



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

## **Alpha Omega Vintners Donate Lake Berryessa Ranch Easement to Permanently Protect Agriculture**

### ***Conservation Easement on 4,461-Acre Property Marks One of the Largest Ever in Napa County***

**RUTHERFORD, CA (Dec. 14, 2017)** — One of the biggest agricultural conservation easements in Napa County was recently completed on the 4,461-acre Monticello Ranch on the east shore of Lake Berryessa, thus ensuring the future of open space and ranching traditions at the county’s largest lake. The ranch, owned by vintners Robin and Michelle Baggett of Alpha Omega winery in Rutherford and Pete Craig, whose family owns Rutherford’s Sacrashe Vineyard, has been permanently protected from development with an agreement known as an agricultural conservation easement. The Land Trust of Napa County worked with the California Department of Conservation (DOC) to bring the easement transaction to fruition through the Sustainable Agricultural Lands Conservation (SALC) Program. The conservation easement restricts future development on the land, but allows the land to stay in private ownership.

The easement eliminates the potential for all but one house on the 4,461 acres. “The land could have been converted into ranchettes and sold for development,” said Doug Parker, CEO of the Land Trust of Napa County. “Under the easement, the property’s significant natural values - right next to Lake Berryessa and the Berryessa Snow Mountain National Monument - and its ranching tradition will be assured over the long term.”

“The Lake Berryessa region is one of Napa County’s great spaces,” Congressman Mike Thompson said. “Throughout my career, I’ve done everything I can to support conservation initiatives that protect our community’s lands. I’m glad to see Robin and Michelle Baggett and Pete Craig taking the steps to preserve Monticello Ranch for generations to come.”

The SALC Program that helped fund this easement is administered by DOC for the Strategic Growth Council (SGC). The Program aims to protect agricultural lands on the outskirts of cities from development, simultaneously supporting California’s food security and encouraging infill development and low-carbon transportation. This program is part of the California Climate Investments, which use proceeds from the State’s Cap and Trade auctions to reduce greenhouse gas emissions while advancing a variety of additional environmental, economic and health benefits.

“We congratulate the Land Trust of Napa County and the Baggett and Craig families on the creation of this conservation easement,” Department of Conservation Director David Bunn said. “We appreciate the work the land trust does to preserve the productive agriculture of Napa County and to help maintain a viable agricultural economy in the region, and we’re very pleased to be a partner in this effort.”

Randall Winston, the Executive Director of the Strategic Growth Council said, “The Monticello Ranch easement is a superb example of the natural and working lands that the SALC Program aims to protect. We are thrilled to support the Baggett and

Craig families and the Land Trust of Napa County in preserving this beautiful asset for the California economy and way of life.”

“With continued pressure from urban sprawl, large tracts of land like this are constantly under threat of being taken out of grassland production, not only eliminating the ranching way of life that has been around for 150 years,” said Craig, who will continue as owner and manager of the ranch, “but reducing the ability of the Mother Nature to work in combination with cattle ranchers to help fight global warming. I have already protected other land in the area, and this ranch is next to additional land I plan to protect as well. Having this land protected and dedicated to ranching will help us achieve our dream of a sustainable ranching operation next to beautiful Lake Berryessa. And it will allow my son, Will, the opportunity to follow in my footsteps, if he has it in him!”

“This is one of the largest easements we have ever completed,” said Parker. “We were very pleased to work with the State of California to complete this easement, and I especially want to thank the landowners, Pete Craig and Robin and Michelle Baggett, for their generosity in protecting this large ranch. They made a very significant and valuable contribution to make this easement happen, and we very much appreciate their farsighted commitment to conservation.”

“I have 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,” Robin Baggett said. “Giving back is so important to Michelle and me, and we wanted to share this land – undeveloped – with generations to come.”

The ranch includes large open grasslands that transition to oak woodlands and forested land ascending from Lake Berryessa to the ridge on the Napa-Yolo county line. “It’s home to an abundance of raptors, such as bald eagles, hawks and osprey, as well as other wildlife,” said Craig.

