



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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LandPaths' Rancho Mark West preserve, home to our beloved Owl Camp and other essential nature programming, suffered major damage to infrastructure and land after the Glass fire burned through the property.

SANTA ROSA, CA.—October 9, 2020—Like so many in the Mark West Creek watershed community, LandPaths' suffered loss and devastation to our 120-acre Rancho Mark West preserve due to the Glass fire.

With accessible pathways and proximity to Santa Rosa, Rancho Mark West is our 120-acre outdoor classroom, community hub, and wild place of refuge in the Mayacamas Mountains. It is located on the traditional homeland of the Southern Pomo and Wappo peoples.

Jim and Betty Doerksen purchased Rancho Mark West in 1967. The Doerksens have worked tirelessly, planting upwards of "one million trees," according to Jim. They also started the Doerksen Christmas Tree Farm – once a favorite holiday tradition for many families throughout the Bay Area. And they've long hosted school groups for field trips and nature experiences on the land.

LandPaths, with assistance from the California Coastal Conservancy, purchased Rancho Mark West in 2011. Under the purchase terms, Jim and Betty Doerkson, have a reserved life estate on the property. Since those early days, the Doerksens have actively stewarded Rancho Mark West for fire fuel reduction. With assist from LandPaths' volunteers, the Doerksens have worked to reduce "fuel ladders" built up from the remnants of nearly a century of woody build up in West Coast forests as naturally-occurring fires were suppressed. |

"Beloved by thousands of people over the decades that it has been shared so graciously by the Doerksens, we know that Rancho Mark West will bloom again," said Craig Anderson, Executive Director at LandPaths. "It is however, heart-wrenching in this moment, to walk through ashes where only this summer was a happy din of children, crickets, and the rustle of leaves and redwood needles."

LandPaths' outdoor nature camps and environmental education programs have brought thousands of children and families to the property for hiking, canoeing, exploring, and studying redwood ecology and all manner of plants and natural history. Our community garden has

Commented [GU1]: Since those early days, Jim & Bed have been actively stewarding RMW for fire fuel reduction.

provided seeds, food, and inspiration to hundreds during Owl Camp, outings, and community gatherings. The land has always been there as a place for refuge and joy when the community needed it most: From pop-up nature camps for fire-impacted kids in 2017 to the only in-person, Covid-19 safe, fully outdoor summer camps during the coronavirus pandemic. |

In terms of recovery at Rancho Mark West, we are happy to say that the iconic red barn still stands. But we have lost the vintage fire truck where kids have played for more than a decade. The fire also destroyed the well-tended organic community garden, the outdoor kitchen used for gatherings and camps, two large water tanks, outhouses, the pole barn over the fire truck, camp canopies, fencing, and other infrastructure. The redwood grove and rest of the forest are currently a hard-hat zone, completely off limits to anyone but fire crews. We are still assessing the impact on the land and what it means for holding camps and programs there for the foreseeable future.

As LandPaths grapples with the extent of the destruction and damage to Rancho Mark West, our stewardship staff is also working up north to repair two miles of bulldozed line breaks at Riddell Preserve. Our 400-acre preserve in the hills west of Healdsburg was burned in the Walbridge fire at the end of August.

Today, Friday, October 9, LandPaths is launching a Fire Recovery Campaign to raise funds for both preserves. These funds will be used to implement erosion control and invasive plant mitigation at Riddell Preserve, which needs to happen before the winter rains begin. They will also be used to assess the damage and begin the long recovery and rebuild process at Rancho Mark West.

For additional information and to set up interviews about the Glass fire's impact on Rancho Mark West, please contact Leilani Clark at leilani@landpaths.org or 707. 332.4736 (cell).

About LandPaths

Established in 1996, LandPaths is a nonprofit organization with the mission of fostering a love of the land in Sonoma County. Diverse by design, Landpaths achieves our mission through three initiatives: rooting youth in nature, branching out conservation for everyone, and growing community with nature. We inspire people to experience the beauty of Sonoma County, understand the value of local open spaces, and participate in stewarding the land.

www.landpaths.org.

Commented [GU2]: Suggested text to drive home the community aspect of this place, now and into the future, and has ripple of impact for so many: As recently as this summer LandPaths at RMW hosted one of the only in-person fully outdoor summer camps during the pandemic, and offered refuge and joy for kids through pop-up camps after the Tubbs fire. The very fire truck impacted was where kids would play out their fire trauma, a part of healing, With great appreciation the iconic barn still stands.