



**Elkhorn Slough Foundation
Strategic Initiative
July 2010 – June 2015**



**Adopted May 12, 2010
By the Board of Directors**

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The mission of the Elkhorn Slough Foundation (ESF) is to conserve and restore Elkhorn Slough and its watershed. This Strategic Initiative for 2010-2015 outlines how ESF will pursue this mission and continues the work laid out in the Strategic Initiative 2006-2010. This plan takes into consideration the lessons of our 28 year history including the key document of our 1999 Watershed Conservation Plan, which remains the overall blueprint for our conservation efforts.

This document outlines ESF's strategic and organizational approach to protecting Elkhorn Slough, including our mission and vision, our conservation activities, specific outcomes during the next five years and goals, strategies and objectives that will guide our work. The plan describes our activities in three basic categories:

- what we'll do to achieve our mission (the first four goals below);
- how we'll build and maintain the organizational capacity necessary to achieve our mission;
- how we'll maintain our fiscal health.

The plan's six major goals establish our focus for the next five years:

- Conserve and protect key lands in the Elkhorn Slough Watershed.
- Manage these protected lands including working farms and ranches to conserve their natural resources and demonstrate successful conservation use.
- Support programs and activities at the Elkhorn Slough Reserve that are complimentary with our mission.
- Disseminate conservation knowledge to engage the community and advance the value, purpose, and effectiveness of conservation.
- Build and value our human resources to create the culture and capability for long term stability and success.
- Assure the fiscal strength and stability of the Elkhorn Slough Foundation.

The plan describes the major strategies we'll pursue in order to achieve these goals, and includes the specific objectives we've set to help us measure progress.

This plan outlines our goals for the next five years guiding the direction of more in-depth annual planning and budgeting. The annual plans, which are completed as part of the fiscal year budget process, provide an opportunity to measure the progress being made towards the goals laid out in this plan, as well as detailing actions and target completion dates. All dates are based on ESF's fiscal year – July 1 to June 30.

MISSION AND VISION

**The mission of the Elkhorn Slough Foundation is
*to conserve and restore Elkhorn Slough and its watershed.***

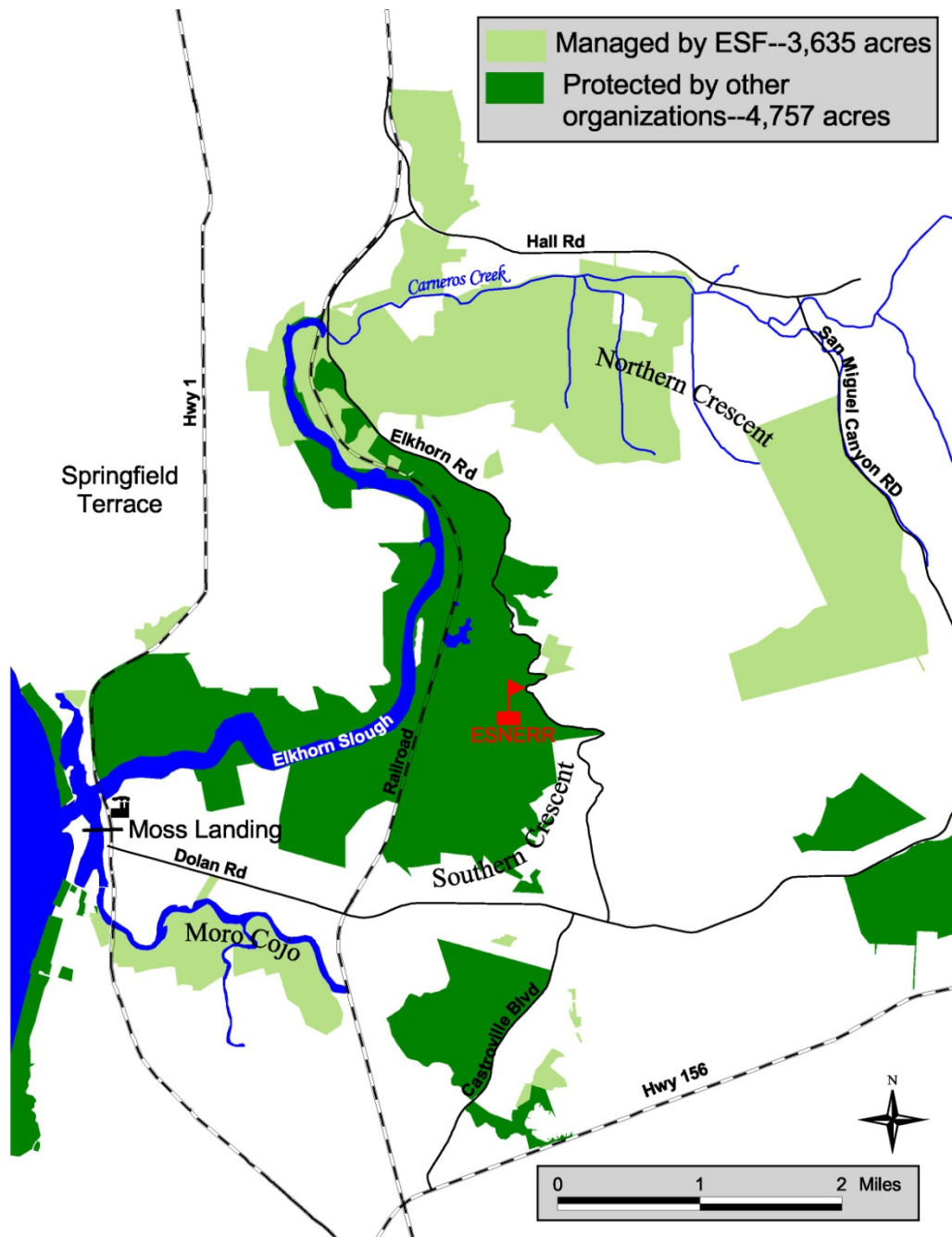
We see Elkhorn Slough and its watershed protected forever. As one of California's last great coastal wetlands, Elkhorn Slough will remain a wellspring of life and a source of inspiration for generations to come.

