

SDC's Future Is Sonoma Valley's Future

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It is no small thing to close a 135-year-old, 860-acre facility. The closure of Sonoma Developmental Center is a complex, multi-layered process with many stakeholders. Sonoma Ecology Center has taken a keen interest in this process. The majority of this land is critical Sonoma Valley open space, with vital habitat, water, and wildlife resources, which it is our mission to protect and preserve. Plus, our main offices are located there!

This is why we've been closely involved in discussions about SDC's future, pushing for a large area of contiguous open space from Sonoma Mountain to Lake Suttonfield and Highway 12 – land that can and should enhance the [Sonoma Valley Wildlife Corridor](#) – to remain fully protected. We provided our partners at Sonoma County's Ag and Open Space District with background data and text for a natural resources assessment of the property in 2015, and worked with Sonoma Land Trust and other partners on a land protection strategy to help guide decisions about the property during its closure and transition afterward.

We've also been on the leadership committee of the SDC Coalition, headed by Sonoma County Supervisor Susan Gorin, since its formation. A compelling current topic for the Coalition is the design of a governance structure for the property – one that could take the community's wishes for the property to fruition even through the next California administration.

So we are encouraged by a recent report calling for protection of the open space areas surrounding the SDC campus. The report, issued by a large team of expert consultants, headed by design firm WRT, and discussed during a [June 23 public meeting](#) at Hanna Boys Center, categorized that land as "most protected" and recommended that it remain completely undisturbed. The report properly acknowledges the immense value of the property's forests, fisheries, riparian forests, springs, meadows, views, water infiltration capacity, trails, and wildlife. Hundreds of local residents participated in that meeting, and have submitted input there and at other meetings, demonstrating how seriously this process is being taken by Sonoma Valley residents.

SDC's final fate is not yet decided. But rest assured we will continue advocating for wise uses of its developed land and conservation of its undeveloped land. If we do this well, the community will eventually see a revitalized central area serving important community needs. And the diverse array of plants and animals that rely on this open space will continue to grow and thrive.

Anyone interested in helping keep SDC's open space open is encouraged to visit the [Save Our Space fundraising campaign website](#). SOS was started by local Glen Ellen

residents to help the Ecology Center in its key role in protecting the SDC property. Donations may also be made [through our website](#).