Convergence

A story of people, place and opportunity at Carr Lake

by Peter Forbes
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convergence
kənˈvɜrjəns/
noun
• the tendency of unrelated animals to evolve similarly.
• the merging of distinct technologies, industries, or devices into a unified whole.
• progress towards equity.
• the act of moving toward union.
“When I have a stranger in my office, they almost always walk over and stare at that map on my wall and point at that big blank spot in the middle of our city and ask, “What the heck is that place? I tell them: that’s Carr Lake.”
-Gary Petersen, former Salinas Public Works Director

“The only thing I can commit to is being alongside Big Sur Land Trust until the end. We'll stay together and do our best. We might win less or win more, but the relationship is what matters most. The relationship is as important to us as the land. Count on me and I'll count on you.”
-Sabino Lopez, Acting Director, Center for Community Advocacy

“Big Sur Land Trust has this opportunity to do something uniquely different. They have the opportunity to capture history and to help us make something really beautiful for our community. I say this to them, ‘Don’t be afraid. If you stand by us, we will stand by you.’ ”
-Juan Carlos Gonzalez, Director, Urban Arts Collaborative

Photo by Peter Forbes
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by Peter Forbes
The story you are about to read could not occur at any other time, the possibility forming slowly as a hunger in a collective imagination. The many unique strengths of the place – Salinas, California – could not fully blossom until a hundred and fifty years of immigrants had planted seeds into her earth to make a strong, diverse culture. Young children laboring in agricultural fields had to grow up, run for office, and become leaders of that city. The land, Carr Lake, the seat of generations of work and feeding people, needed to be fully surrounded by that city, looking in at it, for its significance to be seen. Generations of Japanese-American farmers needed to steward that land through thick and thin. The voice of a community needed to express its yearnings for reconciliation and connection in ways that others could hear. A land trust – Big Sur Land Trust – needed to hone enough experience to be able to imagine a more expansive promise for its work, and to listen to a different community speaking to them. It had to nurture leaders strong and credible enough to follow the path to Salinas and to attract supporters who believed in them. All this had to happen in order for Carr Lake to transform from a blank spot on a map to the possibility of a giant central park, a bridge for a people toward the strength of their history and nature. This place always is and always has been evolving, shifting, growing and changing, and now it is on a cusp of convergence of culture and ideas that has the potential to take it to a new place of ecological and social well-being. This is the story of that beginning.

Chapter 1

Seasons
Laura Lee Lienk has done this many times before, yet she still seems to appreciate the dramatic effect. In one gentle tilt of her water bottle, she sends water cascading down a large, bronze scale model of the Gabilan Mountains and the entire Salinas Valley, replicating a rainstorm to explain the intricate hydrology of this huge watershed. She pours the water onto the mountain range like a god from above and I watch intently as the water separates into the several steep valleys of the mountain and quickly gathers in three separate creeks: the Alisal, the Natividad, and the Gabilan. A second later these three creeks spill the water into one shallow depression on the valley floor. I stare at the puddle there in the middle of the scale model and worry to myself: too bad the model is broken and doesn’t show the water flowing all the way to the sea. Laura Lee watches me patiently. Anticipating me not getting the picture, she waits no longer: “That’s Carr Lake.”

Carr Lake: a place of convergence. Convergence of water, history, people. 480 acres of mostly floodplain and active agriculture in the center of a city of 160,000 people. Bounded by the rodeo grounds just to the northwest, by Natividad – the safety net hospital – to the north, the Alisal neighborhood to the east, and public schools to the south. Right there nestled next to Highway 101, fast food chains, and motels like Super 8, Comfort Inn, and Motel 6.

Carr Lake represents, too, the convergence of ideas about what nature and place mean to different people throughout a dynamic history. It focuses the aspirations of a conservation organization – Big Sur Land Trust – to honor differences and to facilitate a convergence of ecology and sociology, of natural and social justice.

On the first day I’m in Salinas, I sit on street pavement on one edge of Carr Lake and watch a parade of a hundred cowboys on high-stepping horses carrying federal and state flags to the rodeo grounds less than a mile away. Ten minutes later I’m on the other side at Natividad Creek Park being drawn through the woods into a clearing by the beat of a drum. For hours, I’m mesmerized by trance-like dancing from an Aztec world pulsing on flutes, drums and the deep blood memories of ancestral rhythms. Saturated in such different cultures, I could easily be on different continents, not different blocks in the same city.
Historically, Carr Lake divides and separates a city: Whites to the west and south; Latinos to the north and east. But might it one day be, instead, a bridge that connects and heals? Salinas’ former Public Works Director, Gary Petersen, sees that as its promise: “The potential of Carr Lake is to bring this community together, physically and metaphorically, to remember the past but also to co-create a new story for ourselves. You change the story and you change it all.”

Lorri Koster, who grew up in Salinas to become a leading businesswoman, sees something similar: “It can become our Central Park. Anyone can see it from Highway 101. Imagine if what people saw was beauty and a place open to all of Salinas. Wouldn’t that change the story? I hope we can tell the stories of the people that have created this place: Chinese, Japanese, and Latinos. Carr Lake might make us proud of our shared history and help us to say, ‘I care about this place. This is my home.’ ”

Big Sur Land Trust cares deeply about home and nature, but their roots are in a different place and culture. They have put themselves at significant financial risk by buying a key part of Carr Lake and thereby making possible Salinas’ dream. “This will be yours, what should it become, what do you want there? How can this land help you?” By creating time and space for the community to answer, the land trust’s dream is to create a people’s park and to learn what the next generation of conservation might look like.

Larry Imwalle meets me in the offices of Action Council of Monterey County, a social justice incubator organization he’s worked at for twenty years. Larry has never lost his passion for observing his home through a lens of justice and political action. He sees something transformational in Carr Lake:

“What normally divides us in Salinas is the exact thing that can unite us. Just like the water that flows into Carr Lake, I hope that the people flow in. This is the reservoir of our community. I don’t think Salinas has ever had a civic project like this, one that very intentionally is about building a community from among all of our stories.”

Alfred Diaz-Infante, President/CEO of CHISPA, the region’s largest nonprofit affordable housing developer, speaks of Carr Lake as “a public kitchen table,” a safe natural place around which families can gather to know the stories of their relatives, “a park connected to well-being, health, and the preservation of our people. My vision is that more and more people in Salinas will strengthen themselves by being on the land and in nature. For Latinos, nature is our culture. We are descendants of Aztecs and Mayans. Many of us here come from rural places where we are very familiar with nature. I know horses, the beaches, the acacias. Latinos didn’t have a nature deficit disorder until we arrived here in Salinas.”
Chapter 3
Salinas

The roots of Salinas are a fine web of stories. First came the stories of Native people – the original Californians. Then came the stories of people coming and coming, over many centuries: the Spanish, Mexican, Chinese, then Japanese, then Filipinos. Okies fleeing the wind and dust came next, and then the Braceros from Mexico, and along the way indigenous people from Central and South America. They are still coming, heartbeats across the land, every day.

