

Camp 4 Williamson Act Rescind and Replace Project Proposal Statement

Prepared by Sonoma Land Trust for

County of Sonoma Permit and Resource Management Department

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INTRODUCTION

Purpose statement

The purpose of this project is to rescind the Williamson Act agricultural land use contract on Camp 4 and replace it with a Williamson Act open space land use contract so that the property can be restored to historic wetland habitat, as it was prior to European colonization. Sonoma Land Trust (SLT) acquired the property in 2023, and coincident with the acquisition, USDA Natural Resource Conservation Science (NRCS) acquired a Wetland Reserve Easement over the property. SLT and NRCS will restore tidal wetland and other habitats on the property for the purposes of wildlife habitat, climate resilience, and a potential reduction in upstream flooding.

Property Description

Camp 4 is an approximately 1149.44-acre property acquired by Sonoma Land Trust in 2023 in order to restore tidal wetlands as part of its strategy to promote biodiversity, carbon sequestration and climate resilience in the Sonoma Creek Baylands. The property is comprised of three parcels and the legal acreage of each parcel is as following: 467.04 for APN 128-490-005; 482.4 for 128-490-006; 200 for 128-490-007.

Once part of a vast brackish tidal marsh, Camp 4 was diked and drained in the late 19th century to create agricultural land. The soils of Camp 4 are mapped entirely as Reyes silty clay, which is common in former tidal wetlands in Sonoma County and is comprised of 50-65% clay. (Data source: NRCS). The property is a near-island, with dikes bordering the majority of the property (Figure 1). Hudeman Slough borders the eastern edge of the property; Second Napa Slough, the southeastern; Third Napa Slough, the western; and Steamboat Slough, the northwestern.

The Leveroni family acquired the property in 1943, initially using it for dairy operations until switching to oat-hay farming (Camp 4 Baseline Documentation Report, 2023). Agricultural activities ceased after the USDA Natural Resource Conservation

Service (NRCS) purchased a Wetland Reserve Easement (WRE) coincident with SLT's acquisition of the residual property value from Joe Leveroni and Pat Stornetta.

Conservation Values

Camp 4's restoration potential is a key conservation value, adding approximately 1,149 acres to the Sonoma Creek Baylands Restoration Project—a collaborative landscape-level restoration effort. SLT has partnered with U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service San Pablo Bay National Wildlife Refuge, Sonoma Water, USDA Natural Resource Conservation Service, and Ducks Unlimited to develop the Sonoma Creek Baylands Restoration Project, which will restore tidal wetland habitat to more than 9,000 acres of diked agricultural land in the Sonoma Creek Baylands. The benefits of this project range from creating tidal wetland habitat for native flora and fauna to carbon sequestration and adaptation to sea level rise.

One of the driving forces of the tidal wetland restoration project is climate adaptation and resilience. If tidal action is restored to diked agricultural baylands soon, sediment accretion can in many cases keep pace with sea level rise, increasing the likelihood for tidal wetlands to persist even in a severe warming scenario, or migrate to higher ground. These marshes and wetlands may also help buffer communities against the effects of sea level rise as climate change is predicted to generate more severe storm surges and flooding events. Tidal wetlands are also potent carbon sinks, trapping organic matter in bay mud. Finally, restored wetlands create habitat for valuable fish and migratory shorebirds.

Funder Intent

The San Francisco Bay Restoration Authority (SFBRA) granted ~\$1.3 million to fund the acquisition and interim stewardship of Camp 4. The grant's intent is to support habitat protection, restoration, and stewardship. The SFBRA grant includes several deed restrictions on Camp 4. The property must be used for the purposes of habitat protection and restoration, and approval is required to use the property for mitigation. Approval is also required to use the property as security for debt, or to transfer the property (such as to the San Pablo Bay National Wildlife Refuge).

The purpose of the NRCS's Wetland Reserve Program is to purchase easements on wetlands degraded by agricultural activity and partially or fully fund their restoration. A Wetland Reserve Easement purchased by the NRCS concomitant with Sonoma Land Trust's purchase of the property specifies cessation of agricultural activity and restoration of wetland habitat within three years. Preventing further land subsidence and promoting migratory shorebird habitat are the primary priorities of this NRCS WRE.

