

II-0113

**SONOMA BAYLANDS' LOWER RANCH PARCEL:
ACQUISITION AND HABITAT RESTORATION PROJECT**

Applicant:

Sonoma Land Trust
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DWR WAREHOUSE
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a. Project Description

This two-phase project would begin with Sonoma Land Trust's acquisition of fee title to the Lower Ranch parcel: 526 acres of diked historic tidal marsh, in southwestern Sonoma County. The property is on the northern shoreline of San Pablo Bay, east of the mouth of the Petaluma River. Adjacent properties are presently owned in fee by Sonoma Land Trust and California State Coastal Conservancy (CSCC). Lower Ranch is a key parcel in establishing a cohesive ecosystem approach to SLT's successful Sonoma Baylands Wetlands Demonstration Project (SBWDP).

SLT currently holds an agricultural conservation easement (CE) on Lower Ranch. The property, now planted in hay, is targeted for agricultural development and listed for sale. The CE has prevented the property from commercial development, but fee ownership is necessary for conversion into wetlands.

Phase Two is long-term management plan to enhance existing tidal and seasonal wetlands in the Sonoma Baylands/Petaluma River ecosystem. SLT will incorporate experience gained from ongoing tidal marsh restoration projects adjacent to the property in this comprehensive plan. The multi-agency SBWDP involves: restoration of seasonal flood plain freshwater wetlands; enhancement of saline emergent wetland using natural propagation of marsh grasses as sources of nutrient cycling; and, determining the presence and abundance of avian species in the tidal flats including the endangered Clapper Rail.

b. Biological Objectives

Subject property is categorized as "prior converted" wetlands under COE and EPA criteria, having been converted from historic wetland values to agriculture prior to adoption of the Clean Water Act. Agricultural conversion of diked baylands and management of the water table through pumping and drainage ditches permit the use of the area for hay crops to the detriment of wetlands values and habitat restoration.

The primary biological objective is to restore, enhance and protect wetlands through a long term conversion process increasing the historic tidal and seasonal wetlands and wildlife habitat in the Sonoma Baylands/Petaluma River watershed.

c. Approach and Schedule:

- Initial acquisition stage: months 1-6
- Final acquisition and transfer: months 7-10
- Restoration & Management Plan Development: months 11-24

d. Justification for Project Funding by CALFED

This project is within the geographical limits of the CalFed Bay-Delta program and will provide direct benefit in the reclamation of tidal brackish bay lands and seasonal wetlands, both priority habitats.

The acquisition and conversion of this property will provide an immediate benefit by creating critical mass with the adjacent parcels which are currently being reclaimed as salt marsh habitat under the Sonoma Baylands Wetlands Demonstration Project. Acquisition will minimize the isolation of the property and allow for a management plan that addresses the influences of the adjacent expansion of tidal wetlands.

Long term benefits include alignment with a regional ecosystem approach to wetlands creation. This project will benefit the natural habitat for two federally-listed endangered species: the Clapper Rail and the salt marsh harvest mouse. Once agricultural use ceases, several listed plant species will naturally and rapidly propagate at Lower Ranch, assisting in nutrient web cycling into San Pablo Bay.

e. Budget Costs (\$000's) and Third Party Impacts

Project Phase and Task	Dir.Sal/Benefits	Overhead	Service	Acquisition/Fees	Totals
Land Acquisition	10	50	10	800	870
Management Planning*	40	50	60		150
Total					1,020

*Likely cost share from state and federal non-Category III sources.

The primary third party impact will result from the eventual conversion of cropland, now used for hay production, to wetland. No specific mitigation for this is planned as part of this project.

f. Applicant Qualifications

The Sonoma Land Trust, a non-profit 501(c)(3) organization, was founded in 1976 and has protected nearly 11,000 acres in Sonoma County. SLT works with willing landowners to preserve open space and wildlife habitat lands in perpetuity. SLT presently owns sixteen conservation easements and owns nine properties in fee. Qualified professional staff includes David Katz, a 23 year veteran of natural resource and agricultural management. An eighteen member Board of Trustees governs the organization which currently has 1200 active members.

SLT has worked in partnership with various agencies including DFG, COE, EPA, USFWS and the Sonoma County Agricultural Preservation and Open Space District. SLT is the originating partner in the nationally-acclaimed Sonoma Baylands Marsh Restoration Project. In partnership with COE, the Port of Oakland and the CSCC, Sonoma Bayland is an innovative project to reclaim marsh lands using a private-public partnership model.

