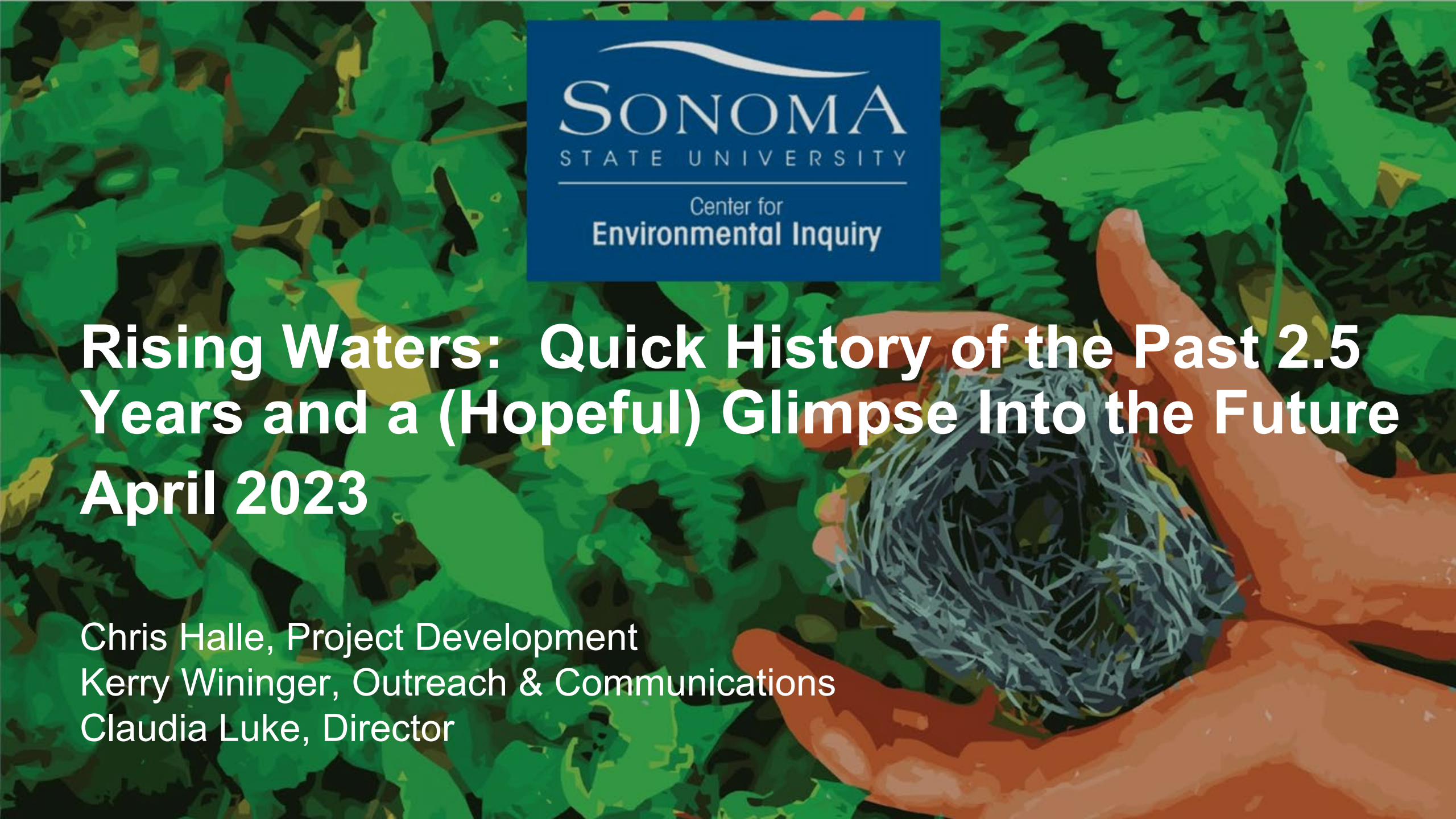

Rising Waters: Quick History of the Past 2.5 Years and a (Hopeful) Glimpse Into the Future

April 2023

Chris Halle, Project Development
Kerry Wininger, Outreach & Communications
Claudia Luke, Director

Transformative change is needed across all sectors of society in the next 10 years

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SSU's Center for Environmental Inquiry

cei.sonoma.edu

Education for a changing planet:

- First-hand understanding of our connection with the environment
- Skill-building experiences
- Innovative solutions

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Transformational Goal

An Environmentally Ready Society

…one where everyone has the skills to find solutions to challenges facing the North Bay.