Conservation Easements

The NRCS WRE covers ~1,107 acres of the property (Figure 2), excluding the pole barn and adjacent parking lot immediately past the entry gate. The conservation easement prohibits uses that would impair the conservation values including development and agricultural activities. See Part III of Warranty Easement Deed.

Part IV of the Warranty Easement Deed outlines instances in which the NRCS may authorize SLT to carry out “compatible uses,” such as managed timber harvest, haying, grazing or other activities. In order to conduct prohibited activities such as water pumping to manage mosquito populations, disking to manage invasive plants, or seed collection for other restoration activities, SLT would need to obtain written permission from NRCS, which could include terms and conditions. Currently, Dean Kwasny, Easement Program Manager at NRCS in Davis, is the point of contact for obtaining permission.

PROPOSED PROJECT

Current Land Use

Following the cessation of hay farming in 2023, the property is currently fallow and managed as open space. SLT is evaluating managing stormwater to create seasonal freshwater wetland habitat to provide winter habitat for waterfowl, shorebirds, and a variety of other species on an interim basis. This must be balanced against mosquito production.

Camp 4 uses a pump to drain stormwater from the property. Currently, it is nonfunctional: 1) the wooden structure is rotting; 2) the 24” steel pipe delivering water to Hudeman Slough is corroded, and the leakage would damage the road if the pump was switched on; and 3) there may be a grounding issue in the pump’s electrical system, and it is unknown whether the system would be safe to use in the rain. Sonoma Land Trust is addressing these issues. As a stopgap measure, a Crisafulli powered by a tractor power take-off (PTO) may be used to dewater Camp 4 long enough to repair the pump structure and replace the pipe and flap gate.

As a stopgap measure, SLT contracted with Manzoni Trucking and Excavating, Inc. to operate a Crisafulli (portable water pump) powered by a tractor power take-off for six days starting on May 7th, 2024. This was sufficient to dry nearly all ponded areas on Camp 4, and reduce the water level at the pump station by several feet. According to Bill Manzoni, the rate of drawdown was about 2 inches per day as measured at the pump station.

Five-Year Management Goals, Objectives, and Actions



This plan guides Camp 4 management during the next five years or until large-scale tidal restoration is initiated. During this interim period, Sonoma Land Trust's primary goals for the property focus on 1) water management, 2) biodiversity, 3) infrastructure and security, 4) tribal engagement, and 5) public engagement. SLT is working to project 5- and 10-year holding costs for Camp 4 that will encapsulate these goals.

Water Management

Based on the 2024 water year, Camp 4 has the potential to support at least 700 acres of seasonal wetlands. SLT will balance the purpose of the NRCS Wetland Reserve Easement against practical needs to limit mosquito production consistent with background levels. This can be achieved through careful water management.

Goal:

During the interim management period, provide seasonal wetlands for migratory and resident shorebirds and waterfowl during winter months in a manner that does not create nuisance levels of mosquitoes.

Objectives:

- a. Maximize seasonal wetland habitat during cold winter months (primarily November-February) by not pumping stormwater (Dean Kwasny, NRCS, personal communication).
- b. Maintain mosquito production consistent with background levels by communicating with the mosquito district and resuming pumping when the District signals that production is increasing.

Actions:

- a. Repair stormwater pump to excellent working order.
- b. Evaluate stormwater ditches to ensure adequate capacity and flow.
- c. Consider agreement with Manzoni for pump operation and maintenance.
- d. Maintain open communication with Marin Sonoma Mosquito and Vector Control District (MSMVCD) through regular check in meetings beginning February 1 of each year.
- e. Consider training staff members to identify mosquito larvae, which would supplement – but not replace – early detection efforts by MSMVCD. (MSMVCD offered to provide training to a small number of SLT staff members).
- f. Drain the small pond between the large pole barn and the pump station and adjacent to the dirt road by excavating a small drainage ditch through the existing berm.

- g. Evaluate natural solutions to mosquito abatement, including installation of bat boxes to promote natural mosquito predators on the property if these will not impede future restoration goals.
- h. To the extent possible, implement frequent monitoring of winter water levels at Camp 4 and target average water depths of no more than 4 inches in order to promote ideal shorebird habitat.

