Dear Friends,

Our Center is named in honor of Bill Lane, the longtime publisher of *Sunset* magazine, former ambassador to Australia and Nauru, and ardent supporter of his alma mater, Stanford University, and its connections to the American West. We are also grateful for the support of a wide network of Stanford alumni, faculty, graduate and undergraduate students, policymakers, advocates, and journalists — all aficionados as passionate as we are about research, teaching, and public engagement in understanding the past, present, and future of the American West.

From our home base in the new Jerry Yang & Akiko Yamazaki Environment & Energy Building on campus, we look around and see collaborators close by in engineering, the sciences, social sciences, and humanities, at the Woods Institute for the Environment and around campus. We look out at the wider American West — our Center embraces the United States west of the Mississippi, western Canada, and Mexico, and faces the Pacific with open arms — and we see collaborators in other universities and colleges, schools, public agencies, nonprofit organizations, foundations, and the media, all as concerned and fascinated as we are with the West.

We bring the discipline of history to everything that we do at the Center, but it is in engaging with the broader university and the West beyond campus that we constantly find inspiration for our work. And we hope this newsletter inspires you to join us.

Sincerely yours,

David Kennedy and Richard White
Faculty Co-Directors

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Walking the Farm and the American West

By Jon Christensen, Executive Director

Every spring for the past three years David Kennedy, Richard White, and I have taken a group of students, faculty, visiting scholars, community members, and journalists on a very long one-day hike around the very large, 8,180-acre Stanford campus. We call this moving seminar “Walking the Farm.” It is a western tradition, although on the ranches of Nevada, where I spent many years, they called it “riding the fenceline.” Same idea: get out on the land, check the fences, talk with the neighbors, make repairs, clean the irrigation ditches, see what has changed in a year, and what remains the same.

Each year, we cover more than 20 miles examining Stanford’s lands as a microcosm for thinking about the larger West of which we are a part. We explore the historic central Quad, the new science and engineering quad where our Center is based, the research park that nurtured Silicon Valley, the backcountry around the Dish still grazed and farmed in many places, Jasper Ridge Biological Preserve, Searsville Reservoir, and San Francisquito Creek. The walk is a way of weaving together in one day the teaching, research, and public engagement that are at the heart of our mission at the Bill Lane Center for the American West. You might say it’s one way that we strive to walk the talk in our own backyard, by thinking about our

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In 2002, David M. Kennedy and Richard White laid the groundwork for the Center by establishing a postdoctoral fellowship at Stanford dedicated to the American West. Since then, with generous gifts from Stanford alumni including David Laney, Eleanor Watkins Laney, George and Mary Lou Shott, Alan and Bse Rosenberg, George and Leslie Humen, Bill Lane, and others, the Center has provided support for six postdoctoral scholars, 18 visiting scholars, 11 visiting journalists, and 58 undergraduate interns, and dozens of undergraduate research assistants. The Center has held 14 conferences that have brought together scholars, researchers, policy advocates, policymakers, and journalists to examine critical challenges facing the American West and start collaborations to find solutions.

Research
The Center sponsors research that engages faculty, graduate students, and undergraduates across disciplines ranging from the humanities and social sciences, to the natural sciences and engineering. Our base in the newest, greenest building on campus — a home for multidisciplinary research on energy, the environment, food, land, water, conservation, and climate change — puts us in constant conversation and collaboration with other researchers focused on solving problems confronting the West and the world. Visiting scholars bring cutting edge research to the Center. Postdoctoral fellows and graduate students pursue their own innovative projects within the context of our broader mission. And undergraduates have opportunities to pursue a significant piece of original research within our larger research projects.

Teaching
Each year Stanford University offers nearly a hundred courses that delve into the American West, including our own Sophomore College courses that give rising sophomores an immersion in western issues. These courses reflect a deep interest among Stanford students and faculty in significant western subjects, from immigration to political reform, water, environmental history and climate change; engaging directly with westerners and western places, and connecting the region to larger themes in practical as well as theoretical ways. The Center sponsors internships for Stanford students and graduating seniors that give students direct working experience in western national parks from Yellowstone to Yosemite and conservation and media organizations around the region.

Public Engagement
As much as we look inward to the rest of the university to build Stanford’s capacity for research and teaching, we also face outward to the rest of the West. We have organized conferences large and small to build bridges between the university and the worlds of public policy, business, journalism, and arts and culture in the West. We have tackled metropolitan planning, political reform, immigration, sustainable forestry and fishing, and the image of the West in national media and culture. By bringing together participants who might not otherwise have the opportunity to talk to one another, the Center brings a fresh perspective on some of the major issues animating this region and shaping its future. And we make special efforts to help journalists and the media bring these important conversations about the changing West to the broader public.

Our History
In 1909 Teddy Roosevelt’s Country Life Commission reported on a nationwide survey of rural communities in America. A century later, we are using innovative data visualization and mapping technologies to analyze historical patterns of change in the rural West and prospects for the future of rural western communities. We’re working with journalists and academic collaborators to light a fire under scholarly and public discussion of important issues affecting the rural West, from health and health care, to education, the environment, food production, media coverage of rural issues, and more.

Our Future
The Bill Lane Center for the American West is becoming a go-to center for innovative teaching, research, and public engagement at Stanford University. And we are now seeking to build on our strengths, solidify our accomplishments, and extend our capacity by establishing endowed faculty chairs and graduate fellowships across the many disciplines concerned with the West at Stanford — from the humanities and social sciences to engineering and the natural sciences. As the Center more deeply engages Stanford students and faculty in the American West, that experience redounds to the benefit of teaching and scholarship at the university that reaches out to the rest of the world.

To find out how you can support and become involved with the Center, please contact Jon Christensen, the Center’s Executive Director, at jonchristensen@stanford.edu, (650) 759-6534.
relationship to the land and our neighbors, to water and all of the people and the creatures that depend on it, to habitat for humans and threatened and endangered species such as the Bay checkerspot butterfly, the California tiger salamander, and steelhead trout, to climate change and our own energy use and conservation efforts. Whether we’re working on constitutional reform in California, water in the West, or the challenges facing the rural West, this is what the Center is all about: connecting Stanford to the larger American West, the region we live in and love.

Join us in exploring the past, present, and future of the American West. Visit west.stanford.edu. Find out how you can support and be involved in the Center. Sign up for e-mail alerts about upcoming events. And keep in touch with us about what’s going on in your corner of the American West.

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