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WATERS: Transforming Higher Education

Vision: All graduates have experience finding solutions to water challenges

- Knowledge of human-environment interactions
- Skilled workers
- Excellent observers, communicators and problem-solvers

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Academic Engagement

- 233 projects
- 2,764 students (126 courses)
- 20+ partners/yr
- 30 faculty/yr; 15+ depts/yr
- Internships & jobs

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Rising Waters

Rising Waters Initiative

- Complex high-priority issues surrounding water
- Neutral meeting ground for diverse partners
- Cross-disciplinary engagement to address cultural, economic and environmental issues
- Facilitated process targeting innovative and practical solutions

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Education Into Action

1. Rising Waters Working Group identifies issue(s)
2. Multi-disciplinary faculty-student teams collect and summarize data
3. Collaborative brainstorm for solutions and cost-benefit analysis by teams
4. Presentations, reports, products

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Rising Waters supported by:

Sonoma Water

RRWA
RUSSIAN RIVER
WATERSHED ASSOCIATION

Alexander Leff

Steering Committee:

- Michael Thompson, Assistant General Manager, Sonoma Water
- Andy Rogers, Executive Director, Russian River Watershed Associationation
- Jenna Garcia, Housing Administrator, City of Rohnert Park
- Emily Quig, Housing Administrator, City of Rohnert Park
- Lynea Seiberlich-Wheeler, Associate Director of Behavioral Health, West County Health Centers
- Sean McNeil, Deputy Director of Environmental Services, City of Santa Rosa
- Matt St. John, Executive Officer, North Coast Regional Water Quality Control Board
- Don McEnhill, Executive Director, Russian Riverkeeper

Issue 1: Homelessness and Watersheds

- flood protection
- water quality
- sanitation/health
- habitat conservation
- community engagement
- mythbusting

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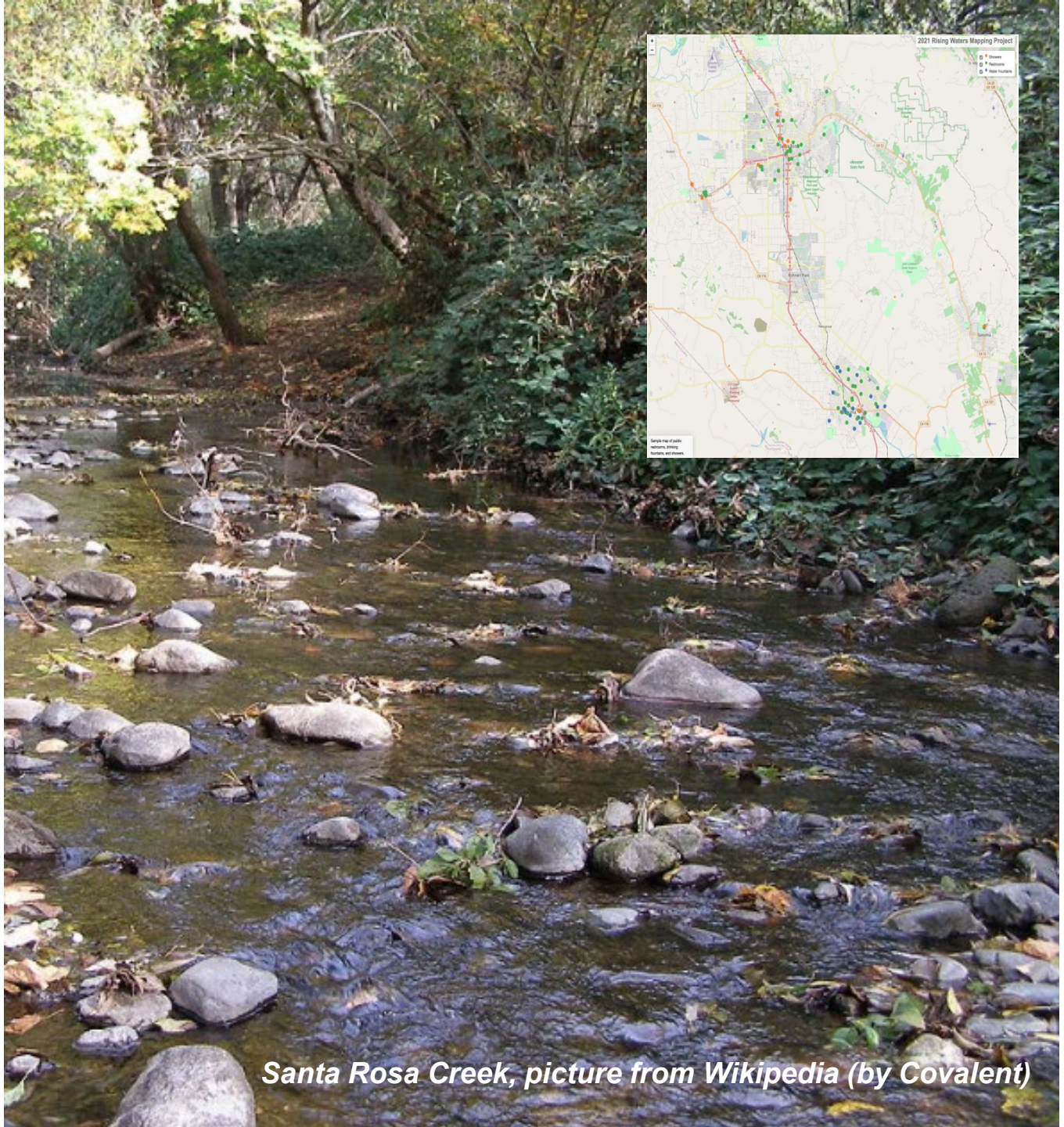
Question 1: Where Are Services Needed to Reduce Water Quality Impacts?

