Farmland Conservation, Cont.

A renowned artist and visionary farmer, Paul is committed to caring for the long-term productivity of his land. In September 2009, he permanently protected his farm with an agricultural easement.

As the local cities grow and expand, Paul sees a growing conflict between the rural and urban areas, but believes a symbiotic relationship can exist. “Rural farmers need urban residents to buy their food and urban folks seek the open space and natural values farms provide,” said Paul. “By working to create a strong, respectful, committed relationship, we can keep urban land as such and rural land as farms providing the dairy, meat, fruit and vegetable needs of the urban residents.”

“There can be no doubt that a society rooted in the soil is more stable than one rooted in pavements.” - Aldo Leopold

Agricultural easements are a flexible tool, written to meet the specific needs of the farmer while ensuring that the farm stays in productive agriculture. With an agricultural easement, the farmer continues to own and manage the land and can pass it on to family or sell it at a later date.

“Our Farmland Conservation Program offers resources and funds to farmers to support their agricultural operations and to bolster their businesses while conserving their farmland,” said Dan O’Connell, Farmland Conservation Director for Sequoia Riverlands Trust. “Jim and Paul’s groundbreaking efforts represent their lifelong commitment to keeping farmland in production. They’ve set the stage for other farmers with these first agricultural easements in Tulare County.”

SRT Conserves 100 Acres of Prime Farmland

In the northern reaches of Tulare County, south of Dinuba and Berrley and just east of Kingsburg, an underground aquifer and fertile soils provide the key components for a rich bounty of delicious local food. Here, two neighboring farmers put a vision into action by partnering with Sequoia Riverlands Trust to permanently protect their farms. Jim Moore and Paul Buxman, both third generation farmers, hope to start a network of connected, protected farmland that ensures an urban/rural boundary where food production can flourish.

Since the 1930s, Jim Moore’s family has been farming land east of the Kings River. Today, Jim grows Thompson seedless grapes, which he distributes locally to a wine maker. A pragmatic man with a keen business sense, Jim permanently protected 60 acres of vineyards in July 2009 by placing an agricultural conservation easement on the property. He sees this both as a business solution and as way to protect prime farmland. “In a place such as this that can grow anything, if you plan to farm your land, you are being paid for something (i.e. development rights) you are never going to use,” said Jim.

As a local agricultural land trust, Sequoia Riverlands Trust facilitates the use of voluntary farmland conservation agreements, otherwise known as agricultural easements, to safeguard farmland. These flexible agreements are negotiated between the landowner and the land trust to purchase or accept a donation of the property’s development rights. Agricultural easements can provide an important business tool in a farm family’s financial planning, providing a variety of economic benefits. Jim immediately invested the money from the easement back into his farm by planting olive trees and upgrading equipment.

Jim encourages a long-term view and approach to managing land and resources, using them wisely over time. “If we don’t start saving farmland, then we’ll be getting all of our food from other countries,” said Jim. “Agriculture produces something there is no other way to get. You can live without a basketball, but not without something to eat. Agriculture is a basic industry that needs to be preserved.”

To the east and adjacent to Jim’s property, Paul Buxman sustainably farms peaches, nectarines, plums, persimmons, mandarin oranges and grapes on 40 acres, distributing them to California markets. (Continued on back page.)
Collaborating for Regional Conservation

Collaboration is the cornerstone of Sequoia Riverlands Trust’s approach to conserving the natural and agricultural legacy of the southern Sierra Nevada and San Joaquin Valley. That’s why in 2008, the land trust helped found the Southern Sierra Partnership with Audubon California, Sierra Business Council, The Nature Conservancy, and the new Tejon Ranch Conservancy. The partners have committed to pooling their resources and expertise to strategically conserve critical working landscapes and biological systems in the southern Sierra Nevada.

