

A dream to grow a resilient forest—rather than houses—on Lake Shasta

LIGHTNING CANYON RANCH WORKING FOREST CONSERVATION EASEMENT

Lightning Canyon falls steeply down the side of Sacramento Mountain, which towers above Shasta Lake between the upper Sacramento River and the McCloud River. Fed by myriad springs, together with Dead Horse Creek, fresh, cold water rushes into Salt Creek and the Sacramento River arm of California's largest reservoir, benefiting fish, farms, and communities across California.

In the 19th century, European-American settlers first established the ranch in the traditional territory of the Wintu. In the 1970s, real estate speculators broke it up to create scores of homesites within the Shasta National Recreation Area. With spectacular views, the amenities of Shasta Lake nearby and only a few minutes' drive from Interstate 5, new houses grew in this rugged, fire-prone, wild land.

Bob and Catherine Hixon have a different vision. For 10 years, starting in 2010, they have done their best to piece the old ranch back together, assembling 27 parcels into one beautiful 2100-acre property. The Hixons have now teamed up with Pacific Forest Trust to permanently protect Lightning Canyon Ranch under a conservation easement so it will never be broken up again.



Rather than houses, it will be a home to forests, fish and wildlife, forever, resilient to climate change. Strategically located between residential properties, the National Forest and commercial timberland, active management under the terms of the easement will help ensure Lightning Canyon Ranch serves as a key buffer to protect people and nature from catastrophic fire.

Clean Water for Critters and California

At 3,354 feet high, Sacramento Mountain catches storms as they pass and pulls the rain down into the 16 miles of creeks, including Lightning Canyon, Nelson, Tom Head, Dead Horse, Salt and others that flow into nearby Lake Shasta. More than a dozen springs and seeps, including a large mineral spring, abound on Lightning Canyon Ranch, assuring year-round cold water so critical for threatened salmon and for people. In fact, 25 million Californians as far away as San Diego depend on Lake Shasta for drinking water while millions of acres of rich farmland rely on this water to grow the food we eat.



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Many Habitats for Many Creatures

Eagles soar, mountain lions roam, and black bear enjoy the abundance of Lightning Canyon Ranch. The imperiled and elusive Pacific fisher makes a home in these woodlands. Fifteen threatened species and a dozen rare ones use the habitats there, including peregrine falcons that nest in nearby cliffs and the endemic Shasta maidenhair fern. Situated in the Klamath mountains near Mount Shasta and just north of the Sacramento Valley, several eco-regions come together to form a rich diversity of habitats including mixed conifer forests, montane hardwoods and riparian woodlands as well as montane chaparral. As many as 248 different wildlife species depend on these habitats. The mix of hardwoods and conifers include live oak, blue oak, black oak and gray pine, along with productive timber species, Douglas-fir and ponderosa pine, which dominate about a quarter of the Ranch.

Managing for Climate Resilience

The Hixons are all too aware of the risks of climate change, having witnessed the Ranch being threatened by three different fires in 2018. They have a forest management plan in place and will be using the conservation easement to guide their on-going investments into future management for a diverse, healthy and resilient forest: More big trees that store more atmospheric CO₂ and are more fire resistant.

Thinning to reduce small trees beneath the big ones. Better spacing so that a fire stays on the ground where it can be more easily controlled. Protected riparian woodlands and watercourses for the best quality water flowing into Lake Shasta. And a fuel break that follows the ridgeline of Sacramento Canyon, tying in with a network critical for fire defense. The conservation easement will help fund these investments by the Hixons and ensure the long-term stewardship of Lightning Canyon Ranch for its many public benefits.

Resilient Communities and Jobs

By agreeing to prevent more development in the wildland-urban interface along Lake Shasta, the Hixons demonstrate their deep commitment to protecting the local community and the natural resources on which the economy depends for both timber and recreational jobs. The view of Sacramento Mountain from the Lake and I-5 will always contribute to the scenic beauty of the National Recreation Area. Permanently conserving this strategically located ranch will help protect forests from the impacts of development where many fires start while also protecting people from wildland fire.

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