

Forest Legacy Project

Trinity Timberlands Conservation Easement

Trinity County, California



FUNDING HISTORY

FY 2023 Forest Legacy Program Funding	\$3,000,000
FY 2023 Non-Federal Cost Share	\$1,750,000
FY 2023 Project Costs	\$4,750,000
FY 2023 Project Acres	12,090
Forest Legacy Funding To Date	\$0
Total Project Costs	\$4,750,000
Total Project Acres	12,090



Tract Name	Size (ac)	Tract Cost	FLP Funding	Non-Fed Cost Share	Status
Trinity Timberlands	12,090	\$4,750,000	\$3,000,000	\$1,750,000	Draft 2023

GENERAL DESCRIPTION

The Trinity Timberlands Conservation Easement (CE) would protect 12,090 acres of private working forestland that share 36 miles of common boundary with the Shasta-Trinity National Forest (NF) and Six Rivers NF--forever keeping whole one of the largest NF inholdings in NW CA and ensuring habitat connectivity in this ecologically important area. The property features 147 stream miles comprising 9 tributaries of the federally designated Wild and Scenic South Fork Trinity River which supports federally threatened steelhead and coho salmon, and spring-run Chinook salmon, a recent CA ESA endangered species. Northern spotted owls (NSO) are documented on the property, as well as the NW CA endemic Trinity Bristle snail – both federally threatened species. This mixed-conifer forest is managed using sustained yield forestry techniques and contributed \$5-6M of timber to local sawmills since 2015. Comprising 64 legal parcels and immediately adjacent to an 1,800-acre tract recently subdivided and developed for cannabis production, the property faces a significant threat of subdivision and forestland conversion. The proposed CE is needed to keep this large, strategically located working forest intact, productive, and conserved in perpetuity.



Aerial view of Trinity Timberlands; South Fork Trinity River Valley below in fog (Photo by Trinity Timberlands)

PROJECT FEATURES

Important

- T&E SPECIES HABITAT: There are 4 known federally-threatened (FT) NSO nest sites on the property and 5 additional nest sites within 1200' of the property boundary. Immediately adjacent in the surrounding NF land is over 10,000 ac. of USFWS-designated NSO Critical Habitat.
- The property contains 9 tributaries of the South Fork (SF) Trinity River which supports a major steelhead (FT) fishery, a functionally independent coho salmon (FT) population, and one of the last spring Chinook salmon (California ES) runs in the Klamath Basin.
- Found only in NW CA, the Trinity bristle snail (FT) occurs in the many riparian areas on Trinity Timberlands. The western pond turtle, an ESA candidate species, has been documented on the property, and the pacific fisher, also an ESA candidate species, occurs on adjacent FS lands.

- CA Dept. of Fish and Wildlife classified Species of Special Concern, from mammals to amphibians to birds, are found on the property, including: the pallid bat, Townsend's big-eared bat, the foothill yellow-legged frog, the southern torrent salamander, and the northern goshawk.
- WATERSHED PROTECTION: 147 linear stream miles on the property serve as sources of cold-water refugia for salmonids in the federally designated Wild and Scenic SF Trinity River. The SF Trinity River plays a key role in maintaining summertime flow in the larger Trinity and Klamath River watershed.
- The SF Trinity River, a 303(d) listed watershed, is considered temperature and sediment impaired by the EPA and CA Water Board. A CE would prevent development & water diversions that would degrade the 9 SF Trinity River tributaries occurring on the property and further impair the watershed.
- RARE PLANTS, AND UNIQUE FOREST COMMUNITIES: Trinity Timberlands spans the full elevational gradient of South Fork Mountain (1,200' to 5,600'), which forms the properties western boundary. This large gradient supports diverse forest types, including red fir, a rare forest community in NW CA.
- Two rare and endemic plants occur on Trinity Timberlands, South Fork Mountain lupine and robust false lupine. Both plants are found only in NW CA and are considered imperiled by the California Natural Diversity Database due to restricted habitat range and isolated independent populations.
- The wide elevational range captured within the property allows for extensive taxonomic and phylogentic diversity found throughout the property. Protections provided by CE would help facilitate species range shifts and provide ecological resiliency under future climatic uncertainties.
- ECONOMIC BENEFITS FROM TIMBER: Trinity Timberlands is a productive, working forest featuring an average of over 12,000 board feet/acre of commercial conifer inventory diversified across Douglas-fir, white fir, red fir, ponderosa pine, sugar pine, and incense cedar.
- Since 2015, Trinity Timberlands has harvested over 11 million board feet, primarily to Trinity River Lumber Company (TRLIC), the last major independent sawmill in Trinity County. TRLIC employs 131 individuals and helps provide critical stimulation to the local economy.
- Trinity Timberlands contributes to local economic development by contracting with businesses based in the region for forest management activities. Over the next 30 years, assuming sustained yield forestry required under CE, the property will provide annually 12-20 FTE jobs.
- The landowner's management plan demonstrates sustained-yield forestry, with commercial thinning and selection harvests that will enhance forest conditions, increasing productivity as stands progress toward older ages, thereby providing stable economic benefits to the region into the future.
- ECONOMIC BENEFITS FROM RECREATION: The property shares 36 mi of common boundary with two NFs and sits above the SF Trinity River, an area popular for outdoor recreation and a major driver of tourism in Trinity county. A CE would ensure the scenic values provided by the property are maintained.
- COMMUNITY BENEFIT: The project would benefit nearby rural and economically disadvantaged communities such as Hyampom (pop. 241) by supporting local job creation, enabling landscape-level fire resiliency planning, and protecting water quality of the SF Trinity River which serves local communities.
- PUBLIC ACCESS: Popular, paved USFS roads Forest Route 1 and Pelletreau Ridge Road traverse or border the property for over 15 miles. Commonly used for scenic drives and long distance biking, conservation of the tract will maintain the rustic allure provided by the property.
- SCENIC: The property forms the "backdrop" for many miles of the SF Trinity River. As a federally designated Wild and Scenic River, the protection of this viewshed is critical in preserving the scenic qualities conveyed for present and future generation's recreational use of the SF Trinity River.
- CULTURAL/TRIBAL: SF Mountain ridge acted as border for the Nongatl and Wintu tribes to the west and east and as a travel route for the Chimariko and Nomlaki tribes. There are 15 known pre-historic sites on the property consisting of lithic scatters, projectile points, hammer stones, and a fire pit.