Refined Goal: Resource Mapping, instead of Impact Mapping

- Database of water resources (showers, water fountains, restrooms) has been developed
- Affordable cloud-based solution for sharing the information with decision makers and engaging the public has been identified
- **Next steps:** Identify the appropriate county agency to hold the license, populate the database, compare results with water-quality sampling for fecal contamination



Santa Rosa Creek, picture from Wikipedia (by Covalent)

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Question 2: What are economic, social and political barriers to providing services to people experiencing homelessness?

Refined Goals:

1. ID barriers & costs of providing sanitation
2. How can we engage the business community?

- MBA students' Sanitation Options Report compared sanitation services options, including "do nothing"
- Social Entrepreneurship students evaluated causes and strategies for the water & homelessness "wicked problem"
- **Next steps:** Work with the Sonoma County Homeless Services Continuum of Care (CoC) to synthesize & format information for County leaders and decision makers

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ADA compliant toilet & handwashing station next to Santa Rosa Veterans Memorial Building during COVID

Photo by Lauren Hart

Question 3: How Can we better align investments across all sectors?

Refined Goal: Develop inventory of Sonoma County organizations working on homeless & water issues; Interview advocates; Summarize issues

- Database of 150 stakeholder organizations of has been developed and dozens interviewed
- Flexible steady funding approach identified as major stumbling block
- **Next steps:** Continue interviews; Work with CoC to incorporate database into KPMG report

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B	C	D
Mobile Shower Trailer (Catholic Charities)		
Redwood Gospel Mission		
Community Church of Sebastopol	Hot showers available in Memorial Hall, complete with soap, shampoo & towels. Warm socks, underwear, sweat pants & jackets as available.	S
The Haven (Sonoma Overnight Support)	Showers, laundry, food, bus passes, computers & case management for Sonoma & Sonoma Valley residents in need. Mon, Tue, Wed, Thu 9am-1:30pm. Fri 1:30-4:30pm	CS
St. Paul's Episcopal Church	Daytime showers Tues 2-5pm. Wed 2-4pm. Thu & Fri 10am-4pm. Se habla español.	H
Buckelew Programs	Family Service Coordination, housing, independent living skills, and employment services for adults with mental illness. Family Service Coordinator (FSC): free education, support & assistance with accessing community resources & navigating mental health system for anyone with an adult family member or loved one with a mental illness.	SR
	For very low income families &	

Question 4: How can we address NIMBYism?

Misconceptions about water and homelessness came up for all Year 1 teams, even among advocates

Project: Media Campaign

- Address myths surrounding individuals experiencing homelessness and efforts to provide water resources, while “humanizing” them and sharing solutions
- A public relations plan & media product library (social media, flyers, news release, poster) were developed
- **Next steps:** House media library on publicly accessible website; Create & deploy short interview videos appropriate for council and board meetings

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Homeless Shelters at Finley Community Center

Picture courtesy of Santa Rosa Press Democrat

Question 5: What are effects of encampments on riparian areas, and of water quality on people experiencing homelessness?