We see a dynamic balance between human use and natural health. As a working landscape, Elkhorn Slough is a place where people, agriculture, industry and nature thrive together.



Protected Lands of the Elkhorn Slough Watershed

The Elkhorn Slough watershed consists of 45,000 acres. Currently there are more than 8,000 – approximately 18% of the watershed – under conservation protection. The Elkhorn Slough Foundation owns nearly 2,600 acres and is the single largest land owner in the watershed. Additionally, we provide stewardship management for another 1,000 acres. The map below outlines the lands protected within the watershed.



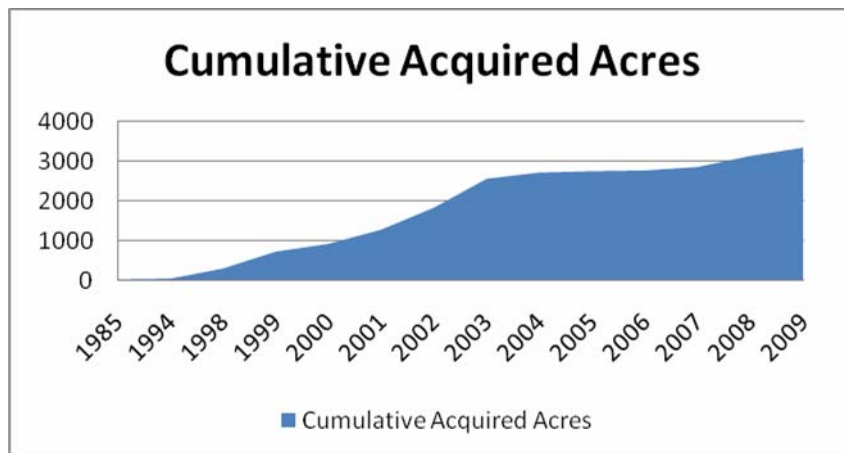
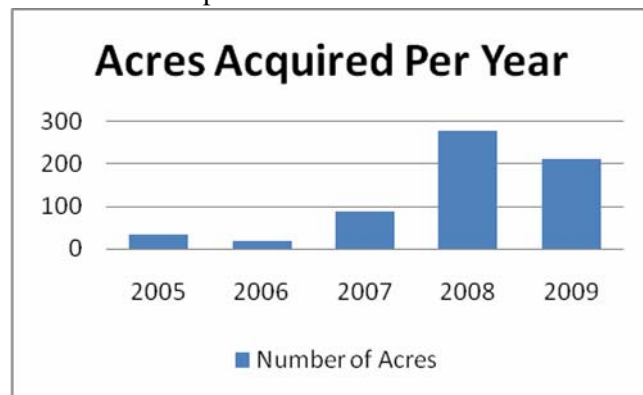
CONTEXT AND OVERVIEW