Northern spotted owl fledglings near a nest on Trinity Timberlands (Photo by BBW Associates)

- The Hoopa and Yurok Reservations exist downstream from Trinity Timberlands. Maintaining the integrity of the SF Trinity watershed is important for sustaining wild salmon fisheries and related sustenance which also provide economic benefits for downstream tribal communities.
- Neume ney-puy (spring Chinook salmon) have sustained the Yurok people since time immemorial but stocks have plummeted over recent decades. Springtime runs of Chinook salmon in the SF Trinity River are impacted by flow levels and water temperatures provided by the 9 tributaries on the property.

Threatened

- **LACK OF PROTECTION:** Composed of 64 parcels, the property has no encumbrances or protections from subdivision and development. Served by multiple paved, public roads, the property is extremely vulnerable to the rampant parcelization and forest conversion for both legal & illegal cannabis operations.
- In 2013, an adjacent 1,800-acre forestland property was marketed for sale in 11 separate parcels. Despite the rural location, all 11 parcels were under contract for sale within 2 months of listing. As of July 2021, median listing house price in Trinity County had increased 18.2% year-over-year.
- **ADJACENT LAND USE:** The pressures for subdivision into "ranchettes" less than 160 acres, often for legal and illegal cannabis production, are evidenced by land sales in Trinity county. The average sale price of a parcel in Trinity County was \$450,000 between mid-2017 and mid-2019.
- Cannabis production is a driver of subdivision and forest conversion in the region – using 2019 Google Earth imagery, Northcoast Regional Land Trust (NRLT) staff identified 325 individual plots containing clearings and/or greenhouses for cannabis cultivation within 5mi of the property boundary.
- As documented by local, State and Federal agencies, SF Mountain is a hotspot for destructive marijuana operations. In August 2020, authorities seized 32,840 plants and found 43 stream diversions and water pollution violations immediately adjacent to the Trinity Timberlands property.
- Researchers have found that water diversions for cannabis production in NW CA have caused a minimum of 23% flow reductions in streams, and that water effluent from grow sites contained high levels of pesticides, herbicides, and growth nutrients, causing acute harm to aquatic species and amphibians.
- Shasta-Trinity NF staff has stated that the conversion or fragmentation of Trinity Timberlands will have a markedly adverse effect on NF management due to increased complications that result from multiple-ownerships implementing various management strategies and new construction that accompanies.
- Subdivision and development increases the risk of wildfire and hinders landscape-level wildfire planning and prevention. Easement completion would extinguish subdivision and development potential, and promote forest management designed to further decrease catastrophic wildfire.
- **LANDOWNER CIRCUMSTANCE:** 7,587 acres of the property burned at mixed severities in the 2015 Route Fire, making the economic situation of the tract more unstable. A CE is the preferred avenue being explored to produce necessary revenue, however, subdivision and sale is also being considered.
- **ABILITY TO DEVELOP:** The property is easily accessible via highways 36 and 299 and is approximately 55 miles east of the greater Eureka area (pop. 60,432), 40 miles west of Redding/Weaverville (pop. 95,372), and immediately adjacent to the hamlet of Hyampom. 2 airports exist within 60 miles.



