



LANDWATCH
MONTEREY COUNTY

IMPACT REPORT 2025

A blueprint for sustainability,
using Monterey County
as a model. **Since 1997.**

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LandWatch.org

Photo by: Steve Zmak Photography

A LETTER FROM OUR EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Dear Friends of LandWatch,

Since 1997, LandWatch has stood up for the people, farmland, and natural resources of Monterey County against unsustainable development and short-sighted policy. 2025 was no exception. From the courtroom to County chambers, from Salinas to the Peninsula, we worked to make sure growth in this region is smart, equitable, and climate-resilient.

This year we pushed back on sprawl in Gonzales, defended sound environmental review in Seaside, helped shape a hard-won short-term rental ordinance, and kept the pressure on local jurisdictions to finish Housing Element updates the right way, with density and affordability where they belong and protection for farmland and habitat where it matters most. We also stayed engaged on the issues that will define the County's future: water supply, greenhouse gas reduction, and who gets a seat at the table when land use decisions are made.

None of this happens without the members, donors, and volunteers who back this work year after year. Thank you for standing with us. The pages that follow summarize what we accomplished together in 2025, and where we're headed next.

With gratitude,



Michael D. DeLapa
Executive Director



LANDWATCH
MONTEREY COUNTY

OUR MISSION

LandWatch's mission is to protect Monterey County's future by addressing climate change, community health, and social inequities in housing, transportation, and land and water use. By encouraging greater public participation in planning, we connect people to government, address human needs, and inspire conservation of natural resources.

28

years defending
Monterey County's land,
water, and climate since
1997

12

cities, plus the County,
whose agendas and
meetings we tracked

6-2

Coastal Commission
vote certifying the
County's short-term
rental ordinance

1

lawsuit challenging
an inadequate
environmental review
in Seaside

WHO WE ARE

Our vision is Monterey County as a blueprint for sustainability: a model for California and the nation of how local governments can balance the needs of current and future residents. Our staff, consultants, legal team, and board bring deep expertise in land use, housing, transportation, water, environmental planning, and public interest advocacy.

WHAT WE DO

LandWatch turns complex local and regional decisions into opportunities for better outcomes. We monitor public processes, analyze plans and environmental documents, conduct technical research, prepare substantive comments, meet with decision-makers, testify at public hearings, and help residents engage when their voices can make a difference.

WHY WE DO IT

Today's choices about housing, water, transportation, infrastructure, and climate will shape Monterey County for generations. LandWatch works to ensure these decisions serve the public interest, supporting sustainable growth, healthy communities, environmental protection, and a more equitable future.



2025 IMPACT

- Tracked agendas and meetings for 12 cities, Monterey County, and special districts such as the Monterey Peninsula Water Management District (MPWMD), the Marina Coast Water District (MCWD), and Monterey One Water.
- Monitored public plans, projects, and policies.
- Submitted formal comment letters, analyses, and testimony.
- Saw LandWatch policies and recommendations adopted in final decisions.
- Engaged residents and supporters.
- Earned media coverage and built public–policy partnerships.
- Improved housing, climate, water, transportation, and land use outcomes by contributing at jurisdictional meetings.

LandWatch’s 2025 work centered on three outcomes: climate and land use, housing and equity, and safe and sustainable water. Here is a snapshot of each; the details follow.

CLIMATE & LAND USE

Sued Seaside over its General Plan environmental review, challenged Gonzales’ Vista Lucia sprawl proposal, and weighed in on Climate Action Plans for the County and the City of Monterey.

HOUSING & EQUITY

Won changes to the County Housing Element Update and helped win a 6–2 Coastal Commission vote protecting long–term rentals and workforce housing.

SAFE & SUSTAINABLE WATER

Pressed for the lowest–cost Peninsula supply, a lifted new–hookup moratorium, and a financially feasible Salinas Valley groundwater plan.



CLIMATE & LAND USE

- **Commented on Monterey County's Climate Action Plan**, supporting a strategy and accountability framework for reducing greenhouse gas emissions.
- **Commented on the City of Monterey's Climate Action Plan**, asking that the City use an origin–destination VMT model. We also asked the City to direct its consultants to evaluate whether building more housing to address Monterey's jobs–housing imbalance would reduce vehicle miles traveled (VMT), and by how much, in line with the City's Regional Housing Needs Assessment allocation and Housing Element.
- **Advocated for affordable housing subsidies** near low–wage jobs as effective mitigation of excessive VMT from sprawl development projects, submitting detailed technical comments.
- **Pursued litigation with the Center for Biological Diversity against the City of Seaside**, challenging an inadequate Environmental Impact Report underlying the City's General Plan update and the sprawl it would enable, especially the loss of sensitive habitat lands in the former Fort Ord.
- Continued **challenging the Vista Lucia Specific Plan**, a proposed city–sized subdivision of 3,498 housing units on 771 acres of valuable farmland adjacent to the City of Gonzales, with most units priced for households earning \$185,000 or more a year.
- **Challenged annexation of the Vista Lucia project** before the Local Agency Formation Commission (LAFCO) based on lack of affordable housing, inadequate mitigation for lost agricultural land, and lack of a legal water supply.