The Native tribes of the region had stories rooted in the original landscape. With the onslaught of new people came a change in these stories. Louise J. Miranda Ramirez, Ohlone Costanoan Esselen Nation (OCEN) Tribal Chairwoman, lived in Salinas as a child, and was told to change her story:

“There was never enough money to pay the rent, so we moved around all the time. When I lived in Salinas I went to the Roosevelt School. The city was being built around us in the 1950s, so for fun we’d ride cardboard boxes down the huge hills of soil that were piled up around the neighborhoods. My great aunt was married to a Filipino and we spent a lot of time with family at the farm labor camps. We felt more comfortable there.

My grandfather would tell me and the other children that we could not say that we were Natives. We needed to say we were Mexicans, because if anyone knew we were Natives, the Federal government would take us away and ship us off somewhere.”

Others come with their own stories, and they have stories placed on them. The Japanese were known by the bankers for always paying their loans and so they became successful business partners. The Filipinos? They were known for being the first to create unions. The Mexican farm workers were the activists: they had a leader named Cesar Chavez who preached non-violence and confronted the established system more than any group before.

Like the unique circumstances of our place in the Milky Way creating just the right conditions for life, consider the geographic, hydrologic and political conditions that gathered laborers
A Native Perspective

I often tell people it was becoming a time that Native people were not viewed as bad people anymore. For the longest time people’s views were based on how the cowboy story went, but a different, more educated understanding seemed to be emerging. And yet, right now, in this political atmosphere, it’s really hard to say that.

The word for hunger in our language is *mashaipa*. And our word for White people is *matshaipa*, meaning “the hungry people.” It has been our experience that White people are hungry for the land and everything else. As Natives, we are different: we exist with the land and everything else.

Now, as Native people, our need to be together is even more important, because historically, the American culture almost succeeded in what they wanted – which was to eliminate us – not only eliminating our culture, but us as humans. And still, they could not diminish our desire and need to be who we are – that has stayed inside of us through all our challenges.

We need to have a home base, for all of us to be together, because that’s what they took from us. They also took our ability to know each other and share our life and culture. That’s why we are working so hard to have a home base. We’re too far away from each other. We need a place that we know is ours to go to when we want to talk to someone who knows what’s inside of us.

We often wonder, why is it so easy for you to see us continue to disappear? Because that is what happens when we do not have a place to be together.

It’s important. I don’t know if other people understand the way that we feel about our ancestors, how they are part of us and guiding us still. And being open to our ancestors’ continued existence in our lives today. Being together brings that part of us back. Having a place would bring the people together.

*Louise J. Miranda Ramirez, OCEN Tribal Chairwoman*
from all over the earth to this one place, Salinas, to live out an American story of opportunity and exploitation, of land and people. Some were brought as prisoners – such as Native people brought by the Spanish colonizers to work the land – while others were drawn here searching for opportunity. East Salinas – the Alisal – in the 1930s was where one could buy a lot for $500 or five years of pay. Today, ten laborers or more live in those same homes. Many of them came as children to work in the fields and stayed to become leaders: Sabino Lopez, Henry Hibino, Gloria De La Rosa.

Gloria’s grandfather arrived as a first-generation Bracero (bracero meaning "manual laborer" or "one who works using his arms"), through the federal program started in 1942 when the United States signed an agreement with Mexico guaranteeing decent living conditions in exchange for labor. Gloria's mother and father met as farm workers in the orchards of Salinas, and Gloria began working in the fields when she was 17, bending down for ten hours a day for $1.10 an hour. Today, Gloria is a Salinas city councilmember.

“We lived in labor camps, we had two pairs of shoes: one for school and one for Easter. They were black and white. I remember taking care of things. You conserved things. My memories were about fun because we were kids and we had to have fun. We had a big transistor radio on the hood of the truck that played all day as we worked. My mother opened my eyes to our rights. The owner of the fields didn’t provide any bathrooms so my mother was forced to squat in the open field which was humiliating.”

During WWII, another group of local residents suffered great humiliation. Japanese farmers in Salinas were hauled off their land after Pearl Harbor and put into horse stalls at the rodeo grounds until they could be moved further away to internment camps. Henry Hibino was just a kid then, but he remembers the four years spent in Arizona and how hard it was to return to Salinas after the war. “It was the only place we knew, but Salinas was a tough place after WWII. Japanese people were not popular.” Yet, with its difficulties, Salinas was a place of opportunity for Henry Hibino and his family. Four years after returning from the internment camp, they were able to buy back land. Fifteen years later they had 200 acres under cultivation in Salinas. It was very hard work and money was tight. “There were days when we couldn’t pay our diesel bill.” But Henry and his father kept at it. Thirty years after the internment camps, Henry Hibino was elected mayor of Salinas. Henry modestly told me: “My election … yea, it probably was a victory for change.”

Today, 70 percent of our nation’s lettuce is grown in the Salinas Valley (Magdaleno, 2016), often by people who are the working poor and hungry themselves. Eighteen percent of the Salinas population are unauthorized immigrants (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2016); one in three of them are
not getting enough food (defined as food-insecure) and, in the Alisal, seventeen percent are living in overcrowded conditions.

Tenoch Ortiz, writing for the California Endowment, described it this way: “Nestled in California’s lush central coast is the small community of East Salinas, in Monterey County, where I live and raise my children. This region, like many others, is reeling from a history of trauma, inflicted by systemic violence and racism towards the Latino community, including stark health disparities, structural inequality and an over-reliance on incarceration with minimal use of community-based alternatives.”

In California, if you’re Latino you’re twice as likely to live in poverty as a White person. (Kaiser Family Foundation). Many of the unauthorized workers are deeply rooted in Salinas, having lived here for more than a decade. Most have children in the schools. Some draw the implicit connection between difficult living conditions and Salinas’ high crime rate (Seven times the national rate), but that’s only one side of the story of this dynamic place. What one sees and feels in Salinas is vibrancy and resilience: block after block of small businesses, a nationally ranked community college, art everywhere, and a unique public eloquence about wanting to both honor and transcend history.