Biodiversity

Goal:

Maintain existing habitat values and provide temporary habitat enhancements for native plants and wildlife before tidal wetland restoration activities.

Objectives:

- a. Promote seasonal shorebirds and waterfowl, and native plants such as *Eryngium vaseyi* (coyote thistle), *Plagiobothrys* spp. (popcorn flower), *Lasthenia californica* (goldfields), *Cotula coronopifolia* (brass buttons; not native, but naturalized), *Eleocharis macrostachya* (spike rush), and *Hordeum brachyantherum* (meadow barley).
- b. Control widespread outbreaks of non-native species (e.g. Australian bentgrass) by pumping stormwater, mowing, disking, burning, use of herbicides, or other means. As of July, 2024, dense swaths of Australian bentgrass were observed in areas that were ponded for much of the winter and spring.

Actions:

- a. Implement stormwater management as described above. Maintaining shallow ponds (~4 in. depth) in winter will create habitat for migratory shorebirds.
- b. Broadly survey property in spring and summer to identify and treat invasive species establishment considered likely to significantly expand. Controlling invasive plant populations may help promote native vegetation.

Infrastructure and Security

Goal:

Provide active management of infrastructure that promotes property security.

Objectives:

- a. Water management infrastructure will be in good repair by the end of 2024 to enable rapid and efficient pumping when needed.
- b. Abandoned structures and derelict equipment be removed to reduce attractive nuisances.

- c. Signage and gates will minimize trespass.

Actions:

- a. Repair and maintain stormwater pump and pump station.
- b. Work with Sonoma Water to monitor existing groundwater well for salinity, depth, and other data.
- c. Demolish and remove structures at center of property.
- d. Remove all derelict and nonfunctional farm equipment.
- e. Consider working with California Department of Fish and Wildlife to repair or removal dilapidated fencing along trail near Ramal Rd. This is beyond the property line, but improved infrastructure around the property may improve security and discourage trespassing while still allowing hunters to access Ringstrom Bay via Camp 4's parking lot.
- f. Erect and maintain sturdy and locked gates at the front entrance of the property.
- g. Remove old gate at the front entrance of the property.
- h. Install Sonoma Land Trust sign at property entrance that acknowledges funders.
- i. Install a second sign visible from Ramal Road that highlights SLT ownership.
- j. Install appropriate signage to discourage trespass at primary entry point and elsewhere as needed.
- k. Minimally maintain the internal road as necessary.
- l. Work with SLT Community Programs staff to determine whether the pole barn can be used for public events, such as staging for hikes.
- m. Although the parking lot is owned and maintained by Sonoma Valley County Sanitation District, SLT will monitor and report its condition on a regular basis.
- n. Install security cameras if warranted by repeated trespass, vandalism, or other.
- o. Maintain excellent relations with neighbors.
- p. Conduct regular levee inspections, especially after significant storms, with focus on areas on the northern edge of the property where past breaches have occurred (see labels 1, 2, and 3 in Figure 3) and note changes in levee condition.
- q. Keep levees in working order and repair breaches if they occur.

Tribal Engagement

Goal:



Build and maintain excellent relationships with the Federated Indians of the Graton Rancheria and other tribes as part of the tidal wetland restoration planning and property management.

Objectives:

- a. Provide early and open engagement with FIGR and other tribes through direct outreach.

Actions:

- a. Complete geoarchaeological report.
- b. Engage FIGR and other tribes to discuss wetland restoration planning.
- c. Consider access agreements to Camp 4 if desired by tribal members.

Public Engagement

Goal:

Promote public awareness of Camp 4 and SLT's restoration plans.

Objectives:

- a. Provide periodic opportunities for guided public access and education such as bird walks.

Actions:

- a. Work with Community Programs to schedule natural and cultural history walks.