Project: Water Sampling

- Clearly document relationship between homeless encampments and water quality, and quality of water people experiencing homelessness are exposed to
- Water samples up- and downstream of multiple homeless encampments have been tested
- **Next steps:** Repeat these tests; Add a test to pinpoint human fecal contamination; Add invertebrate sampling; Engage with local leaders to place samples in context of previously collected regional samples

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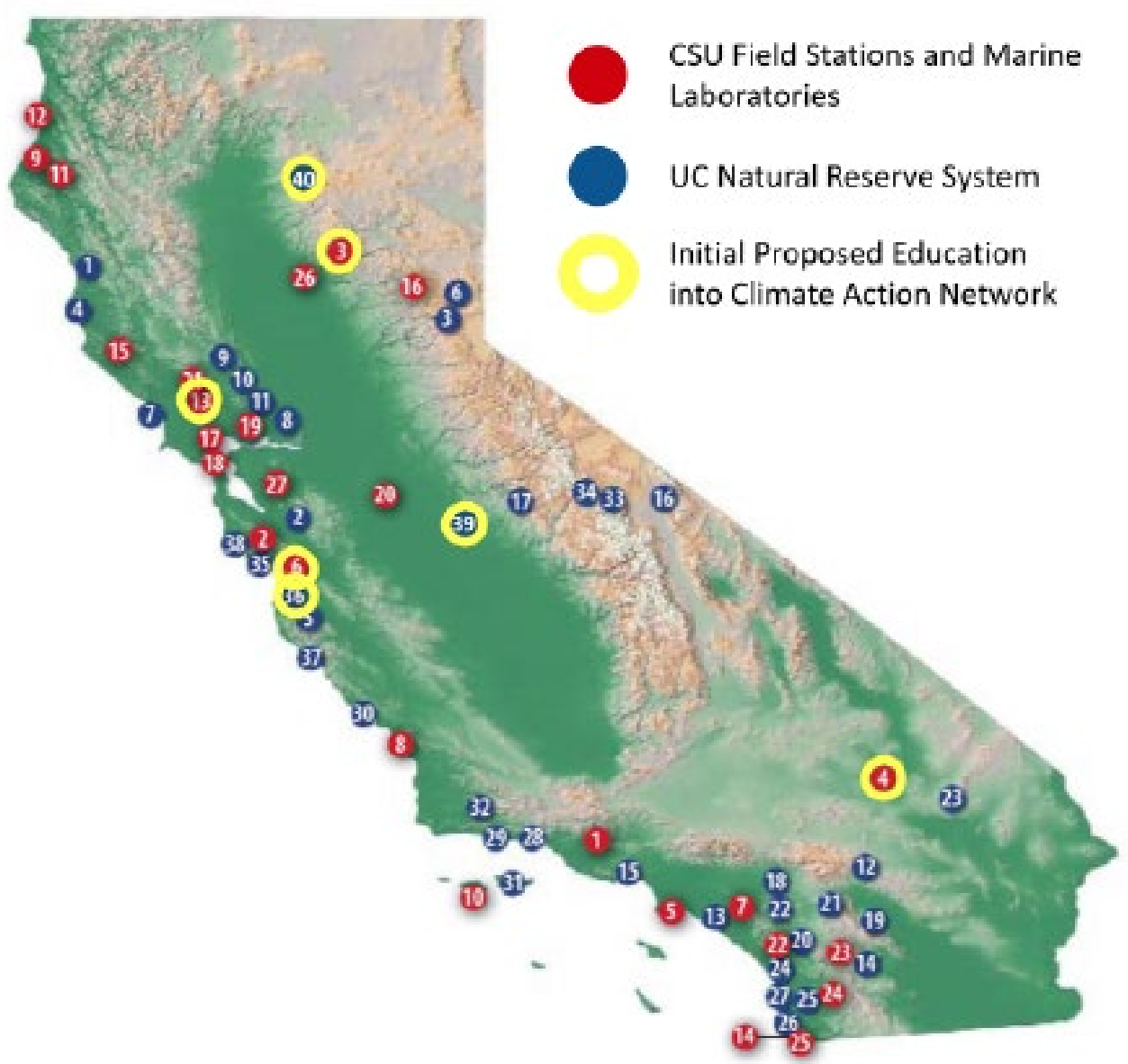
Into the Future

- **Climate Action Grant**: We have submitted a proposal to supercharge these efforts through development and implementation of three pilot projects in the Russian River watershed:

1. Managing water quality impacts in riparian areas
2. Developing cross-agency tools to improve resource allocation and effectiveness
3. Qualitatively and quantitatively assisting Sonoma Water and RRWA in evaluating the value of water supply reliability to water users (i.e., Potter Valley)

The grant would also be used to extend the Education Into Action Model statewide



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Transformative Impact

> “I am walking away with valuable skills: teamwork, leadership, communication, and creativity.”