Juan Carlos Gonzalez, known as “JC”, is the director of the Urban Arts Collaborative, and got to know Carr Lake by sneaking through its edges with friends on his way to the skateboard park, following footpaths along the creeks. JC was raised by his grandmother in Mexico and tried living in San Diego and San Francisco, but returned to Salinas because of that vibrancy and resilience, because of people committed to achieving a better life. Maybe those other places were too comfortable, not alive enough. Salinas is a place whose struggle and strong spirit speaks powerfully through art and community life, and I hear this in JC’s voice. He speaks slowly but forcefully, choosing his words carefully:

“Remember the motivations for why most people came to Salinas in the first place: they come here to see their dreams come true. But they must work unbelievably hard within a long history of disenfranchisement and oppression. This can lead us to being violent to ourselves: we lost our 25th child just a few days ago. There’s trauma here. People will always remember the sad things that have happened, our community has been hurt so much. Healing from any trauma requires us to have places and conversations that open us up toward one another, not close us down. Natural places can open us toward one another. Nature is a place that offers us consciousness. The more consciousness people have, the more open they are to peace.”
Part of the convergence that gives strength to Salinas is an unusual relationship between growers and laborers that makes empathy more possible. Alfred Diaz-Infante tells me: “Relationships between labor and owners are more progressive here largely because they are still family-owned farms and many of those families were immigrants as well and that’s a shared experience. Their kids are growing up in the same schools with the farm workers. While these issues have been very hard to talk about, and it’s taken us years to confront, our relationships here in Salinas have allowed a healing to occur sooner than in any other part of California.”

Larry Imwalle, of Action Council of Monterey County, said to me: “It’s both positive and futile here. A small fraction of one percent of the people here are the economic and political elite and they are the growers. It’s a place with stark winners and losers. It’s crystal clear who’s in each group. The vast majority of our residents are marginalized. It’s all wrapped up in class and race, and it’s persistent. Some of my high school friends are now part of the patriarchy. I gravitated over time to challenge that status quo, and we all know each other and that does create a powerful opportunity here to disrupt the old system with new ideas. Carr Lake is our best chance to work together.”

Lorri Koster, former CEO of Mann Packing, a family business that once employed up to 900 and was recently acquired by Del Monte Fresh Produce, sat behind Larry Imwalle in 7th grade math and is a strong progressive voice for her community: “The farmworkers are the people feeding the world, each generation doing the work that no one else wants. They arrive whenever there is work to be done. The public schools never know how many kids are going to show up, but they arrive, holding the hand of their grandmother, wanting to learn. Today they are the working poor, sleeping a dozen to a house in east Salinas. You can tell by the number of cars parked in the front yards. They are respected as hard workers, but the pay is seasonal so they are often without. The median age in Salinas is 28 years old, and half the total population is under 18.”

Lorri walked me down a hall filled with photographs of their employees and her relatives, ending on a picture of three men in the 1930s who fled the Oklahoma Dustbowl to find home and opportunity in Salinas. One of them was her grandfather. She ends our conversation with, “We all grow up together and then the sort starts to happen in high school and we become defined as haves or have-nots. I am primarily interested in healing that divide.”

California Assemblywoman Anna Caballero puts it this way: “John Steinbeck wrote about poverty in the Salinas Valley with a sympathetic voice and his books were burned here as a result. This is where Cesar Chavez did his fast. We have such a rich, complex history here of relationships between people and place and it is rarely told fully. I’m not interested in saying, ‘That was evil’ but it is necessary to say, ‘This is who we are.’ Carr Lake could help us to say, ‘This is who we are’ but also to re-create who we are.”
Chapter 4

Land of Water

Salinas was a land of swamps and streams, it was a land of water. This is what drew the birds and the animals and the people: for thousands of years before the Spanish named this land, it was home to Native people. Hundreds of generations of different human hands planted dreams in this land of water for thousands of years. Perhaps this is what makes Carr Lake sacred ground, it was never a blank spot on a map, but a place of meaning to so many.

In the early 1900s, steam engines dug ditches to drain the Alisal, the Natividad, and the Gabilan Creeks of Carr Lake for farming – and the long natural run to the Elkhorn Slough was speeded up and replaced by waterways and underground pipes. The 480 acres we know today as Carr Lake was bought up by Japanese farmers, the Hibino family, the Ikeda family, and others, after the Second World War because it was in town and affordable. It was tougher for farming because the plain flooded every several years into a shallow lake again.

James Martinez, OCEN tribal member, whose father was a Mexican caballero, has childhood memories of the ebb and flow of Carr Lake.

“We lived in Santa Rita, near El Camino Real. As a kid in the 1950s and ‘60s, I knew there were great fishing spots all along Little Bear Creek and Natividad Creek. Sometimes there would be water at Carr Lake and sometimes it was dry. When the creeks were full we’d walk along them fishing for trout. We heard there were Steelhead, but I never saw any.

As an adult, I had some monitoring jobs for OCEN, looking for tribal lands before Verizon could install cell towers. I found two shell mounds in the Alisal behind Carr Lake. We didn’t find any bones, so Verizon installed the cell tower. After my monitoring jobs I wanted to know more about the creeks from my childhood. Every hundred years after big rains, they would run like a bunch of veins from the mountains into Carr Lake. Because I had seen those shell mounds, I could imagine Native people fishing there and living off the land. It makes me happy to hear what Big Sur Land Trust is doing – trying to clean up the water and connecting more people to the land.”
Ecologists have their own dreams of healing, mostly the natural hydrology of Carr Lake. A fully restored Carr Lake floodplain could actually slow down and clean the fresh water. Over the years, development upstream and downstream paved over earth and made water flow faster into the lakebed. As a well-designed park, Carr Lake could help recharge ground water, and improve the quality of the water that ultimately flows into the Monterey Bay National Marine Sanctuary by slowing, infiltrating, and absorbing water, and trapping and recycling nutrients. Improved water quality would be good for everybody – from wildlife to people.

In the City of Salinas, only 283 acres of the land is dedicated to small, neighborhood and community parks. There are just 1.7 acres of park per 1,000 people – far below the median of 4.65 acres per 1000 people for urban communities with similar population density. The national average is about 10 acres per 1000 people. Not only is there a very strong ecological case, but also a strong food security and social justice case for making that landscape into a giant park. And for the past 50 years people have tried, and failed.

Gary Petersen fills me in on some of the politics: “Back to the 1960s and 1970s people have talked about reclaiming Carr Lake as a community asset. There’ve been lots of peaks and valleys of public disappointment over it. In the 1970s a Latino plan for Carr Lake was presented and rejected by an all-White city council. Every decade has brought forward an ambitious plan with dreams about Carr Lake, and they failed either because the plan wasn’t inclusive or because no one involved actually controlled the land.”