SLT's history in managing and producing studies is well documented. Currently, SLT has been retained by the CSCC to carry out a study of Sonoma Coast Properties and their potential for preservation and recreational use in Sonoma County. The study will be used by local agencies as a basis for implementing acquisition activity that will also involve State and Federal agencies.

g. Monitoring and Data Evaluation

Lower Ranch has been monitored annually since 1986. Complete data collection and monitoring, with reports distributed to appropriate agencies for response, will be done on an annual basis.

h. Local Support/Coordination with other Programs/Compatibility with CALFED Objectives:

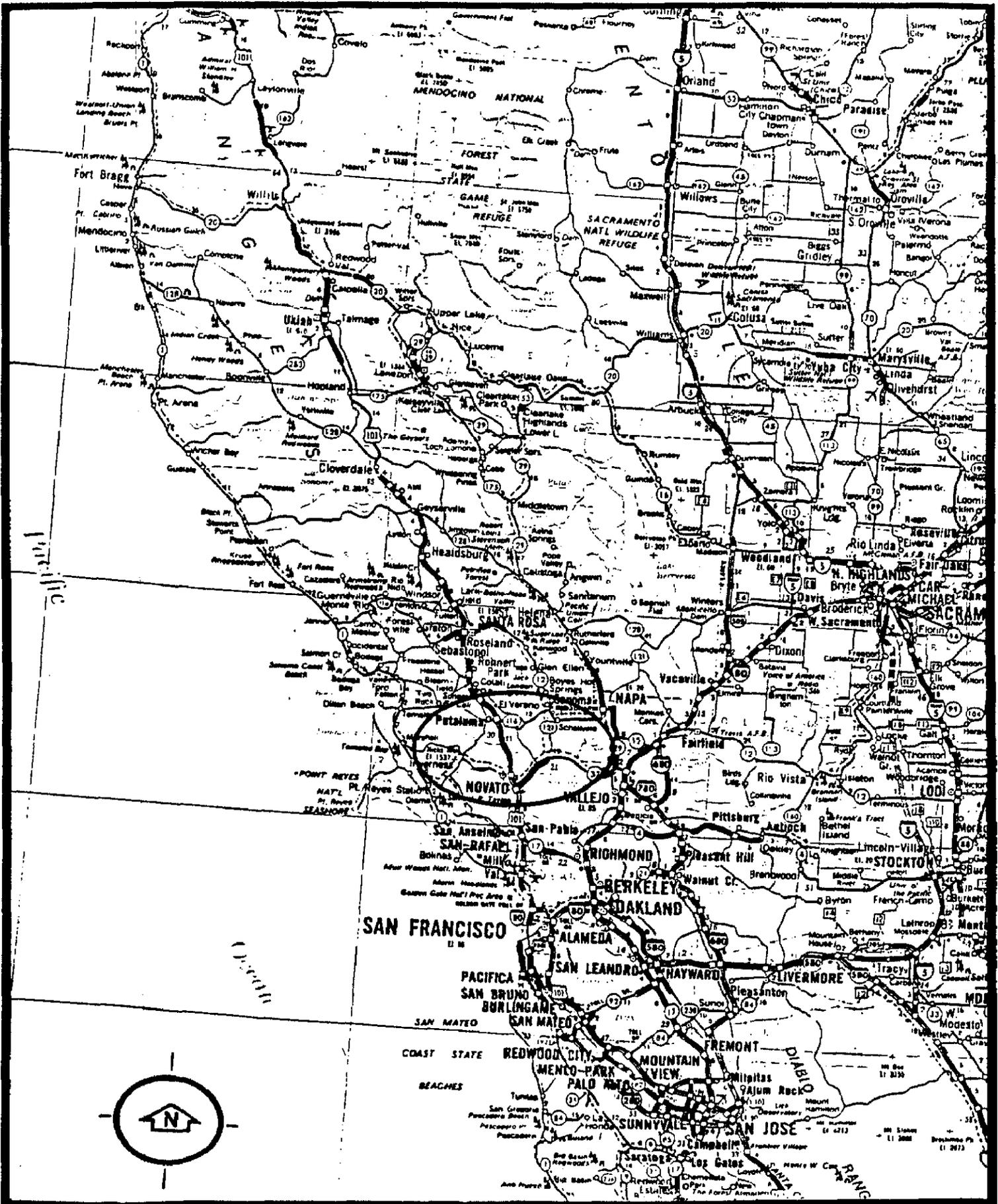
Sonoma Land Trust will work closely with the Coastal Conservancy, BCDC, USFWS, DFG, COE, appropriate Sonoma County agencies, USEPA, CalEPA, and other agencies and programs where appropriate.