Implementation Tasks and Schedule

Seasonal Schedule:

| Season | Management Actions |
|---|---|
| November – February | Allow ponding and monitor depth; Minimum monthly site visits; Coordinate with MSMVD on mosquito larvae monitoring Shorebird surveys if desired |
| February - March (depending on rainfall) | Run stormwater pumps; Coordinate with MSMVD on mosquito larvae monitoring Shorebird surveys if desired |
| April – November | Broadly monitor for invasive plants; Mow/disc/burn as necessary |

Annual Schedule:

| Year | Management Actions |
|-----------|--|
| 2024 | Dewater in Spring using Crisafulli Repair pump station Demolish buildings Install proper signage Breach small pond adjacent to pump station Annual property monitoring visit and report |
| 2025-2028 | Allow winter ponding; dewater in late Winter/early Spring Monitor mosquito production and invasive plants Manage invasive plants, if necessary Annual property monitoring visit and report |

Maps

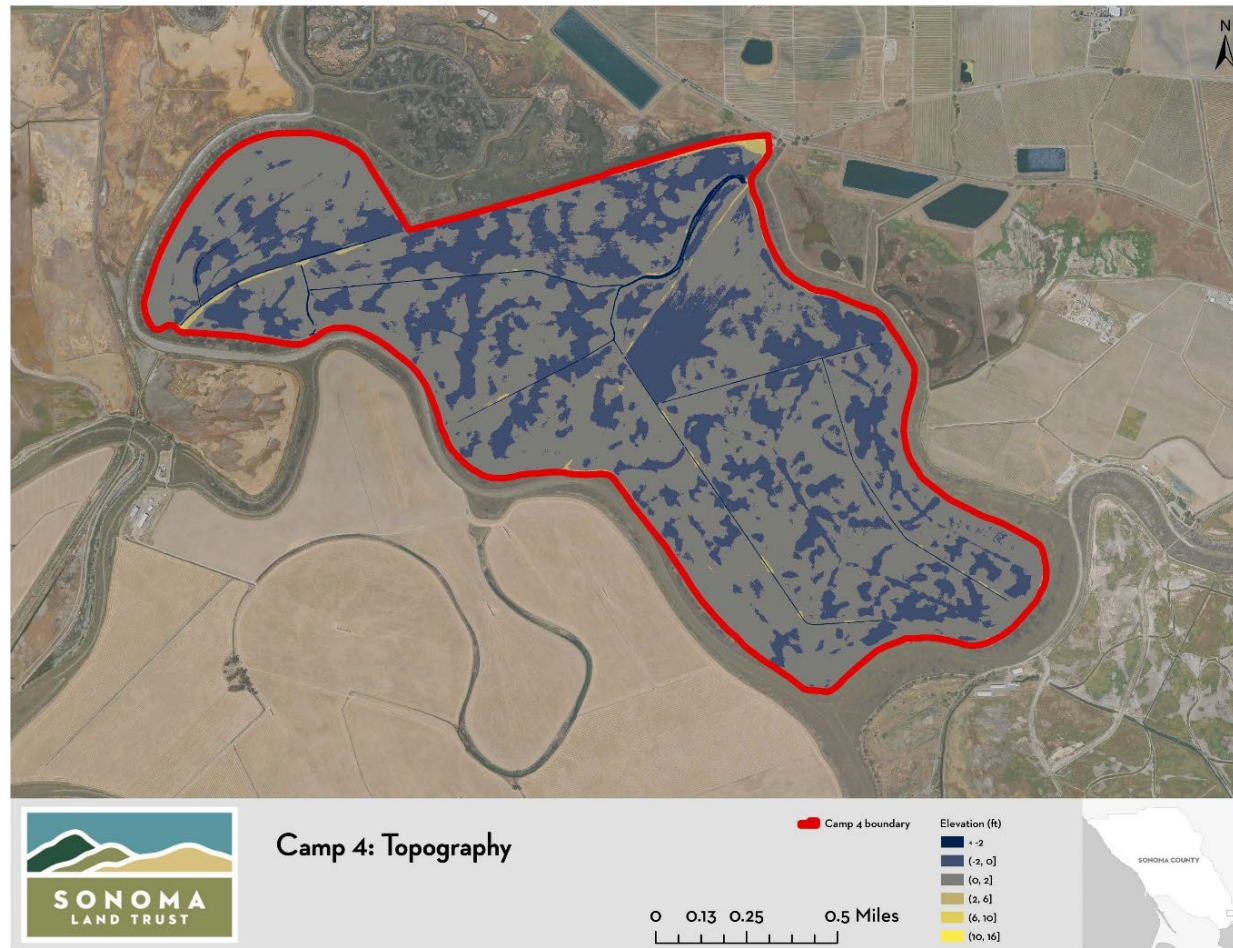


Figure 1: Topographic map of Camp 4. (Data Source: Sonoma Vegetation Mapping & LiDAR Program, 2013 DEM).