Everything changed when the Ikeda family – who had watched Salinas grow and surround their Carr Lake family farm since the 1920s – chose to sell their property to Big Sur Land Trust. On January 25, 2017, Big Sur Land Trust announced they had purchased 73 acres at Carr Lake.

Gary Petersen smiles at the thought and says: “People who spend time with the land trust folks know they’re real. They’ve been talking about Carr Lake forever and now they bought the land. After the community has always wanted Carr Lake and not been able to do much about it, the land trust has bought the land. This is enormous.”
Chapter 5

The Big Stretch

The greatest challenge to any land trust is expanding their vision to include the concerns of a new generation. No matter the era, our most fundamental issues arise from choices we make about the land: the rate of change around us; how beauty and nature shape us; the value of clean water, healthy food, meaningful work; recreation in the mountains and oceans; and safe places to live and be with our family. Choices about who gets access to the benefits of healthy land and water shape culture and democracy; what each generation chooses to do about this defines who they are.

Forty years ago, seven families came together through their deep concern about threats to the place they called home: the iconic beaches, mountains, and rivers of "the big country of the south," the Big Sur coast. In 1978, they saw how easily the beauty and the health of their home ground could be destroyed by others’ urges to develop the land. They believed that if development wasn’t kept in check, nature would be lost for their children’s children. Those families founded Big Sur Land Trust and decades later the organization had conserved over 40,000 acres of land and achieved many of its goals.

Those significant land conservation accomplishments would be remarkable enough, but from that privileged place of success the land trust began to ask themselves new questions about who the conservation of land serves and its capacity to improve societal as well as ecological health, and thus began to transform how they saw the world and their response to it.

Walter Moore is the President of Peninsula Open Space Trust (POST), a highly regarded peer organization to Big Sur Land Trust. He took care to describe what he saw as Big Sur Land Trust’s evolution: “POST and Big Sur Land Trust were on similar paths 15 years ago: from a very privileged, White culture, willing to invest our financial and political power on where bond money goes to buy big tracts of land in rural places that didn’t provide a great deal of public access. We got a lot of that kind of very important conservation done, but…we also isolated ourselves. We worry now that it isn’t an effective way to protect land in the long term. We are shifting our gaze from the coast to the inland cities. Big Sur Land Trust got started on that evolution 15 years ahead of us. Bill [Leahy] saw something different and followed his heart.”
A child of navy admirals, brokerage firms and Ivy League schools, Bill Leahy became a conservation disrupter. In his quiet, determined way, Bill sought to change himself along with the conservation movement he admires. After a stint at The Nature Conservancy, he was hired to lead Big Sur Land Trust in 2004. Within a year of starting his new job, Bill’s yearning to connect conservation to a broader base of people beyond affluent Carmel and Big Sur brought the land trust to Marks Ranch, near Salinas. The conservation objective was not unusual: Marks Ranch could provide much needed, safe open space to people who lived nearby; Big Sur Land Trust had done that many times before. But the distance between Carmel and Salinas is more significant than the 30 miles on the ground. It’s a difference etched in culture, history, power and privilege. Some people who experience the distance call it the “lettuce curtain.” That distance between Carmel and Salinas is greater than miles and can only be traveled at the speed of trust, and that was the journey that Bill began himself and then with the land trust. The initial reaction from Salinas had to be: “You’re here to help us? Really? Who are you and why should we trust you?”

Covering that distance can’t be accomplished by charity (“We’re here to help you”) but only through reciprocity:

### Parting the lettuce curtain

The lettuce curtain is a phenomenon in which many residents from Monterey Peninsula and other coastal cities avoid going to the Salinas Valley. This fear and feeling of disconnect worries environmentalist and social change advocates. Everyone in the Monterey Bay Area is connected through water, even if they don’t have an ocean view. *Return of the Natives*

Though the Monterey Peninsula and the Salinas Valley share a county, there is a very real divide. I don’t know who coined the term Lettuce Curtain but it’s apt. It applies to economics, social standing, living conditions and political and cultural issues. And it also applies to an attitude way too common on the Peninsula.

A great many Peninsula people, even those who consider themselves open- and fair-minded, dismiss Salinas as a dangerous and unappealing place. They don’t view the community’s issues as their own. Crowded housing, gang crime, pesticide pollution and conflict with law enforcement don’t alarm many people of the Peninsula nearly as much as their water bills, beach bonfires, view-sheds and what’s playing at the Osio.

You probably know people who would never shop in Salinas, unless stopping for gas can be called shopping, and who would never go out to eat in Salinas. When my daughter enrolled at Salinas High School, arguably the best public high school in the county, some of my Peninsula acquaintances were appalled. *Royal Calkins, Contributing Writer, Monterey Bay Voices*
embracing how both worlds can be changed by the journey. Traveling the distance involved choices and learnings that are expanding the land trust and are worth understanding and replicating.

At Marks Ranch, the people to be served, the location of the land and the purpose of the project were all brand new to the land trust, but they went about it with their standard formula: enlist their big donors to pay the purchase price and then create a high-profile steering group to give the land trust clout and access. Working the “power angle” is what the land trust knew how to do, and it failed to connect them to Salinas. It also failed to produce a plan for Marks Ranch that excited anyone. Leahy told me, “Frankly, our steering group was too powerful and too removed from the people.”

What it did accomplish, however, was to connect the land trust to two individuals, Judy Sulsona and Alfred Diaz-Infante, who knew the people of Salinas well and would later join the land trust board. They brought change, new definitions of conservation, and how to do it in service to the people. Acquiring Marks Ranch for the people of Salinas and not wholly meeting goals, missteps alongside gains, finding allies who could translate the land trust’s intentions, were all part of the journey.

