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# When conservation measures help preserve and create logging jobs at Mount Shasta



In Siskiyou County, supervisors have unanimously backed partnerships to keep land in private ownership and productive use. **Lezlie Sterling** Sacramento Bee file

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Mount Shasta presides over the Northern California landscape, a towering spiritual presence that attracts poets, presidents and healers seeking harmony in its aura. Today the mountain is casting its spell on the land itself.

While most of the nation is facing a divisive assault on the environment led by the president, the Mount Shasta region is experiencing a surge of grass-roots agreements as anomalous as they are unifying:

- Timber companies are forming partnerships with a progressive conservation think-tank.
- Private forestlands rich with wildlife and natural springs are gaining permanent protection from development.
- Supporting both are a multinational bottling company and the Siskiyou County Board of Supervisors.

And most surprising of all: The combination of conservation measures is preserving and creating jobs in one of the state's most economically depressed areas.

The partnerships burgeoning in the Mount Shasta region all began on vulnerable ground.

It doesn't take a Realtor to recognize the development potential of the 1,300 acres of forest around McCloud, a historic timber town. Or a 5,000-acre parcel on the eastern flanks of Black Butte, a cluster of lava domes along Interstate 5 between Weed and Mount Shasta city. Graced by conifers and scores of bubbling springs, both areas boast spectacular views of Mount Shasta. Left alone, both would have been prime development terrain. The McCloud forestland was poised for conversion to 50 single-family houses on lots as small as 5 acres.

Last month Schroll Timberlands, owner of the lands once part of the McCloud Timber Co., reached an agreement with [Pacific Forest Trust](#) that protects these forests for the long-term production of timber, water and wildlife.

The arrangement eliminates Schroll's rights to divide the property for development, guiding restoration to an older, more complex forest and wet meadow system. At the same time, it allows the owners to continue sustainable timber harvests, said Connie Best, co-CEO of the self-described "think-and-do-tank" based in San Francisco.

Pacific Forest, a land trust committed to conserving privately owned forests, negotiated a similar agreement with [Michigan-California Timber Co.](#), whose family owners have for decades managed California forests for timber production that will now include the Black Butte property.

Under the agreement, Michigan-California will still log. "We can count on this land to continue to produce timber," maintaining local jobs in the woods and at an affiliated sawmill in Yreka, said Chris Chase, Michigan-California's timberland manager.

But the company is giving up the right to commercially develop the land it owns. In exchange, it will receive payment for the wildlife habitat, access to recreation and other "nonmarket values" it is providing to the public, Chase said.

In Siskiyou County, cradle of the State of Jefferson, supervisors have unanimously backed these partnerships and others Pacific Forest Trust has negotiated. They keep land in private ownership and productive use, said board Chairman Michael Kobseff. Crystal Geyser, embroiled in a controversy over its proposal to bottle Mount Shasta water, is also supportive despite its resistance to scientific studies quantifying the aquifer it depends on for its commercial operations.

"This is the radical middle," Best said. "We are connecting the otherwise disconnected, and we're doing it on the ground, where people can come together."

Along with linking often at-odds partners, conservation easements on about 50 square miles of forests in the Mount Shasta region are creating wildlife corridors to adjacent national forests for endangered species that include the gray wolf and Sierra Nevada red fox. Keeping forests as forests also plays a critical role globally,

where the loss of forests to development represents 17 percent of the emissions responsible for climate change.

At a time when the nation is poised for top-down dismantling of environmental protections, the Mount Shasta model offers a powerful alternative: grass-roots agreements safeguarding natural resources one partnership at a time.

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