The last strategic initiative was approved in November 2005. The focus on that plan was to acquire key parcels of land within the watershed in order to ensure its conservation and restoration. With the drastic change in the economy, ESF now has the opportunity to reexamine its goals in light of the “new normal” and the accomplishments set and achieved in the last strategic initiative.

A Brief History of ESF's strategic directions

ESF was formed in 1982 primarily to support the work of the newly created Elkhorn Slough Reserve. Its early successes included the creation of the volunteer, education and research programs at the Reserve and opening and expanding public access. Within a decade ESF took on a new role, when it began managing 800 acres of land owned by The Nature Conservancy. By the late 1990s ESF made the strategic decision to become a land trust with the explicit goal to acquire, protect, and manage land impacting Elkhorn Slough.

In 1999 ESF adopted the Watershed Conservation Plan, developed with key partners, which remains the basis for the current Strategic Initiative. This plan calls for the balanced conservation of land and embraced the notion of a "working landscape." Since adoption of the Watershed Conservation Plan ESF has raised more than \$30 million for land acquisition, restoration and stewardship. Since the last strategic initiative was established ESF acquired more than 600 additional acres to help complete the Northern Crescent and start protection of the Moro Cojo area. ESF currently manages more than 3,600 acres of conservation lands.



Along with increasing the number of acres in protection, the Elkhorn Slough Foundation made progress on each goal outlined in the 2006-2010 Strategic Initiative. The highlights of these accomplishments illustrate the underpinning of ESF's success – a passion for this land,

cooperation with our surrounding neighbors and community, and support of the ESNERR. These highlights include:

- ✓ 450 acres of degraded land actively restored
- ✓ Eradication of non-native invasive jubata grass on 2,000 acres
- ✓ Implemented best management practices on ESF farmlands
- ✓ Near completion of protection of the Northern Crescent of Elkhorn Slough
- ✓ Enhanced technology for staff and board, increasing efficiency
- ✓ Administered federal grants and collaborating on \$4 million stimulus funded grant for Tidal Wetlands Project
- ✓ Implemented contingency planning successfully during economic downturn
- ✓ Obtained funding for land acquisition and stewardship
- ✓ Engagement of the public through volunteer stewardship projects and special events

These achievements are no small task and have required time and money, as well as expanding and training our talented staff. Each accomplishment is a step in our ongoing mission to conserve and restore the Elkhorn Slough and its watershed.

THE PLANNING PROCESS

It was vital to review and determine our success and shortfalls with the 2006-2010 Strategic Initiative in order to develop our plans for the next five years. This review was the first step in updating the initiative. The change in the current economic situation and future forecast were also a focus of this review. Creating a plan without considering these factors would be impractical. The staff then updated the Elkhorn Slough Foundation Board of Directors on the progress and challenges of the previous initiative. The 2010-2015 Strategic Initiative has been developed based on this review process. Additionally, this plan has been created in an effort to serve our community while balancing environmental, human, and financial realities.

As in previous years, we will use this overarching initiative in our annual planning and budgeting process. Annual plans will focus on the vital few objectives critical to moving the organization toward the long-range objectives shown in the plan. Management staff will review the organization's progress quarterly and make adjustments as appropriate. The highest priorities will be tracked and progress will be reported to the board every six months. In recognition of the need for flexibility and responding to changing conditions, the five year plan will be reviewed annually and, if necessary, updated by management and the board.

For consistency, the terms used in the previous Strategic Initiative will be maintained in this document and the annual plans.

Goal: An outcome statement that guides a program or management function.

Strategy: A coordinated, broad approach or direction adopted by an organization in response to the environment so that the organization can achieve its purpose.