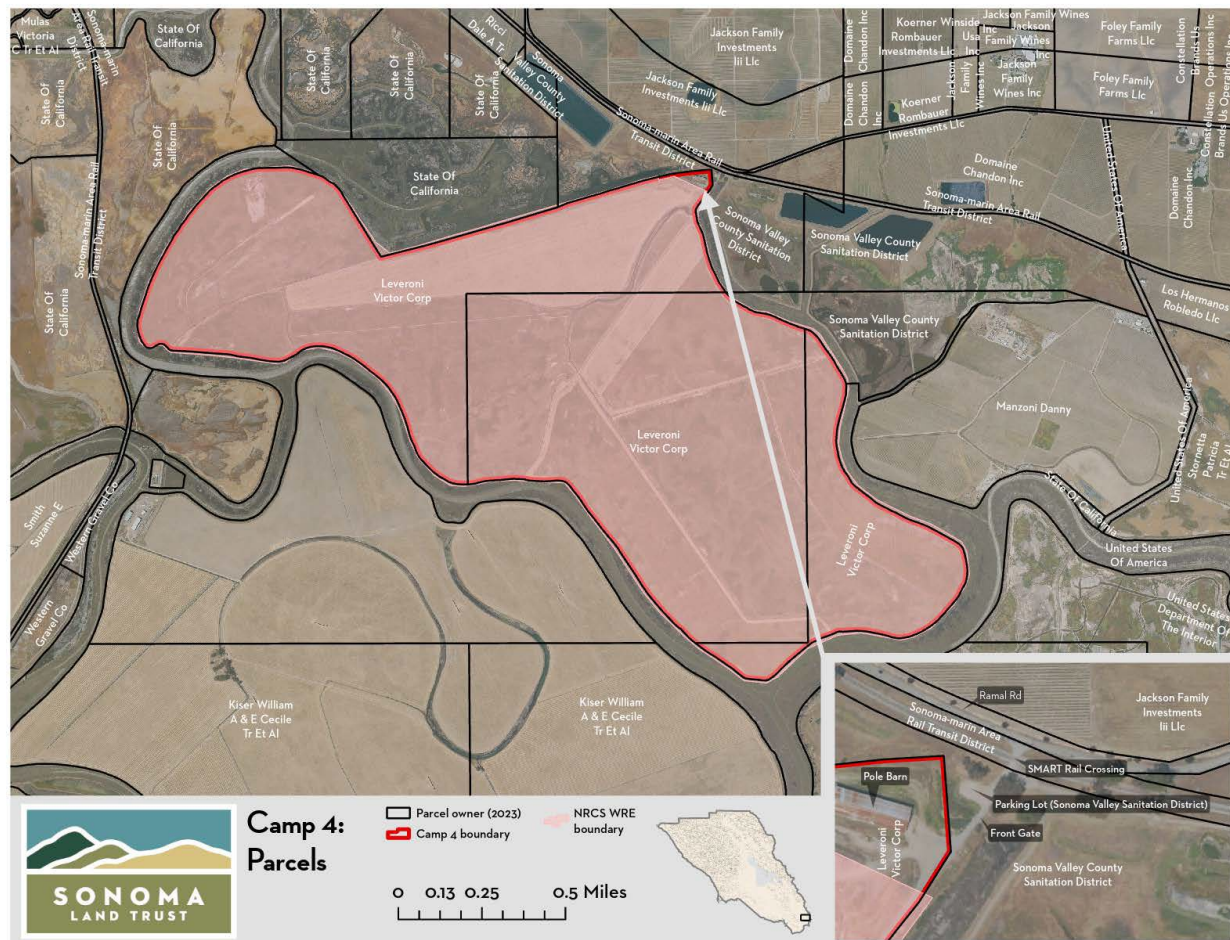


Figure 2: Parcel ownership surrounding Camp 4 and NRCS Wetland Reserve Easement Boundary. (Data Source: Sonoma County Assessor's Office; NRCS).