Nicole Manzares (student)

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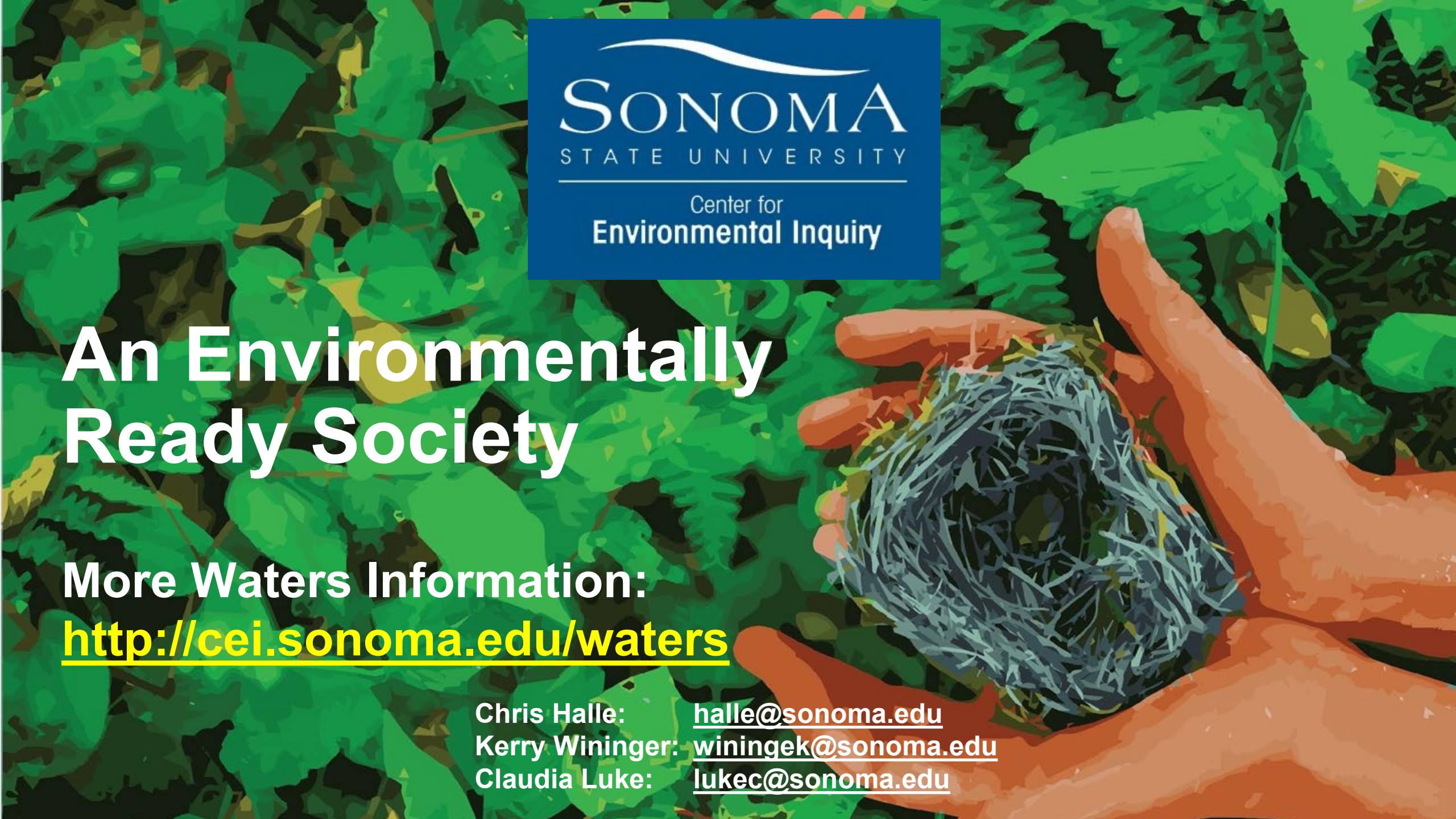

An Environmentally Ready Society

More Waters Information:

http://cei.sonoma.edu/waters

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