For Immediate Release

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Santa Cruz Mountains Stewardship Network Holds AI Salon Focused on Land Stewardship

Santa Clara County FireSafe Council sponsors event for land managers, scientists, water utility professionals, fire agencies, and conservation practitioners.

June 16, 2026, San Jose, CA — The Santa Cruz Mountains Stewardship Network (SCMSN) hosted an AI Salon on June 3, 2026. Sponsored by the Santa Clara County FireSafe Council, the Salon brought together land managers, scientists, water utility professionals, fire agencies, and conservation practitioners to explore the responsible use of artificial intelligence in land stewardship.

The Salon was co-facilitated by Jared Lewis, Hugo Selbie of Google, and Dylan Skybrook, and attended by 20 people from organizations around the region, including staff from Stanford University, Midpeninsula Regional Open Space District, Federal Bureau of Land Management, San Jose Water, Sempervirens Fund, Resource Conservation District of Santa Cruz County, Santa Clara County FireSafe Council, and UC Santa Cruz.

The event comes at a critical time. The Santa Cruz Mountains face converging pressures — escalating wildfire risk, drought, invasive species, post-fire recovery, and the growing complexity of managing landscapes across dozens of jurisdictions and ownership boundaries. At the same time, artificial intelligence tools are rapidly entering the mainstream, creating both opportunity and uncertainty for resource-limited conservation organizations that must decide how, whether, and when to adopt them.

The AI Salon was designed to meet that moment as an exploration of AI as an emerging medium for thinking, analysis, and collaboration. The Salon gave practitioners a space to explore what responsible adoption looks like in a stewardship context — from data access and governance to institutional readiness and the things that will always require a human in the room.

"The pace of AI development is outrunning most organizations' ability to evaluate it," said Dylan Skybrook, Network Manager of the Santa Cruz Mountains Stewardship Network. "The Salon gave our members a space to engage with these tools collectively and critically — to ask hard questions about data governance, equity, and institutional capacity before the technology is adopted by default. This kind of proactive, practitioner-led learning is the kind of collaborative effort the SCMSN is for."

"The stewardship community doesn't need more hype about what AI can do — it needs practical, honest frameworks for deciding when AI adds value and when it doesn't," said Jared Lewis, Manager of Environmental Planning and Natural Resources at San Jose Water Company. "This Salon demonstrated that the real challenge isn't the technology — it's building the governance, trust, and shared standards that make responsible adoption possible."

About the Santa Cruz Mountains Stewardship Network
The Santa Cruz Mountains Stewardship Network (SCMSN) is a collaboration of twenty-six organizations working together to steward the lands and waters of the Santa Cruz Mountains region of California. SCMSN's mission is to cultivate a resilient, vibrant region where human and natural systems thrive for generations to come. The Network connects local, state, and federal agencies, land trusts, water utilities, fire agencies, universities, and community organizations to coordinate stewardship at a landscape scale — addressing shared challenges including wildfire resilience, forest health, climate adaptation, and biodiversity conservation. For more information, visit https://www.scmsn.net.

Santa Clara County FireSafe Council:
For more information, visit www.sccfiresafe.org