The addition of the Lower Ranch parcel to the Sonoma Baylands Wetlands Demonstration Project will enable the overall project to realize its full potential as a non-flow related ecosystem restoration project that encompasses a range of wetlands reclamation types and restoration strategies. The project is already producing valuable data that will enable other successful restoration projects and serves as a model of local-state-federal cooperation in wetlands restoration and management.

Location Map

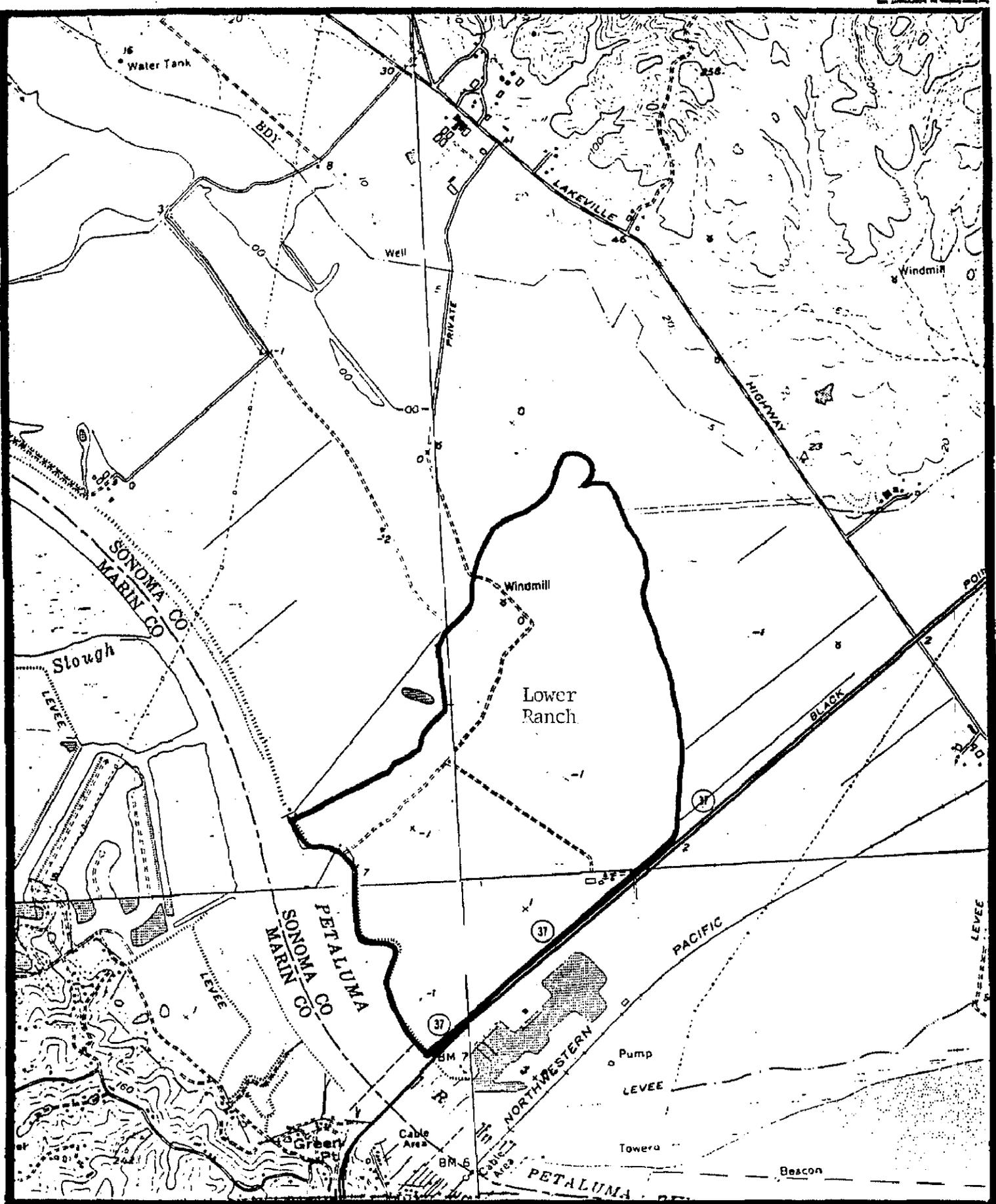
Sonoma Land Trust

Location Map - Cat. III Inquiry Submittal



Topographical Map

Sonoma Land Trust - Location map - Cat. III Inquiry Submittal



Sonoma Land Trust Cat. III Inquiry Submittal
Map showing target parcel (Lower Ranch) in relation to
Sonoma Baylands Wetlands Demonstration Project parcels

Map by Don Ryan