This led in 2012 to the land trust’s decision to dedicate one of their most iconic and valuable assets in Big Sur, Glen Deven Ranch, to summer camps for children of the Salinas Valley. Glen Deven’s 860 acres of redwood trees, coastal river lands, chaparral and soaring views of the Pacific Ocean were given to Big Sur Land Trust in 2001 by Dr. Seeley and Mrs. Virginia Mudd. It’s a prize of the Big Sur coast: the perfect place to showcase the land trust’s work. And to dedicate a large part of it to provide opportunities for youth of the Salinas Valley to experience nature was a huge step that would change everyone involved. Judy Sulsona explained: “To run the summer camps, to have kids from Salinas actually want to come to Glen Deven Ranch, required the land trust to develop real relationships with families in Salinas Valley and then to prove the worth to individual kids. We had to do it not once, but year after year. The camps over five years became a critical foundation for relationships. There are families in Salinas that could say: “We can trust you, you are here now. We know you.” ”

The youth camps brought the land trust closer to Salinas because they built relationships and changed perspectives. However, bringing kids out of Salinas to find nature wasn’t as compelling as restoring nature within Salinas. That brought the land trust to focus on Carr Lake. Here’s Judy’s take on what Carr Lake is asking of the land trust:

"Carr Lake is a place for the people of Salinas to experience Mother Earth. For 50 years or more, traditional conservation was preservation and about keeping people away, it was about
land as museum pieces. Decisions about access and use of that land were made by people from away who didn’t live in the communities. If people's relationship to land is stripped away, they don’t have a place to grow food, why would they care? If access to land is always someone else’s opportunity but not my opportunity, why would I care? If Carr Lake is ever to happen, it needs to happen with the people in the people’s backyards.”

Judy and Alfred are no longer the land trust’s only board members from Salinas. In 2017, Lorri Koster and Kurt Gollnick joined the land trust’s board and both have deep agricultural roots in the Salinas Valley. (Although Lorri could not remain on the board due to her leading role in transitioning the family business, she remains active and hopeful to one-day return. –ed.) A new generation of ideas about the purpose and obligations of conservation is alive and being debated within Big Sur Land Trust. And one very important result is that no one would say today that Big Sur Land Trust is isolated to the peninsula. It’s a part of Salinas now.

Lorri is unequivocal: “Carr Lake is a social justice issue. I wouldn’t be involved with Big Sur Land Trust if they weren’t doing Carr Lake. The land trust is now part of our community, part of the solution to the many challenges we face. In the beginning I had to ask them, do you care about birds more than you do about people? And now the land trust is helping us to reconnect with our own place, our own stories, helping us to be proud of our hometown, to say ‘I care about this place’.”

Carr Lake’s gift to Big Sur Land Trust is in an invitation to become something new.

John Laird, California’s Secretary of Natural Resources, sees the big stretch that this represents for the land trust: “Carr Lake is a metaphor for all these changes within our state and within our conservation movement. How open will we be to new definitions of conservation? How representative can Big Sur Land Trust be of Salinas? How supportive will wealthy coast folks be for a project in Salinas? How far will everyone stretch to make this important project work?”

The values guiding conservation today are converging on new themes. The families who started Big Sur Land Trust felt deep obligations and we’ve all benefited from their vision that protected the ecological, historical and spiritual importance of their home. Emerging now from Carr Lake are new yearnings which will also grow conservation. For example, the artist activist, JC Gonzalez, offers provocative questions about the role of people to nature: “Tell me how the land can be beautiful and healthy without us here? The land is beautiful because we’re here. If we’re not here, the park won’t be as beautiful. I ask the land trust to work where people are, to bring land and nature back to the people.”
Julie Packard and her family’s foundation, the David and Lucile Packard Foundation, have been the most consistent allies of modern conservation in California, investing hundreds of millions of dollars into land conservation on the central coast. In addition, Julie has dedicated her life to environmental education around human relationships to the ocean through years of leadership at the Monterey Bay Aquarium. She told me this:

"I believe in people, especially young people, and their ability to solve societal problems. It requires deep engagement. Building a constituency for conservation is really, really important today, and the next generation should be encouraged to build and express their own values for the environment. How will conservation know what the next generation of Californians wants and needs without a deep relationship with the Latino community?"

The next moment will not be what this moment was. The voices of a future conservation movement will not be White men, a Henry David Thoreau or a John Muir, but will be a young Black woman growing up in the east, or a young man growing up now in Indian country, or a Latina growing up this moment in Salinas. The power of Carr Lake is that it is making space for that voice to develop and be heard.
Over and over, this project must strike a balance between calling people in and calling people out. Certain conversations, born out of honesty and the desire to walk toward one another, make all other things possible. And yet it’s not possible to really walk toward one another without first facing each other with truths. How do we call each other out to make visible that which is invisible? How do we call each other in to transform it?

Engaging, listening, offering opinions, resolving differences asks of everyone their time and to be their better selves, plus to be patient; this park’s not going to be created in a year or maybe not even in three years. The land trust’s approach envisions concentric circles of engagement beginning with a core planning team of partners that is, in itself, unique to any conservation effort. It includes advocates for housing, public health, social equity, and the city government. This core group has reached out to a long list of community partners who work every day in the arts, with youth, on health and safety issues, on education and community prosperity. The community partners bring their skill and experience to guide a process for eliciting resident contributions to vision and design.

Everyone is asked by this process to rise to the challenge of creating the dream of Carr Lake, but not everyone has equal capacity or is in similar circumstances to stand up. Anna Caballero’s understanding of this runs deep. She moved to the Salinas Valley decades ago to work for California Rural Legal Assistance where she represented striking farm workers and was later elected to city council, then Mayor of Salinas, and now the California State Assembly. Anna told me:

“Our people are living in fear. Those who are here are afraid to come out to public meetings for fear of ICE and entrapment. People feel they are unappreciated. They work really hard and still there’s all this discrimination. And yet, for Carr Lake, we must come out of our homes and participate in a process to learn all the options and to make good decisions for ourselves.”

What will be required of everyone in this process to help make their dream come true? How will the land trust and the community need to support one another so that each person can “stand up” and be part of this process?
My calling is to be able to coordinate with the community to come together and make a change.

My wishing is for the land to be protected in the name of Yen So that it can be a happy environment and make people happy.

My wishing is for the people to be friendly to others and help each other.
Chapter 7

Trust the People

Joel Hernandez Laguna was born in the state of Michoacán, Mexico and journeyed to the United States to re-connect with his father who was working in the ag fields of the Salinas Valley, under President Reagan’s amnesty immigration program. Every year, Joel’s dad would return to Mexico to spend time with the family and in 1989 he hoped they could re-unite together in the USA. Joel, his mother and sister lived for six months at the border waiting to cross, but it was slow going. “At six years old, I came through the fence and we made our way to Yuma, Arizona where we lived for six months during the harvest season. I had no English and a big yellow school bus picked me up each morning. The first English I learned was from Michael Jackson’s song *Black or White*.”

