Program Director for Restoration on Private Lands, plans to build on this training and says, “The Partners in Restoration staff will be working with each of the trainees to develop a permitting strategy that is appropriate to their watershed, ranging from a full Partners in Restoration-type program to working selectively with a few agencies on single practices.”



“Sustainable Conservation's effective leadership has created Partners in Restoration programs that span the length of California.”

Daniel Mountjoy, Area Resource Conservationist with the USDA – Natural Resources Conservation Service