“Its location is very significant for connecting protected land into the large areas needed by wildlife,” said Parker. On the west, the ranch abuts federal land around Lake Berryessa. On the north, it abuts another protected ranch. And on the east, it abuts the new Berryessa Snow Mountain National Monument. “This easement connects together all this protected land,” said Parker, “and it’s a key step toward an ambitious goal aimed at protecting all the land on the east side of Lake Berryessa – 14,000 acres. The landowners are interested in doing easements, so we are excited about working with them to protect this important area.”

The easement will help meet California’s climate goals in several ways. By keeping the land in ranching, the property will not be generating the ongoing emissions that would result from the development of housing. In addition, the easement will also ensure ongoing sequestration of carbon. Because significant portions of the property are forested, the easement will ensure that these forests are protected, growing trees that will continue to pull carbon from the atmosphere. Furthermore, the project will help protect the watershed of Lake Berryessa, a key water source for Solano County, and beautiful scenic landscapes for all the residents and visitors to Lake Berryessa each year.

“It’s great to work with someone as committed to sustainable ranching as Pete is,” said Parker. Craig added, “While at Cal Poly, one of my professors said the only way to get into the cattle business was to inherit it, marry into it, or be dumb. I can’t say that I fall into the first two categories, but I have been a rancher for a long time now and with the help of Robin and Michelle and the Napa Land Trust, maybe I am getting a bit smarter.... maybe!!!”



View of Monticello Ranch, below, taken from Berryessa Peak.



Alpha Omega vintners Robin (left) and Michelle Baggett.

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**Alpha Omega** - Founded in 2006 by Robin and Michelle Baggett, Alpha Omega began as a direct-to-consumer pioneer and now sells 95% of its wine through this channel. Located on Highway 29 in the legendary Rutherford Bench of Napa Valley, Alpha Omega produces world-class, Bordeaux-style, handcrafted wines made with prized grapes from its own vineyards and historic vineyards by Swiss-born winemaker Jean Hoefliger and consulting winemaker Michel Rolland. With its landmark fountains, tranquil pond and stunning views of the Mayacamas Mountains and vineyards, the winery exudes a sense of place and offers hospitality reflective of the farming community. Alpha Omega’s land and winery are Napa Green certified. To learn more, please visit [www.aowinery.com](http://www.aowinery.com).



**California Climate Investments** - <http://www.caclimateinvestments.ca.gov/> - are programs funded by the Greenhouse Gas Reduction Fund using proceeds from the State’s cap-and-trade auctions. For more information on California’s Climate Investments, please visit: [www.arb.ca.gov/cc/capandtrade/auctionproceeds/ggrfprogrampage.htm](http://www.arb.ca.gov/cc/capandtrade/auctionproceeds/ggrfprogrampage.htm)



**The Land Trust of Napa County** - [napalandtrust.org](http://napalandtrust.org) - is dedicated to preserving the character of Napa by permanently protecting land. In its 41-year history, the Land Trust has worked with landowners to complete over 200 real estate projects, protecting more than 70,000 acres of land – over 14% of Napa County.



**The Department of Conservation** (DOC) administers the Sustainable Agricultural Lands Conservation (SALC) Program - <http://sgc.ca.gov/Grant-Programs/SALC-Program.html> - and the Planning Grants and Incentives Program, among others, on behalf of the SGC. DOC provides technical assistance to local governments on the Williamson Act and assists Resource Conservation Districts to promote the long-term sustainability of the State’s rich and diverse natural resource heritage. DOC also tracks the conversion and loss of farmland in California through the Farmland Mapping and Monitoring Program. For more information, please visit [www.conservation.ca.gov](http://www.conservation.ca.gov).

**Media Contact:**

Kelly E. Carter  
Alpha Omega  
Direct: 707-302-2012  
Mobile: 707-339-1527  
[kelly@aowinery.com](mailto:kelly@aowinery.com)

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