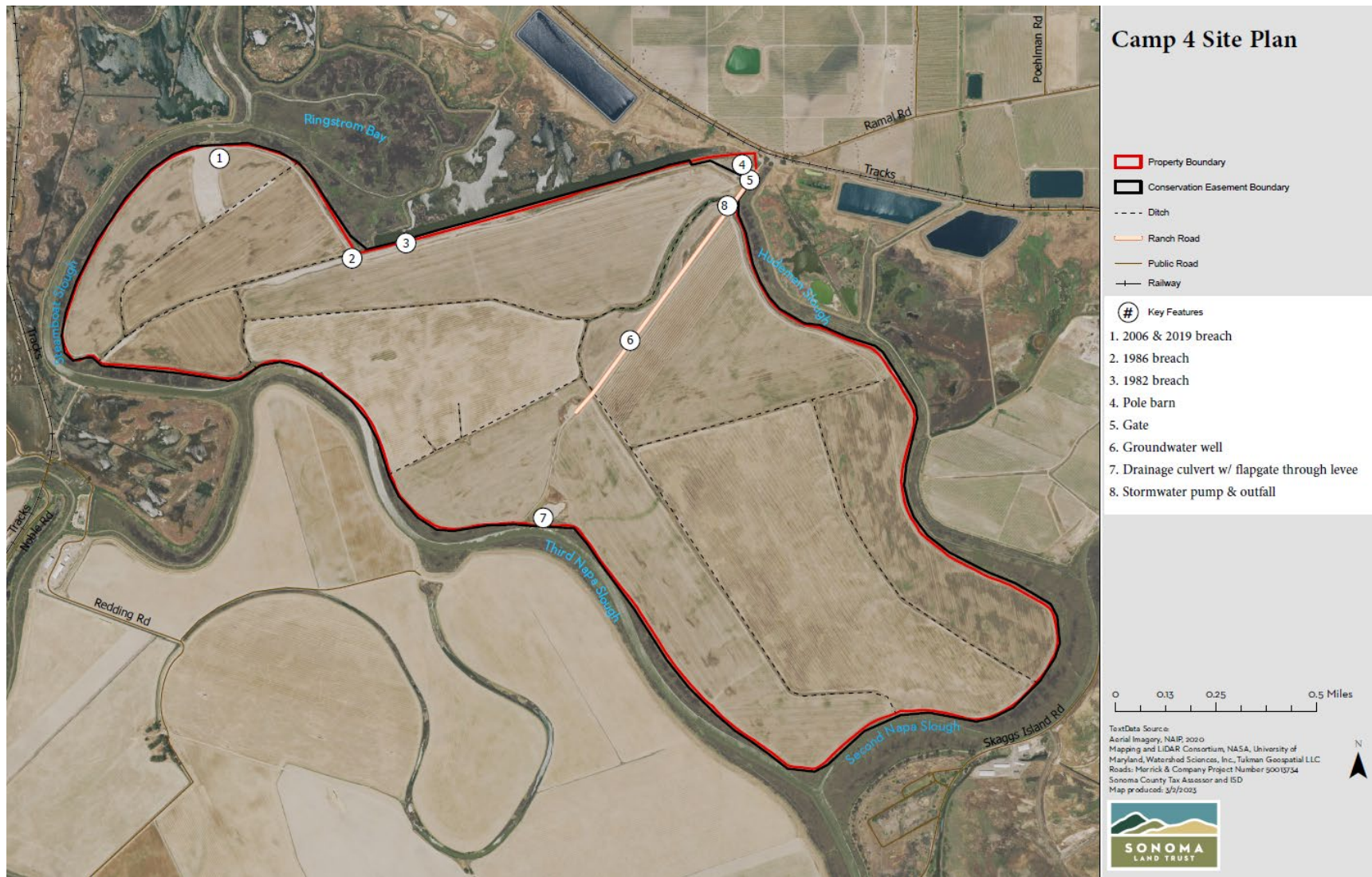


Figure 3: Infrastructure and key features at Camp 4.

Citations

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