



Forest conservation takes root on Big Trees border

By Phillip Gomez

A 413-acre forest that stands shoulder to shoulder with Calaveras Big Trees State Park is being conserved in perpetuity through an easement with San Francisco-based Pacific Forest Trust. Conserved along with it is a view of the Sierra Nevada.

"We protect the whole southern boundary of Big Trees State Park," said Larry Smith, spokesman for the family-owned Love Creek Forest, managed sustainably as a timber-producing forest for the past 40 years. "We're the southern boundary of the North Grove. The migratory patterns of wildlife go up and down the Sierra Range. It's kind of a critical area."

A view of a landscape, according to the Web site Lasting-Forests.com, "is all of the land and water seen from a point or a series of points (a road or trail). ... Managing the seen aspects may greatly affect the perceived spirit of a place."

"We provide a buffer," said Smith, referring to subdivisions that have sprung up close to the

park with names like Pinebrook and Blue Lake Springs. "There are quite a few private homes up there."

The mixed-conifer Love Creek Forest stands at the headwaters of Love Creek, an area that's still shown on the Stanislaus National Forest map as "Squaw Hollow." Concern about the number of homes being built around the private forest was what prompted the Smith family last winter to donate the land, through a conservation easement, to the Pacific Forest Trust. The Sierra Nevada Conservancy funded the cost of the legal transaction.

"We, as a family, made a philosophical decision to protect the forest long-term and to prevent any kind of commercial development of the property," Smith said.

The land was originally logged in the early 19th century by a shipping magnate named McKay, whose namesake is the area reservoirs dotting the U.S. Forest Service map north of the North Fork of the Stanislaus. A narrow-gauge railroad used to carry felled timbers down to a

sawmill on lower Love Creek where they were sawed into lumber for shipbuilding. Those were the economics of an industrial age of cut-and-saw expansion.

Conservation of trees – especially since the advent of Global Warming and worry about the damage being done to the atmosphere by carbon dioxide gases – has become big business. "It's a commodity, now," Smith said of the credit system recently devised to symbolize how trees conserve in their bark the CO2 released by automobiles and factories. Smith said he's "still just beginning to understand it," but that carbon sequestration in trees, as it's being called, is something big timber companies have already made investments in purchasing credits. "We have to look at the economics for us," he said of the international trade in what the Pacific Forest Trust calls "climate benefits."

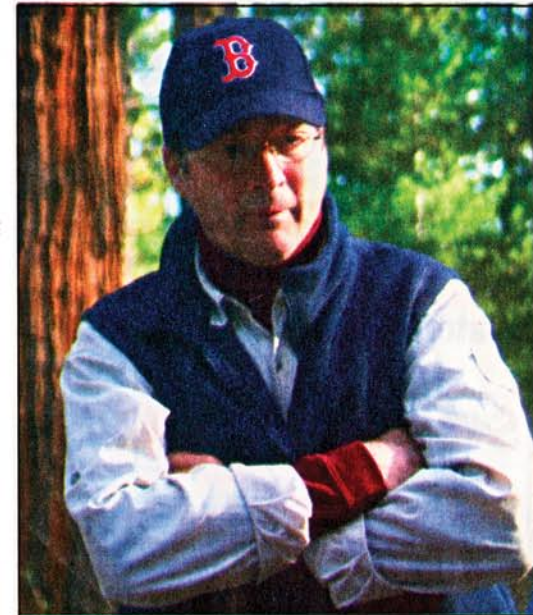
"The Pacific Forest Trust is the leading advocate for the climate benefits of forests," said Christine Harrison, communications manager for the non-profit trust, dedicated to "conserving the public benefits of private forests."

Four out of every five forests in the lower 48 states are privately owned, and yet each year more than a million acres of

these forestlands are converted to shopping malls, subdivisions and roadways, according to the trust. All of these developments contribute to more traffic-polluting carbons in the atmosphere – believed to be the cause of the Earth's gradually warming climate.

Smith has found he can do well for his tree business while doing good for the planet. "We may be able to generate additional revenue by practicing a method of sustainable forestry that yields both timber products and climate benefits, and we are just now starting to investigate this option," he said in the Pacific Forest Trust's press release.

The emissions reductions that come from managing forests for their carbon benefits can be traded as credits in the growing multi-billion-dollar carbon market, according to Pacific Forest Trust. Climate credits are accounted for through rigorous measuring practices, as required by the California Climate Action Registry. The state's forest protocols, developed over a four-year period by scientists, foresters and climate experts, set the rules for calculating emissions reductions from forestry practices that come on top of what the forest would normally provide if left alone. The protocols also provide for emission



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Larry Smith, managing partner in the Smith family's Love Creek Forest.

reductions being made permanent through conservation easements.

The Smith family has long been involved in conservation efforts in Calaveras County, going back to Larry Smith's grandfather, who built a cabin in the area in the 1930s. Larry Smith's parents, Dr. Ben Smith and his wife, Dutton, were active in creating the Calaveras Big Trees Association, a volunteer organization dedicated to preserving and promoting the state park.

"We're sort of following their lead in what you might call con-

servation and stewardship forestry," Smith said, speaking for his brothers, sister and children. Love Creek Forest would not be broken up, but kept as a working forest, they all agreed. "We believe forestland has to be managed, not just left alone," he added, "especially near population centers when there's a build-up of fuels. We've eliminated most of that through thinning and selective harvesting for over 10 years."

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In Tuesday's story "Forest Conservation Takes Roots . . ." the process for calculating reduced carbon emissions credits from forest sequestration was misstated. The credits can be earned from "increased carbon stores from forestry practices that go above and beyond what is already required by state regulations." The Smith family was also said to have donated the Love Creek Forest, through a conservation easement, to the Pacific Forest Trust. The Pacific Forest Trust wanted it clarified that the Smith family will continue to own and manage their property, not withstanding their easement donation.