Objective: A measurable, time-phased result that supports the achievement of a goal. Objectives in this plan are to be SMART —

S = Stretch, *M* = Measurable, *A* = Attainable, *R* = Realistic, and *T* = Time Constrained

An Overview of the 2010-2015 Strategic Initiative

During the next five years we will build on our past success and the guiding documents that have contributed to those successes. We will take every opportunity to protect – either through the acquisition of property or conservation easement – key parcels effecting the health and future of the Elkhorn Slough. We will launch the second phase of a ten year effort to protect the Southern Crescent and expand the Elkhorn Slough Reserve. We will work to complete protection of the Northern Crescent of lands in the Elkhorn Highlands. We will continue to add to the lands we have protected in Moro Cojo Slough and complete the next phase of its restoration. We will seek opportunities to conserve and restore lands on the Springfield Terrace including the permanent protection of productive farm land.

We will continue to apply cutting edge research and management techniques to steward the land under our care. We will persist to restore degraded lands, protect endangered habitats, and practice environmentally healthy farming. We will maintain – and increase – our support for the Elkhorn Slough Reserve, as the center of educational, research and public access for the Slough. We will provide and expand responsible public access to Elkhorn Slough and its surrounding areas, while maintaining the protection of the land, water, and life of the slough and those seeking to explore and enjoy it.

Elkhorn Slough is uniquely set in a true working landscape. The area consists of residential, industrial, business and agricultural properties, as well as those conserved. From the beginning the Elkhorn Slough Foundation has understood that the protection of Elkhorn Slough can be achieved only through the creation and nurturing of strong working partnerships. In the next five years, we will develop plans to more fully engage the various communities in the area in the conservation of Elkhorn Slough striving to make protecting the environment a community activity. We will set the standard for a non-profit land trust successfully conserving critical habitat while respecting the fact that others live and work off this land.

We highlight the key role of our partner, the Elkhorn Slough National Estuarine Research Reserve, and during the next five years we will enhance our support of the Reserve and its researchers and projects. Through this partnership, we will play a key role in Tidal Wetland Project and explore the impact of climate change and sea level rise on the land and Slough.

Achieving these ambitious goals will require that the Elkhorn Slough Foundation continue to evolve as an organization – and so we will devote attention in the next five years to strengthening our organizational and human resource capacity. We will continue to refine the planning process to more effectively create annual plans and budgets that support the objectives and goals of this Strategic Initiative.

Accomplishing these goals will require a substantial increase in community support. Over the next five years we will increase the number of members and donations to support our work. We will raise more than \$2.5 million in donations and private grants cumulatively. We will continue to build our endowment from its current amount of \$3 million to \$6 million by 2015 and eventually to \$10 million by 2020.

We move into the next five years aware of how much remains to be done. Because we know how much has already been accomplished, we are confident that these goals can be achieved. We are committed to protecting this great and threatened natural resource for the health of the environment and enjoyment of future generations.



OUR CONSERVATION ACTIONS

Because Elkhorn Slough is the one of the largest remaining coastal wetlands in California, we are committed to the following actions we believe will help protect Elkhorn Slough forever:

1. We will serve as model stewards of the land under our care, continually monitoring and adapting our land management approaches.
2. We will protect vital habitats, either through the acquisition of property or conservation easements.
3. We will demonstrate on our lands the compatibility of well-managed farming and other land uses with environmental protection and promote the conservation of working landscapes. We embrace the positive role humanity can have on the landscape.
4. We will engage and educate key constituencies and the broader community about the value of and threats to this rare and endangered environment – and about how we can all work to further its protection.
5. We will work in partnership with others to accomplish these goals. Sometimes we will take on a leadership role, sometimes a catalytic role, sometimes a supportive role – depending on the situation.
6. We will serve as a model and leader in the conservation and non-profit communities, sharing our experience and encouraging all players to learn from each other.

Taken together, these activities are essential to achieving the future expressed in our vision statement – to protect Elkhorn Slough, and other wetlands, forever.

STRATEGIC INITIATIVE OUTCOMES

All of the work conducted by the Elkhorn Slough Foundation is in the effort to achieve our vision of the Elkhorn Slough and its watershed protected forever, a wellspring of life and a source of inspiration for generations to come. Each year during this Strategic Initiative we will move closer to that vision. Detailed strategies and objectives are outlined and updated annually to ensure success, however we have identified the following overarching outcomes for this plan. During the next five years, the Elkhorn Slough Foundation will...