With the pop song’s black-and-white-babies-together hopefulness in his young mind, Joel and his family made their way to Salinas where his dad was living in the farm worker camps. “My parents had the American dream to buy their own land and everyone in our family worked really hard so that we could buy a place at Acosta Plaza in East Salinas. I worked as a groundsman at a Carmel golf course and I mopped the bathrooms in a supermarket. I’ve had the good fortune to learn and to grow.” Acosta Plaza, very near Carr Lake, is a mostly farmworker community of about 2000 people, half of whom own their homes, that feels as tidy and loved as it does densely-packed with many people in each home. In the last five years, Acosta Plaza has experienced a murder each year, and before that two murders each year. Working hard during high school kept Joel out of gangs and, in 2003, he graduated from Everett Alvarez High School.

A dear high school friend, Bibiana, who later became Joel’s wife, introduced him to the Building Healthy Communities (BHC) program which gave Joel a language and an analysis for the difficult divides in race and privilege he was navigating every day and which weren’t described in Michael Jackson’s *Black or White*. The desire to volunteer, to learn and to grow led him to Sabino Lopez, who encouraged Joel to work at the Center for Community Advocacy as a community organizer. Joel shared with me, “Although I never went to university, now I have a master’s degree in community organizing.”
Joel told me about a saying in his community “Nunca sabes para quién trabajas” which translates as you never know who you work for. Someone else eats the apples from the tree you plant. And at the end of a long day, your labors have benefited someone else more than they have benefited you. He wants to make sure that the community who helped plant the “seeds” on this land are those who will benefit from its shade and harvest. It is important to Joel that the Latino community, in particular, feel welcome and safe as if at home, when they visit Carr Lake.

This is the context in which Big Sur Land Trust is asking the people of Salinas to dream about Carr Lake. If they ask people to dream, Big Sur Land Trust has a powerful responsibility to deliver on those dreams or they will have delivered cynicism and betrayal. Joel says, “This is tough work. It’s hard to knock on doors and ask people to dream for the next three years. People are struggling to pay their rent on Wednesday so we can’t ask them to dream too long. We’ve got to give people small wins that show the dream is unfolding.”

Sabino Lopez remembers the exact date that he began a life as farm worker: March 10, 1966. His ancestors fought with Emiliano Zapata and then Sabino was working 80-90 hours per week for $1.05 per hour in the fields of Salinas. Three years later, Sabino heard that Cesar Chavez was coming to Salinas and in 1970 he joined The United Farm Workers of America and held their first general strike. He would later join Judge Lydia Villarreal in helping to start the Center for Community Advocacy where he has devoted his life energy for the last 27 years.

"I love what the land trust does but I thought they only did it in Big Sur and for Carmel. We love that, but we didn’t think they cared about farm workers. Often liberals disappoint us. Big Sur Land Trust stepped forward and bought the land. That established a lot of credibility. They went from dream to reality really fast. I ask them don’t be afraid. Let’s try to trust each other. Let’s speak honestly with one another. Allow us to help. Be open to challenge us, and let us challenge you."

We had been together for several hours talking and it was time for us both to go home, but Sabino had one more story he wanted me to hear:

“We need nature and beauty in our lives too. Carr Lake can do that for us as a large community as long as the land trust respects that we have a different relationship to the land than they do. When I was young when we were picking the corn, we would stay in the fields all day and all night. I didn’t have a blanket but the corn would be warm and at night we would sleep in it. Corn is life to us. Corn covered my face. I spent many nights alone in that corn listening to the coyotes and worried about the snakes that were also drawn to the warmth of the corn. Honestly,
it wasn’t so much fun. Don’t ask me to spend a night in a tent, but don’t ever doubt that I love Mother Earth as much as you.”

In a stunning alignment of different histories and ways of loving nature, the land trust has signed an agreement with Joel and Sabino’s organization to help lead the community engagement process, to apply what CCA has learned over 30 years in farm worker housing and advocacy for the benefit of park creation. Rachel Saunders, Big Sur Land Trust’s Director of Conservation, told me: “We’re here to learn from the leadership of CCA and the other community partners around the table.”

Julie Packard, longtime supporter of the land trust, reinforced this point: “On this one, Big Sur Land Trust needs to go further than just listen, but to actually share power and authority with the community. This one must be ‘by and for the community.’ The good news is that no other land trust I know has prepared more, worked harder, to get to this point.”

Joel, Sabino, Judy Sulsona, Alfred Diaz-Infante and others are quietly showing the land trust the path where power is shared and enormous things are accomplished by everyone. Alfred reflects on the meaning of power: “If you want to be a leader, you’ve got to take risks, which means stepping into areas where you don’t have all the answers or hold all the power. Poder means ‘to be able.’ It also means ‘to take responsibility.’ Poder in our language does not mean power over, but power with and through.”

Judy Sulsona expresses her philosophy as building power for the community: “I’m a strong ally to the people who live here. When the people feel they have the power to change their circumstances, then the politics, economy and environment will all improve, because the people are no longer subject to what others want for them. They can live with dignity because they have access to opportunity, health, housing and nature. We need all of these things.”

Nothing will test the land trust’s commitment to listening well and sharing power more than the issue of gentrification and displacement of people. For decades in many parts of our country, there’s been a strong correlation between improving a place (through economic development or conservation which invites more affluent people to live close to those improvements) and the displacement of the people who were originally there. One person in Salinas described the challenge quite succinctly: “We can’t condemn poor people to live in terrible conditions and then push them out when those conditions change.”
The recent issue of the online magazine, *Color Lines*, ran this arresting picture from Portland, Oregon: The trendy city known for its progressive politics and affordability has seen a 20 percent rise in rents in the last five years as Whites are becoming majority populations in traditionally Black communities. Some 300 longtime Black residents have been displaced from Portland since 2010. The magazine asks, “What will it take for this hipster heartland to live up to its warm and fuzzy reputation?”

What’s the connection to Salinas and to Carr Lake?

Salinas is an hour’s drive from Silicon Valley, well within the commuting distance of well-paid folks looking for affordable alternatives to Mountain View, California. If the land trust and the people of Salinas do their best work, they may very well create a magnet for people of better economic circumstances eager to get close. Some might ask, “Isn’t this exactly what needs to happen? Wouldn’t Salinas benefit from that?” Others would say, “Without attention to affordable housing, the beautiful new park will displace the people for which it was created.”

