

Napa Valley **Register**

Environment

Napa Land Trust announces large Lake Berryessa ranch preservation

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A view of Monticello Ranch on the east side of Lake Berryessa. The Land Trust of Napa County holds a new conservation easement on the 4,461-acre property that will protect the cattle ranch from development. Courtesy the Land Trust of Napa County

Almost seven square miles of ranchland on the east side of Lake Berryessa should look and remain the same for future generations, no matter what pressures arise for ranchette development.

Vintners Robin and Michelle Baggett of Alpha Omega winery in Rutherford and Pete Craig, whose family founded Rutherford's Sacrashe Vineyard, own the 4,461-acre Monticello Ranch. They recently put the land under a conservation easement.

That means the land remains privately owned with the development rights stripped. The Land Trust of Napa County holds the easement, the third-largest in its history.

"There's only one house under the easement on the entire 4,461 acres," Land Trust CEO Doug Parker said on Wednesday. "No wineries. The easement will maintain it as range land. You won't even be able to do cultivated agriculture there."

State Department of Conservation spokesman Don Drysdale said the easement is worth \$2.7 million. The state paid about \$2 million through its Sustainable Agricultural Lands Conservation program, with the owners donating the remaining value.

Though this land is relatively remote, Parker said it could have been threatened by ranchette development. People would have been attracted by the great views of Lake Berryessa, he said.

Robin Baggett said he has been cattle ranching for 34 years.

"When my wife Michelle and I first toured this expansive lakefront ranch, we knew this land was a very unique place on this earth," he said in a press release issued by the state and Land Trust.

Craig said pressure for urban sprawl constantly threatens large tracts of land such as Monticello Ranch.

"Having this land protected and dedicated to ranching will help us achieve our dream of a sustainable ranching operation next to Lake Berryessa," Craig said in the press release. "And it will allow my son Will the opportunity to follow in my footsteps, if he has it in him!"

Parker said the land connects with federal land along Lake Berryessa and to Berryessa Snow Mountain National Monument. It is part of a natural corridor extending northward to the Oregon border.

If the Land Trust is going to create protected areas that stand the test of time, it needs these areas to have connections to other protected areas on a large scale, Parker said.

"At Lake Berryessa, we can do that," Parker said.

Napa County's agricultural scene is known mostly for its grapes. Still, Parker said there is ranching in the east county on out to Yolo County. The 2016 county crop report said 95,000 acres – about 148 square miles—are used for pasture and rangeland.

The Land Trust wants to protect 14,000 acres through conservation easements in the Lake Berryessa area, Parker said. With the latest addition, it is up to about 6,000 acres, with the promise of more to come.

"The landowners are interested in doing easements, so we are excited about working with them to protect this important area," Parker said.

Money for the easement comes from the state's cap-and-trade program designed to lower greenhouse gas emissions.

The easement on Monticello Ranch will prevent emissions that would result from housing development. It will help with carbon sequestration by protecting forested areas, the press release said.

"Furthermore, the project will help protect the watershed of Lake Berryessa, a key water source for Solano County, and beautiful scenic landscapes for all residents and visitors to Lake Berryessa each year," it said.

The nonprofit Land Trust of Napa County since 1976 has protected more than 65,000 acres, 12 percent of Napa County. It does so both by owning land and by obtaining conservation easements on privately owned land.