- complete transition of The Nature Conservancy's Elkhorn Slough watershed preserved land to ESF ownership maximizing the opportunity to communicate and promote the overall conservation of Elkhorn Slough.
- complete the Regional Water Quality Board (RWQB) Elkhorn Slough Environmental Enhancement and Mitigation Plan.
- review, refine, and update the Elkhorn Slough conservation plan assuring protection of the Springfield Terrace, Elkhorn Highlands, and Moro Cojo Slough.
- facilitate high quality stewardship of our lands to ensure a healthy landscape where people, farming, and nature mutually thrive.
- continue our active partnership with the Elkhorn Slough Reserve by; managing grant funding, supporting Reserve programs, and adding protected land to the Reserve, as appropriate.
- support the Elkhorn Slough Tidal Wetland Project through the implementation of the Parson's Slough restoration plan.
- invest in continued development of our human resources through training, evaluation, and positive communication.
- generate a strong and steady stream of contributions from individuals, business, and foundations that is consistent with meeting our evolving conservation goals.
- assess all steps necessary in each functional area to achieve Land Trust Alliance (LTA) compliance.



STRATEGIC INITIATIVE – JULY 2010 – JUNE 2015 GOALS AND STRATEGIES

Conserve and protect key lands in the watershed

- Review and refine our 15 year acquisition plan and define mission success.
- Transfer Nature Conservancy lands to ESF.
- Protect key land and land uses through easements, including productive farm land and groundwater recharge zone.
- Acquire key properties to protect rare and threatened habitats, contingent on funding.

Manage protected lands to conserve their natural resources and demonstrate successful conservation use

- Restore degraded natural areas.
- Protect habitat needs and functionality for rare and endangered species using latest science.
- Manage a sound conservation easement (CE) program.
- Utilize volunteers where possible to support land management activities.
- Manage working lands to support healthy food production while maintaining appropriate land stewardship ethic.
- Control spread of target invasive non-native plant species.
- Expand public access possibilities and educational opportunities.

Support programs and activities at the Elkhorn Slough National Estuarine Research Reserve that are complementary to our mission

- Redefine and reinvigorate the ESF/Reserve partnership.
- Provide administrative support for grant funded education and research activities at the Reserve.
- Assist the Reserve's land acquisition program.
- Provide direct funding assistance to support Reserve activities.
- Coordinate publicity and communications about Elkhorn Slough with the Reserve.
- Disseminate conservation knowledge to engage the community and advance the value, purpose and effectiveness of conservation.
- Participate in the Tidal Wetland Project's development and implementation.
- Promote the concept and value of conservation within the Elkhorn Slough Community.
- Promote the concept of land conservation in a working landscape.
- Build and nurture formal and informal connections with stakeholders and colleagues.

- Actively participate in national, state and regional conservation organizations.
- Encourage scientific research and land management experimentation on our lands and throughout the watershed.
- Serve local community needs for education and enjoyment through ecologically sustainable public access of Elkhorn Slough and its watershed.

Build and value our human resources creating the culture and capability for long term stability and success

- Ensure a strong Board of Directors.
- Create a planning culture to guide our work.
- Establish a robust volunteer program that supports the Reserve's and ESF's mission.
- Create and maintain a healthy, productive, collegial, collaborative and innovative work environment and culture.
- Review and refine policies and procedures.
- Promote development and refinement of leadership capabilities for Board and Staff.

Assure the fiscal strength and stability of the Elkhorn Slough Foundation.

- Develop and articulate a clear picture of ESF's short and long term revenue and spending needs for mission success.
- Raise funds sufficient to acquire the properties to ensure Mission Success.
- Increase individual giving support to ESF.
- Expand and increase the diversity of contributions made to ESF.
- Explore and optimize appropriate land donations and revenue.
- Increase ESF visibility with a defined ESF brand to enhance contributions and increase donor loyalty.
- Increase access to our lands for recruitment and cultivation of members and major donors.
- Increase annual Board giving and Board participation in fundraising.
- Continue to explore the concept and feasibility of naming rights for land features and properties.
- Increase development and communications capacity to achieve above objectives.

In the full Strategic Plan (available on request), each strategy above is supported by a detailed list of Objectives.