Gentrification and displacement is often an unintended consequence of conservation. It puts a fine point on the question, “Who are you doing this conservation for?” Even the most accomplished land trust would appropriately say that it’s challenging enough to create a park, they cannot possibly control what happens around the park. And yet, because Big Sur Land Trust is intentionally engaging local residents to create a people’s park, they will be asked for a commitment to address displacement. Some in Salinas are already asking the partners to not accept even one percent displacement. There may or may not be an answer that meets the goals of zero percent displacement, but the community partners will need to explore models for open space development that don’t result in displacement. In doing the best they can to address this issue, the land trust and their partners could test new ideas and raise the bar for conservation and community development everywhere. JC Gonzalez says:

“It is not about resolving the question. It’s about raising and sustaining the question. If the community and Big Sur Land Trust can realize fully what both are getting in this relationship, then we can have difficult conversations together. We can come up with the best possible solutions. Conscious and relevant is what Salinas is about, and what Salinas offers Big Sur Land Trust.”
Chapter 8

Staying Open

It’s taken me a few days of conversations in Salinas to understand exactly who people are talking about in their many references to “the women”: “The women are really strong and have their hearts in the right place. They are asking the right questions and listening to us. We trust them.”

The women are Jeannette Tuitele-Lewis and Rachel Saunders, President and Director of Conservation, respectively, for Big Sur Land Trust. If Leahy, his board and staff created the conditions for the land trust to do meaningful work outside the Peninsula, it was these new leaders who made it all real when the opportunity to purchase a portion of Carr Lake materialized. Upon Leahy’s departure as Executive Director, the land trust’s Board of Trustees made a conscious decision to hire a new leader that would carry the expanded vision forward. Jeannette Tuitele-Lewis was hired in 2014 and is the first female executive in the organization’s history, a next generation conservation professional. Carr Lake, with all of its practical challenges, is asking Jeannette and Rachel to step more fully into themselves and their vision for what conservation can be. Rachel tells me outright: “I don’t always have the right language, but I know that this work is giving us license to do the type of conservation that is most needed in California right now.”

Jeannette ran a land trust in the Sierra before coming to Big Sur Land Trust and she is steeped in the culture of success shaped by deadlines and transactions. “Going slow doesn’t come easily to me. Working in Salinas reminds me of working in the Samoan Islands where time and attention needs to be put into relationships long before work is started. In Salinas, I get a deep sense of right and wrong and the possibility of reconciliation. An important and difficult part of being president of Big Sur Land Trust is translating this into words and actions that we can deliver on with the full backing of all of our supporters across the Peninsula.”

Jeannette says what she fears the most: “Can we deliver on our openness? Can we deliver on our expansive view of what conservation can mean in Salinas?” When time is too precious, counted in minutes and translated into money, it can be the enemy of equity. Jeannette knows this and makes the time for her board to discuss the philosophical differences about conservation that Carr Lake illuminates as well as the practical challenges of time, money and risk. Judy Sulsona, her trustee,
tells me: “There’s strong consensus that Carr Lake is one of our most important projects, but we have different reasons why. We are working toward consensus on key ideas like how we can protect land by connecting people to it. I trust that my fellow board members will learn more when they experience the community talking about their own connection to that land. Every board member will sit in one of those community meetings and hear these stories. They are different stories for sure, but my fellow board members will recognize the same values.”

Tom Reeves retired from the City of Monterey where he spent most of his career as City Engineer and contributes his time to the land trust as board member, land surveyor and engineer. “I owe it to society to help out.” His family gave him a deep appreciation of the outdoors, of natural systems and biology.

"I look at protecting nature as the right thing to do for nature, not for human benefit. My view of the world is that there’s a natural world and there’s a human world and a connection between the two. Humans are causing the problems. We have a brain and we can do things about what we see happening. Humans have to be the solution and we need to connect humans to the natural world in real ways. The best way to develop an appreciation for any subject is for people to have their own pathway to discovery."

That’s exactly what people in Salinas are asking for: their own pathway of discovery. What happens when those pathways are different from how Tom experienced nature? Would Tom agree with JC Gonzalez when JC told me, “The land is beautiful because we’re here. If we’re not here, the park won’t be as beautiful.” Speaking with Tom makes me hopeful. “The best skill we can have is empathy. This is an experiment, right? We won’t do it flawlessly. We have to learn, I want to learn. I’m really glad that we’re doing Carr Lake."

Both the land trust and community partners are being asked to work beyond their comfort zones, and uncomfortable terrain is fertile ground for innovation. If they stay with that discomfort long enough to share ideas about what nature means to different people, or how one must effectively protect a place today, there’s much to learn.

Andrea Manzo grew up in Salinas, daughter of immigrant parents, and is now the Regional Equity Director for the Building Healthy Communities initiative of The California Endowment. She cares deeply about how her community can build its own power through access to land. She told me, “We have great respect for Jeannette and her team because they have showed us early that they are open to honest, frank conversation about what they are doing well and not well. They are open to the conversations that rarely happen around land. We ask them to acknowledge how much power and
privilege comes with owning any land, but especially Carr Lake. How will they use that power? Is this project going to be transactional for them and for us or will it be transformational for them and for us? I know how deeply interested they are in doing the right thing.”

What will make for a transformational outcome?

Staying open to community decision-making authority and having patience as everyone rises to that challenge.

Accessibility: it doesn’t matter how beautiful Carr Lake is if it is not accessible and welcoming to the people.

Displacement: Salinas needs the land trust to keep holding this question and bringing new solutions to it.

Commit to race and equity learning for everyone on staff and on the board who works on this project.

Recognizing how he has a foot in both worlds, Alfred Diaz-Infante expressed this wish: “The issues facing the community are really different from the issues facing our board. I wish for more people to understand this and to have appreciation and empathy. Our board includes businessmen and lawyers and that mentality wants a roadmap, details, assurances, but that’s not always possible when you’re working with a community. There’s a difference between power and authority. I hope the land trust will remain the authority but share power around what happens there. This dream of Carr Lake comes at a time of crisis: economic, health care, immigration. The more our board understands what this community faces, the more they will be willing to hold the questions.”
February 17, 2018 dawned bright blue and cold in Salinas and yet over 100 people converged on Carr Lake from the surrounding neighborhoods with work gloves, native trees and shrubs in buckets, and their breath a mist in the morning air. For hours, they dug holes with shovels, gently planted the trees with hands, hauled water in plastic five-gallon buckets, and began the process of making a park for themselves. They were laborers on that land just as so many others had been before them, but this time they were planting trees for themselves. A poster board had written on it this message in young handwriting: Mi sueño para el sitio es que mi comunidad se una y haga un cambio. My dream for this place is for my community to come together and make a change.

It made me think of Joel Hernández Lagunas’ parable of people laboring for something that ultimately is not theirs, nunca sabes para quién trabajas. Maybe the gift of conservation at Carr Lake is a re-making of that parable into this: When we work for nature, we work for ourselves. Cuando trabajamos para la naturaleza, trabajamos para nosotros mismos.

