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## Forest easement lets the ax fall – gently

**Logging, conserving co-exist in McCloud plan.**

**By Jane Braxton Little**  
BEE CORRESPONDENT

McCLOUD – Connie Best hopped onto a 30-inch diameter white fir stump to survey a clear-cut carved into the forest at the base of Mount Shasta. Piles of dead branches and logs littered the ground amid dried grasses and mule ears, rattling in the late September breeze.

Best, managing director of the Pacific Forest Trust, beamed with pride at her surroundings.

A self-proclaimed conservationist, Best is no ordinary champion of logging. And this is no ordinary clear-cut: It represents a new model its advocates hope will save forest landscapes.

The 30-acre block of timber logged

two years ago is part of a 9,200-acre tract of prime timberland forever protected from development by a conservation easement. An agreement announced last month allows the owner, Bascom Pacific, to manage the land as a working forest.

In addition to sanctioning logging, the easement protects water quality

► **McCLOUD, Page B4**



Sacramento Bee/Jane Braxton Little  
**Connie Best, a forest trust official, sees the McCloud plan as a model for mixing public, private interests.**

# McCloud: Watershed benefit expected

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and wildlife habitat and provides public access to the Pacific Crest Trail and along eight miles of famed McCloud River.

Mike Chrisman, California's secretary of resources, called the McCloud easement a creative approach to conservation and the protection of fish and wildlife habitat.

The group that negotiated the agreement with Bascom Pacific includes the California Wildlife Conservation Board, the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation and Pacific Forest Trust, a San Francisco-based conservation group dedicated to protecting working forests. All are as interested in the logging as the environmental protections.

With development threatening the McCloud and other forests in California's commercial "wood basket," the public can no longer take private forests for granted, said Al Wright, former executive director of the California Wildlife Conservation Board.

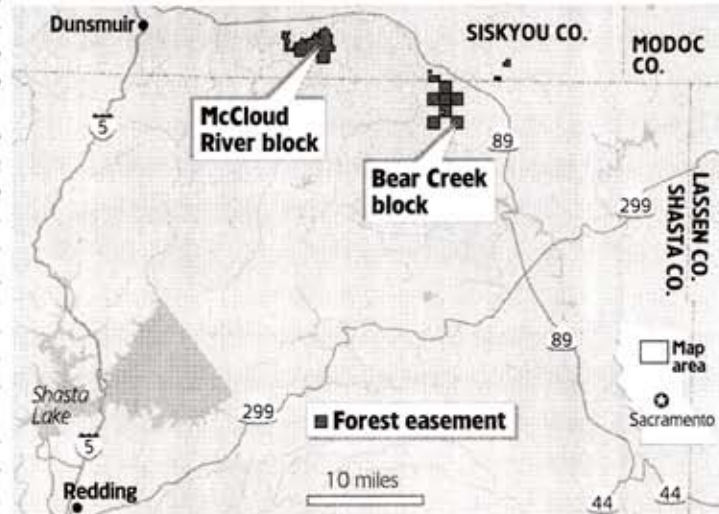
"We will need many more working forest conservation easements like this one," said Wright.

America is losing more than 1 million acres of privately owned forests annually to development – the equivalent of paving over an area larger than Rhode Island, year after year. California alone loses more than 35,000 acres a year, said Best.

The McCloud agreement is the largest forest conservation easement west of the Rockies. The coalition of private and public groups that created it is part of a

## Protecting private forests

A group led by San Francisco-based Pacific Forest Trust has won a conservation easement to spare nearly 9,200 acres of private forest in Siskiyou and Shasta counties from being subdivided for vacation homes and rural residences. The easement allows the owner, Bascom Pacific, to log but forbids land sales to developers.



Source: The Pacific Forest Trust

Sacramento Bee/Olivia Nguyen

national effort to prevent timberland losses. Key are innovative partnerships that allow forest owners to generate income while managing their land to protect non-timber values, Best said.

"Stewardship will happen when it's in the landowner's interest," she said. "Bascom Pacific is demonstrating that forestry and conservation, private ventures and public values are complementary, not contradictory."

Under the agreement, Pacific Forest Trust paid Bascom Pacific \$7.3 million for the development rights to its land 50 miles

northeast of Redding. Bascom Pacific and future owners can continue to log the land but they can never sell it for residential or commercial development.

That protects the wildlife habitat, which hosts 250 species of birds, fish and mammals. Among them are 11 species considered threatened or endangered, including the northern spotted owl, bald eagle, Pacific fisher and redband trout. The 15-square-mile McCloud project – twice the size of Yosemite Valley – links critical habitat and serves as a wildlife corridor across 2.1 million acres of the surrounding Shasta-Trinity Na-

tional Forest.

Other benefits should be protection of the watershed that provides drinking water to more than 20 million Californians and enhancement of the forest's long-term ability to store carbon.

The local community would be expected to see a benefit to its economy, which has been based on timber since the McCloud River Lumber Co. established the town in 1897.

Much of the timber harvesting will be one tree at a time, but the management agreement allows for clear-cuts. Instead of removing all vegetation, however, clear-cutting on the McCloud property requires retaining at least 10 trees per acre, Best said. Some may be left in clumps of up to two acres to provide refuge for wildlife and avoid the hard edges of typical clear-cuts, which remove all vegetation.

In the area where Best stood in view of Mount Shasta, black oaks have been topped to stimulate acorn production for deer and other wildlife and to encourage the bushy growth that many bird species prefer for nesting, she said. Piles of logs simulate the large woody debris that provides shelter for mammals – including bears.

"With clear-cuts, most landowners talk about what's taken off the land. We're talking about what's left," Best said.

The McCloud easement designates several special habitat areas. At Stick Rock Meadow, aspens are being crowded by thick stands of ponderosa pine and white fir. McCloud forest managers are cutting back the conifers

to favor the aspens, which are disappearing from wet meadow landscapes across the West.

At Bear Creek, a tributary in the headwaters of the Fall River, management will focus on the clear-flowing water that helps flush sediments and improve the habitat for spring-fed rainbow trout, Best said.

"Pacific Forest Trust is setting a very high standard for the kind of conservation activities we are embarking on in California," said Resources Secretary Chrisman.

Rick Smith, president of Forest Systems, which manages the Bascom Pacific property, concurred. "We hope this project helps set a conservation precedent in California and beyond."

For Bascom Pacific, the working forest conservation easement is part of a long-term strategy that offers extra financial incentive to practice high standards of stewardship, Smith said.

Most of the funding for the easement purchase came from the state Wildlife Conservation Board, with matching grants from the Richard and Rhoda Goldman fund and the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation through its Wal-Mart-sponsored "Acres for America" program.



For more information, go to <http://www.pacificforest.org/>