Forestland conversion and marijuana operations on adjacent 20-acre parcel (Photo by NRLT/Will Goldenberg)

Strategic

- **RECOVERY, STRATEGIC, AND MANAGEMENT PLANS:** This project fulfills goals of Federal Recovery Plans for federally threatened species, including the US Fish & Wildlife Service's Revised Recovery Plan for the NSO, and the National Oceanic & Atmospheric Administration Final Recovery Plan for the Southern Oregon/Northern CA Coast Evolutionary Significant Unit of Coho Salmon.
- This project fulfills goals of State Recovery Plans for federally threatened species, including the California Department of Fish and Wildlife's (CDFW) Recovery Strategy for California Coho Salmon and CDFW's Steelhead Restoration and Management Plan in California.
- This project fulfills goals outlined in the California Water Action Plan written by the CA Natural Resources Agency, CA Dept. of Food and Agriculture, and the CA Environmental Protection Agency, including protecting and restoring important ecosystems, and providing safe water for all CA communities, especially rural and disadvantaged areas like those existing in Trinity County.
- Conservation of Trinity Timberlands supports goals outlined in the Shasta-Trinity and Six Rivers NF Plans, including maintenance of: water quality, functional aquatic ecosystems, riparian communities, diversity of scenic qualities, and important habitat elements. The property is also listed as a high priority for conservation in the Land and Resource Management Plan of the Shasta-Trinity NF.
- This project compliments the Trinity County Resource Conservation District Strategic Plan, adopted in 2018, which outlines the priority resource issues to include: wildfire protection and fuels reduction, water supply and availability, fish and wildlife habitat, biodiversity and ecosystem function, and climate change resilience.
- The Trinity River Restoration Program Spring Chinook Plan (authors: USFS, CA Fish and Wildlife, Bureau of Reclamation, Hoopa Tribe, and The Watershed Center) specifically calls for conservation measures on "streams with very severe [sedimentation] hazards occurring along South Fork Mountain".
- The proposed management of the property is consistent with the Watershed Center's South Fork Trinity River Restoration Program goals, the collaborative Six Rivers to the Sea Initiative, and the Trinity County Community Wildfire Protection Plan. The landowner is working with community-based conservation groups to shape its long-term management plans and annual operating activities.
- **CONSERVATION STRATEGY:** Trinity Timberlands is one piece of a two-part effort that would conserve roughly 24,000 acres of private forestlands that border the Shasta-Trinity and Six Rivers National Forests via acquisition of conservation easements. NRTL recently received notice of award for funding through Federal FLP FY 2021 (\$2,850,000) to close on the second property, Travis Forest CE.
- If a CE can be realized, the landowner is prepared to enter into an option agreement with The Watershed Research & Training Center, a nonprofit based in nearby Hayfork (pop. 2,368) that focuses on innovative land stewardship and local job creation. WRTC would seek to acquire and manage the property as a community forest, and facilitate landscape-scale community fire protection planning.
- **COMPLEMENT PROTECTED LANDS:** Trinity Timberlands is one of the largest NF inholdings in NW CA. With over 36 miles of common boundary with NF lands, conservation of the property will bridge together Shasta-Trinity NF and Six Rivers NF, the nearby 15,600-acre Hunter Ranch CE, and further consolidate a corridor of conserved lands connecting to the planned ~12,000 acre Travis Forest CE to the south.



Mixed-conifer forest on the property and adjacent NF lands from Forest Route 1 (Photo by NRTL/Will Goldenberg)

Readiness

Pre-Appraisal/Market Analysis	1
Easement or Fee Conditions	1
Non-Federal Cost Share Commitment	0
Signed Purchase Agreement	1
Title Search	1
Mineral Determination	1
Stewardship Plan (or equivalent)*	1
Readiness Total Tally Score	6

Supporting Parties

Forest Supervisor Scott Russell, Shasta-Trinity National Forest; 5th District Supervisor John Fenley, Trinity County Board of Supervisors; Executive Director Mark Lancaster, NW CA Resource Conservation and Dev. Council; Executive Director Nick Goulette, The Watershed Center, Hayfork; and Timber Manager Joe E. Miller, Trinity River Lumber Company.

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