- **Informed English– and Spanish–speaking residents** to comment at a Monterey County Board of Supervisors meeting on the City of Gonzales’ violations of its anti–sprawl agreement with the County.
- **Commented on the Puente del Monte Specific Plan** scope of environmental review for the 2,500 units to be added to the City of Gonzales, advocating a higher–density, smaller–footprint, more affordable project.
- Advocated that the City of Salinas pursue a denser, **smaller footprint for its East Area Specific Plan** to improve affordability, reduce infrastructure costs, and preserve farmland.
- Called out the important role of LAFCO when it updated its agricultural mitigation policy to include policy guidelines.
- Reported on **LAFCO** appointment votes, holding local mayors accountable to their constituents’ interests on regional water and governance issues.
- **Launched a community reading group** to discuss land use and other issues related to LandWatch’s mission.

SPOTLIGHT: VISTA LUCIA, GONZALES

3,498

housing units
proposed

771

acres of valuable
farmland lost

\$185,000+

household income
most units are
priced for

A city–sized subdivision on prime farmland, priced out of reach for most local households. LandWatch rallied residents behind a denser, smaller–footprint alternative.



HOUSING & EQUITY

- Successfully advocated for changes to the **County of Monterey Housing Element Update** and continued urging quick adoption of a final Housing Element to stop further Builder's Remedy applications.
- Supported converting a low-density Builder's Remedy proposal into high-density Housing Element additions, creating room for more **affordable apartments and townhouses** on a smaller footprint.
- Advocated for the Coastal Commission's 6-2 certification of Monterey County's **short-term rental (STR) ordinance**, 10 years in the making, which reduces coastal-zone STRs and protects long-term rentals and workforce housing.
- Supported changes to the inland STR ordinance, in response to litigation challenges, to **protect long-term rentals and workforce housing**.
- **Developed a Housing Element Memorandum** outlining the status of local Housing Element updates across the County.
- **Supported the Soledad Mayor's efforts to create a City Council Subcommittee** to publicly discuss key details of the Development Agreement for the 2,400-unit Miramonte project, ensuring the Specific Plan provides both deed-restricted affordable housing and compact housing affordable by design.
- **Began engagement with the City of Salinas** in the revision of its General Plan through comments and meetings with staff.
- **Initiated engagement with the City of Soledad** on the revision of its General Plan through scoping comments.
- With local infill developers, **created a "Make Housing Happen" working group** to identify regulatory barriers and opportunities to lessen the cost, risk, and time of building infill housing.

"We worked to make sure growth in this region is smart, equitable, and climate-resilient."

Michael D. DeLapa, Executive Director



SAFE & SUSTAINABLE WATER

- **Advocated timely economic analysis** of proposed infrastructure projects needed to meet the looming 2040 and 2042 sustainability mandates for Salinas Valley groundwater under the Sustainable Groundwater Management Act.
- **Encouraged the Groundwater Sustainability Agency (GSA) and stakeholders to consider whether massive proposed infrastructure projects would be financially feasible**, given agricultural users' willingness to pay the costs likely to be allocated to them.
- **Encouraged the GSA to develop principled cost sharing** between urban and agricultural users, and between groundwater subbasins, based on water rights.
- **Advocated for Valley-wide sustainability solutions** that share both surface and groundwater supplies.
- **Advocated that the State Water Resources Control Board revise its Cease and Desist Order to Cal Am** to lift the moratorium on new water hook-ups on the Monterey Peninsula, a step justified by the available new supply from the Pure Water Monterey project and by the need for new housing.
- **Collaborated with local builders to oppose the City of Monterey's refusal to distribute available new water supply** for housing, supporting immediate distribution where not barred by the Cease and Desist Order.
- **Opposed Cal Am's proposed desalination facility**, which is not needed for the next 20 years and would substantially raise water rates.
- **Advocated before the California Public Utilities Commission** and mobilized grassroots support for realistic supply and demand estimates and for the lowest-cost water supply option in its Phase 2 decision on the Monterey Peninsula Water Supply Project.
- Commented to the State Lands Commission and the Central Coast Regional Water Quality Control Board to **challenge the lease and permit for the Cal Am desalination facility**.



LOOKING AHEAD TO 2026

LandWatch enters 2026 with the same core priorities. We will be:

- **Climate & Land Use:** holding the line in litigation against the City of Seaside's General Plan; keeping Climate Action Plans accountable across the region; and supporting permanent protection for Fort Ord open space and preventing another "Monterey Downs," the racetrack-and-housing mega-development on open space that LandWatch helped defeat in 2016.
- **Housing & Equity:** pushing County and city jurisdictions to finish Housing Element updates that direct growth to infill and away from farmland and habitat, and advocating for changes to Salinas Valley development plans to create more housing affordable to the local workforce and to preserve agricultural land.
- **Safe & Sustainable Water:** securing a durable, affordable water supply for the Monterey Peninsula.

LandWatch's work is possible only with the support of the community. Your engagement, your voice at public hearings, and your financial support make it all happen.

HOW YOU CAN HELP IN 2026

- Speak up at a public hearing. We'll tell you when and where.
- Join the Action Alert Network at LandWatch.org/about/e-newsletter/subscribe
- Give at LandWatch.org/give-now.

OUR BOARD & STAFF

Thank you to the volunteers and professionals who guide LandWatch's work.

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Every gift helps us keep watch over the decisions shaping Monterey County's future. LandWatch is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization (Tax ID #91-1862145).

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RECOGNITION



LandWatch holds a four-star rating from Charity Navigator, the nation's largest independent charity evaluator.



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