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STATE PROGRAMS, NAPA LAND TRUST PERMANENTLY SHIELD TWO RANCHES FROM FUTURE DEVELOPMENT

NAPA -- For Amy Gunn, seeing stars over Lake Berryessa was a big motivating factor in ensuring her family's cattle ranch will forever be rural.

"When I was little, in bed at night, the view from my room looked out to the west side of the lake," she said. "My early memories are of complete wilderness. But the nighttime view has changed dramatically in 50 years, with home lights now visible in large groups in several areas.

"If we protect the east side of Lake Berryessa now, and we look ahead 50 years into the future, the lake won't be a complete circle of lights. Maybe my grandchildren will still experience that feeling of being in the wilderness, even so close to the Bay Area."

The Gunn Ranch and adjacent Smitty Ranch have been permanently shielded from development in an arrangement known as an agricultural conservation easement, and other local properties are likely to follow suit. The [Land Trust of Napa County](#) worked with the [Gordon and Betty Moore Foundation](#) and the California Department of Conservation (DOC) to bring the easements to fruition. The easement restricts future development on the land, but allows the land to stay in private ownership and ensures that sustainable ranching can continue into the future.

The Napa County easements were the first completed under California's new Sustainable Agricultural Lands Conservation (SALC) Program. The SALC Program is part of the [California's Climate Investments](#), which use proceeds from the state's cap-and-trade auctions to reduce greenhouse gas emissions while providing a variety of additional benefits to California communities. SALC is administered by the DOC for the Strategic Growth Council (SGC). SALC supports the state's efforts to reduce emissions through agricultural land preservation, complementing SGC's climate investments in infill and compact development.

“Protecting our natural and working lands from future development is a key component in reaching our state's long term climate goals, and the Strategic Growth Council is committed to stewarding and protecting these vital natural resources,” said SCG Executive Director Randall Winston.

“We were very pleased to work with the State of California and the Moore Foundation to complete these easements,” said Doug Parker, Chief Executive Officer of the Land Trust of Napa County. “And I especially want to thank the landowners for their commitment to this project. This was really just the first phase of a very large agricultural easement project aimed at protecting all the land on the east side of Lake Berryessa – 14,000 acres. All of the landowners are interested in doing easements, so we are excited about working with them to protect this large and important area.”

The easements, totaling 1,558 acres, are 18 miles from Angwin in Napa County and 12 miles from the City of Winters Sphere of Influence in Yolo County. Although the land is rural, the property just south of the ranches has been divided into 40-acre lots and around the lake, other areas have been developed. The ranches have beautiful views of Lake Berryessa desirable for ranchettes, estate homes, or recreational homes. By eliminating the potential to subdivide these ranches, 5.1 million fewer vehicle miles travelled over the next 30 years will be attained, along with a multitude of agricultural and habitat benefits.

The ranch includes large open grasslands that transition to oak woodlands and more forested land going up from the lake to the ridge on the Napa-Yolo county line. Protecting the upper reaches of the land will ensure that these forests are also protected, growing trees that will continue to sequester carbon. In addition, the project will help protect the watershed of Lake Berryessa, a key water source for Solano County, and significant scenic landscapes for all the residents and visitors to Lake Berryessa each year.

To the east and north east, the ranches are adjacent to protected areas. The land immediately to the north and south remains under threat. Nearby protected lands include Bureau of Land Management property that was designated last year as part of the new Berryessa Snow Mountain National Monument, and ranches protected with easements in both Napa and Yolo counties.

“Pursuing this project provides the opportunity to create, through several phases, a contiguous area of over 57,000 acres of permanently protected land,” Parker said. “This would ensure wildlife corridors across this very large area and into a complex of protected lands to the north.”

DOC’s Division of Land Resource Protection administers the SALC Program, based on its conservation easement expertise under the [California Farmland Conservancy Program](#) (CFCP). Since 1996, the CFCP has funded more than 175 conservation easements, permanently conserving more than 57,000 acres of the state’s best farmland with more than \$83 million in funding.

“We congratulate the Land Trust of Napa County and the landowners on the creation of these agricultural conservation easements,” said David Bunn, Director of the Department of Conservation. “We

appreciate the work the land trust does to preserve the productive ranchlands and natural beauty of Napa County. We're proud to have helped facilitate preserving these properties and look forward to working with land trusts and landowners on future endeavors that will result in long-term greenhouse gas reduction benefits."

Added Dan Winterson of the Moore Foundation: "We are pleased to be able to support this important project, which protects high conservation-value lands from development. We extend many thanks to the landowners and the Land Trust of Napa County for all of the work to complete the easement, and are very excited about the new, innovative funding provided by the SALC program that allows these deals to come to fruition."

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