

PACT PROTECTS SIERRA RANCHLAND, UPPER CALAVERAS RIVER

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Campstool Ranch owner Tim Lanes talks about the land Friday while holding historic mining photos during a celebration of a conservation easement that will preserve the ranchland.

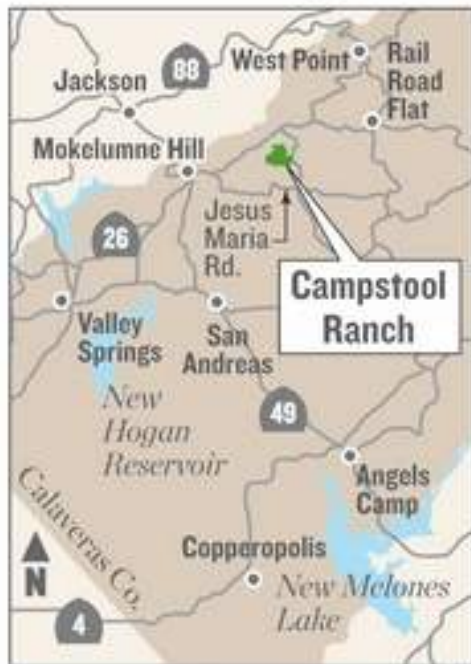
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Undeveloped land at Campstool Ranch in Rail Road Flat on Friday morning.

Campstool Ranch preserved

Pacific Forest Trust has cut a deal to preserve a 2,168-acre ranch in the heart of Calaveras County.



Source: Pacific Forest Trust The Record

RAIL ROAD FLAT - Stockton's future drinking water supply is a little more secure because Tim Lane was willing to give up some of his property rights.

Lane and his family are owners of Campstool Ranch, a 2,168-acre spread near Rail Road Flat in Calaveras County. Friday, three generations of the Lane family as well as state officials and representatives of the Pacific Forest Trust were on hand to celebrate a conservation easement that will preserve the ranch and its pastures and forests in perpetuity.

"I just feel it's the right thing to do," Lane, 71, said from behind the wheel of a dusty ranch pickup.

Campstool Ranch includes a 3-mile stretch of the North Fork Calaveras River, which flows to New Hogan Reservoir and provides drinking water to Stockton.

Pacific Forest Trust officials said they seek easements to protect upland ranches like Campstool in part because that's where water originates that flows into major California rivers and to the San Joaquin River Delta.

The Campstool easement purchase was funded with \$2.7 million from the state Wildlife Conservation Board and \$350,000 in Proposition 84 bond money distributed through the Sierra Nevada Conservancy.

That didn't cover the full appraised value of the easement, so the Lane family donated the rest.

What the easement means is that the ranch will never be chopped up into small ranchettes whose size makes forest management impossible and whose septic systems pose a contamination risk for Stockton's water.

The easement also bars the owners from overgrazing the pastures or removing more than 25 percent of the volume of timber in any given decade.

"We wouldn't do that anyway," Lane said.

Pacific Forest Trust officials say such easements are negotiated so that the land will still be protected even a century from now when the present conservation-conscious owners are long gone and the property could be owned by a different family.

They also praised Tim Lane and the other Lanes who have cared for at least some of the land since 1919, when Tim Lane's grandparents, Thomas and Anna Lane, homesteaded 160 acres.

"This area is pristinely cared for. They have minimized fire risk," Kim Kowalski, communications director for the trust, said of how the Lanes have managed their forests.

Kowalski said that the ranch's forests are in far better shape than those on nearby public lands. That was evident during a tour Lane gave Friday through stands of Ponderosa pine, cedar and fir. In many places, parklike meadows extend below the trees rather than the brush that chokes many areas in national forests.

"In the last 25 years, we've reclaimed almost 1,000 acres," Lane said of his brush-clearing and thinning efforts. "There are areas where I see little rivulets of water running down draws where I never saw it before. And it's because we removed brush."

Tim Lane's parents, Eldred and Blossom Lane, were the ones who built the ranch to its present size. That started in 1946 when Blossom Lane received an inheritance.

"She bought 574 acres for \$5,000 bucks," Lane said.

It took five years and a lot of talking to each other before the Lanes decided on doing the easement.

"Many discussions were at that table right there," Scott Lane, 39, said, pointing to the ranch house dining room on the property Blossom Lane bought in 1946.

Signing the easement doesn't mean the ranch can't still generate income. The Lanes can still run 100 head of cattle, and they expect to continue selective logging to pay the bills every few decades when a new generation heads off to college.

Next up on that timeline are three granddaughters - Holly, Madison and Mckenna, all 9, who could be heading out to college in about nine years or so.

The high point on the ranch is a 2,950-foot elevation hill with views across the San Joaquin Valley to Mount Diablo in the west and the expanse of the Sierra Nevada to the east.

The gravestones for Eldred and Blossom Lane are there. Before feeding them a barbecue lunch, Tim Lane brought the visiting state officials and Pacific Forest Trust officials to see that hilltop and its graves.

"It's appropriate because my parents would definitely approve of what we are doing," Tim Lane said.

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Undeveloped land at Campstool Ranch in Rail Road Flat on June 14.



Owner Tim Lanes talks about the land while holding historic mining photos at Campstool Ranch in Rail Road Flat on June 14.



Undeveloped land and the road into Campstool Ranch in Rail Road Flat on June 14.

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Undeveloped land and the pond at Campstool Ranch in Rail Road Flat on June 14. *MICHAEL McCOLLUM/The Record*