The steep elevation gradient from the southern San Joaquin Valley to the rugged peaks of the Sierra Nevada creates a tremendous range of living conditions for plants and animals. This results in an exceptional biological diversity and numerous species unique to this region. Geologic and climatic factors have also converged to make the adjoining southern Sierra Nevada one of the most productive agricultural regions in the world. Deep, fertile soils, a long growing season, and high-quality water from mountain rivers and snowfields enable valley farmers to grow an amazing variety and abundance of commercial crops. Foothill rangelands also support significant beef production.

These world-class agricultural, biological and scenic resources are as yet relatively undiminished by conversion to residential and industrial uses, and are the target of the Southern Sierra Partnership’s land conservation efforts. The partners are currently collaborating on a major assessment of biological resources and “ecosystem services” in the southern Sierra Nevada and the link to the Tehachapi Mountains. The team is also analyzing threats to these natural assets, including a rigorous look at the potential impacts of climate change. With the help of numerous other stakeholders, the partners are developing regional and local strategies to make the most of our collective conservation efforts for years to come.

“Collaboration is the key to responding to both the threats and opportunities for this amazing part of the world,” said Saopy Mulholland, Executive Director for Sequoia Riverlands Trust. “Through the Southern Sierra Partnership we can accomplish far more than the individual organizations could by themselves.”

Accomplishments

With your support, in 2009, Sequoia Riverlands Trust...

Conserved 100 acres of productive farmland in Tulare County by working with two farm owners to establish voluntary agricultural conservation easements.

Conserved 2,450 acres in and adjoining Carrizo Plain National Monument in partnership with the Bureau of Land Management and The Nature Conservancy.

Research and developed a long-term conservation plan for the Southern Sierra, including scientific climate change modeling and projected threats, as a member of the Southern Sierra Partnership (see article page 2).

Near completion of a five-year effort to reclaim a former gravel quarry and restore natural habitat at Dry Creek Preserve. Recent accomplishments include re-contouring and re-vegetating the former hard rock pit.

Initiated a visitor access plan for Blue Oak Ranch and began important restoration work, including removal of invasive, non-native plant species.

Led more than 1,000 local students on curriculum-based nature tours at Kaweah Oaks Preserve.

Engaged the community in a series of successful, conservation-oriented events, including guided hikes, a Native American basketweaving demonstration, a plein-air paint out and the Kaweah Land and Arts Festival.

Redesigned its website to make it more informative and easier to navigate.

The Gift that Gives Twice

This holiday season, give everyone on your list a nature-inspired gift that conserves habitat, open space, rangeland and farmland.

Give a gift membership: Share a membership to Sequoia Riverlands Trust with the special people on your giving list. Includes a subscription to SRT’s Vistas newsletter; discounts to nature walks & events; and a personalized card notifying the recipient of your gift. Individual Membership.........$35; Family.........$50

Dedicate an oak: For a truly meaningful gift, dedicate a valley oak at Kaweah Oaks Preserve to your family. You personally select your tree, and we’ll attach a beautiful metalwork name plaque, hand-designed in the shape of an oak leaf. Includes a membership to Sequoia Riverlands Trust and a dedication certificate. Dedicate an Oak.........$500

Adopt an oak: No holiday tree is as beautiful as a grand valley oak. Adopt one for all of the nature lovers in your life. Not only will you be giving a unique gift, but your loved one will be proud to have helped conserve, in perpetuity, a majestic valley oak. We’ll send the recipient a certificate of adoption. Adopt an Oak......... $50

Give a Southern Sierra painting: The gift of beautiful springtime art will warm the heart of your favorite recipient this winter. Distinguished artists painted on SRT properties and contributed these magnificent pieces of work representing the bioregion’s beauty of our region’s landscapes. Call SRT for pricing and availability. Framed, Original Painting........starting at $700 Framed, Limited Edition Print........starting at $350

www.sequoiariverlands.org

Students learn about biology at Kaweah Oaks Preserve.

Oak dedication name plaque.

Don Crocker, Stories of Spring – Homer Ranch. Oil on canvasboard, 9”x12”.

Sequoia Riverlands Trust
Conserving California’s Natural Legacy

VISTAS
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