Deep inside the walls and the boundaries of this American cultural moment, a new promise is converging in Salinas about restoration and reconciliation. The promise arises from a land trust with a strong moral voice. Those who own the land get to decide so many things in this country. I wonder, can we truly empower communities when conservationists have the power on their land to say, “Yes, you can” and “No, you can’t?” Big Sur Land Trust is answering the question in a different way that stands to change conservation.

We know from books like Nature Deficit Disorder that affluent suburban children struggle to develop physically and emotionally when denied access to nature. Carr Lake asks us to imagine the consequences to the children of farm workers who grow our food, and to imagine the consequences to so many others. The California Council of Land Trusts (CCLT) acknowledges that this hasn’t happened nearly enough before: “As land trusts, we do not reflect the demographic make-up of California. Our protected lands are not readily accessible to most Californians, nor do they provide the range of outdoor experiences many Californians seek.” (CCLT California Horizons report, 2015)
At Carr Lake, a moral voice from within Big Sur Land Trust is responding and saying loud and clear, our work is not for some people, but for all people. Walter Moore, the president of Peninsula Open Space Trust, a neighboring organization to Big Sur Land Trust, says it clearly, “I wish 50 years from now others will say freely that conservationists didn’t do their work just for themselves but for others. That we did conservation in California because we were truly looking out for one another.”

John Laird, California’s Secretary of Natural Resources, puts Carr Lake in a historical perspective:

“We’re 160 years from statehood and it’s been unbridled extraction of resources: deltas completely moved, dams built up, oil extracted and residues left behind, parts of San Francisco Bay were filled in, fish populations have crashed. Our job is to take that and restore it. It’s not like you’re going to ‘unsettle’ Salinas so the goal is to make it a healthier place. In this case ‘health’ means a primarily Latino’s sense of safety, respect and connection to place. It’s two steps back if Big Sur Land Trust doesn’t succeed, but it’s huge step forward for the future of conservation if they do. A lot is riding on this.”

What’s converging now at Carr Lake are opportunities to better understand each other’s history and to learn how other people love nature. The reason to do this is to create a stronger, more resilient community in relationship to the privilege of nature rather than divided from each other by the wealth of people.

History isn’t in the past, but still in the present for all but the most privileged of us. Things that happened in the past are still happening in less visible ways today. Understanding someone else’s history helps one to understand how people see you rather than how you see yourself. Working with someone else’s history in mind is a first step in standing strongly beside them. And, finally, if we can then we should. If we have the privilege to see and to act, then we should do both.

We are never resilient alone. We are never resilient in a world of outsiders and insiders. And nature may be the last remaining place in our democracy where we might meet each other and share what matters most to us: beauty, health, freedom, relationship to other humans and to something bigger than ourselves. Nature may be the last remaining place to scale walls of empathy that separate us.

Doing conservation-with-history-in-mind is to use the privileges of conservation to counter the past. The narrower our definitions of conservation, the less of it we will have. And so, the toughest work is the courage to hold space for a new conversation:
What does it mean for a land trust to do social justice work?

What does authentic community engagement ask of all of us?

What do different people need and deserve in a relationship to nature and place?

What really protects land and nature today?

How might conservation meaningfully respond to gentrification and displacement?

If the conservation movement, as it is today, can listen eagerly to new voices, it will remake itself into something broader, stronger, fresh and relevant to many more people.

Jeannette Tuitele-Lewis has a dream for the land trust movement: “I’m working toward a future where the land trust community as a whole will become just as comfortable using all of its tools to address social justice needs the way we have become comfortable over time and experience using all our tools for protecting working lands. My field of vision has been expanded by Carr Lake and I don’t ever want go back to seeing the role of land trusts so narrowly. It is not about sacrificing nature for people; this is a false choice. All thriving beings need clean water, nutritious food, safe environments and natural spaces. Land is the convergence of all of these things.

At a minimum, our land trust work requires us to listen to what our communities are asking of us and respond in ways that honor our conservation mission, embrace the history and complexity of people’s relationship to place and uphold the public trust. At our best, we are bridge-builders and our work is both transformational and reciprocal; we work with communities to help shape the future and we are transformed by what we experience.”
Chapter 1

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Painting by JC Gonzalez
Acknowledgements and Gratitude:

This essay is not impartial journalism. Having experienced Carr Lake and sat with many of the people involved, I became the lens through which you’re viewing this remarkable story. To keep this honest, I situate myself lightly in the text.

My own lens is a privileged one. My home is on the other coast of this continent in a very different place, which means I approached Salinas with humility and some distance from which to observe. I believe in the importance of facing and understanding history, and I believe in the power of our different relationships to nature and to each other to reconcile history. I’m also a farmer, an educator, and I’ve worked in the past for an organization not unlike Big Sur Land Trust. I admit to claiming that I’ve chosen a life in conservation over a career in conservation. After writing this, I won’t brag like that again. This project has restored my faith in careers in conservation because I saw people I admire risking and testing those careers for practices on the ground that they know will change their organization to benefit people and nature. I’m humbled by the responsibility to share what I saw, felt and learned in Salinas. I believe in Carr Lake and those who are making it the people’s park.

My deepest gratitude goes to Jeannette Tuitele-Lewis for inviting me into her organization’s work, trusting me, and making it possible for me to travel to and come to know Salinas. Without Jeannette’s trust, my particular lens would not be gathering the light, words and story of Carr Lake. Thank you, Jeannette.

I am grateful to all the people who spent time with me in Salinas or over the phone: Alfred Diaz-Infante, Andrea Manzo, Assemblywoman Anna Caballero, Bill Doolittle, Laurie Dachs, Gary Petersen, City Councilmember Gloria De La Rosa, Henry Hibino, Joel Hernandez Laguna, Gary Knobloch, JC Gonzalez, John Laird, California’s Secretary of Natural Resources; Judy Sulsona, Julie Packard, Larry Imwalle, Laura Lee Lienk, Lorri Koster, Rachel Saunders, Sabino Lopez, Juan Uranga, Tom Reeves, and Walter Moore. None of these important conversations would have been possible without the grace and skill of Guille Barbosa who assisted the creation of this essay on many levels, large and small.

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I also want to thank Bill Leahy who a decade ago invited me into a dialogue with Big Sur Land Trust about what conservation is – for that appears to continue today. This essay also greatly benefitted from the insights and editorial guidance of Helen Whybrow, Danyelle O’Hara and Glenn Lamb. Thank you each so much for efforts to strengthen this story.

Peter Forbes
Knoll Farm
Fayston, Vermont
Convergence
A story of people, place and opportunity at Carr Lake

by Peter Forbes