

**Sierra Nevada Conservancy Grant Program  
Safe Drinking Water, Water Quality and Supply, Flood Control,  
River and Coastal Protection Act of 2006 (Proposition 84)**

**County:** SHASTA

**Applicant:** SHASTA LAND TRUST

**Project Title:** RICKERT RANCH CONSERVATION EASEMENT ACQUISITION

**Reference Number:** SNC 070244

**PROJECT SCOPE**

Shasta Land Trust, in partnership with the Trust for Public Land, proposes to acquire a conservation easement on the 5,082-acre Rickert Ranch, one of the largest properties in the Cow Creek watershed, located 15 miles east of Redding, CA. A conservation easement on this property would:

- Permanently protect this working cattle ranch and its cultural and natural resources, including riparian habitat, grasslands, oak woodlands, and vernal pools;
- Protect approximately 8.5 miles of creek frontage along the Little Cow, French, and Swede Creeks;
- Provide a cost-effective means for protecting the landscape while allowing historical cattle ranching practices to continue.

A conservation easement, acquired through a combination of funding from SNC and \$1.5 - \$2.5 million in public and private funds, would complement Shasta Land Trust's previous easement acquisitions on the 2,241-acre Fenwood Partners Ranch and the 6,639-acre Hathaway Ranch, also located in the Cow Creek watershed.

**PROJECT SCHEDULE**

<b>DETAILED PROJECT DELIVERABLES</b>	<b>TIMELINE</b>
Finalize purchase and sale agreement of conservation easement	March 2008
Complete easement purchase	May 31, 2009
<b>Final Report/Final Payment Request</b>	<b>July 1, 2009</b>

**PROJECT COSTS**

<b>PROJECT BUDGET CATEGORIES</b>	<b>TOTAL SNC FUNDING</b>
Estimated Fair Market Value of Property	\$1,000,000
<b>GRAND TOTAL</b>	<b>\$1,000,000</b>

**Letters of Support:**

- Jim Rickert, Land Owner

**Recommendation:**

Staff recommends funding this project at the requested amount of \$1,000,000.

## **Rickert Ranch Conservation Easement Project**

Shasta Land Trust (SLT) requests a Sierra Nevada Conservancy grant of \$1 million to be matched with \$1.5-2.5 million in public and private funds for the acquisition of a conservation easement on the 5,085-acre Rickert Ranch. The ranch, one of the largest properties in the Cow Creek Watershed still intact, is located approximately 15 miles east of Redding in Shasta County's foothills. The easement will permanently protect this working cattle ranch, and its cultural and natural resources from development pressures while maintaining compatible ranching practices and private ownership. This project will complement the SLT's recent easement acquisitions on the 2,241-acre Fenwood Partners Ranch and the 6,639-acre Hathaway Ranch, also located within the Cow Creek Watershed.

Cow Creek is the most northerly un-dammed tributary to the Sacramento River. Over eight miles of perennial and seasonal streams, including Little Cow, French and Swede Creeks, flow through Rickert Ranch. The property also contains expansive vernal pools and swales within the Swede Creek plains. The wetland and riparian lands provide habitat for remnant runs of fall run and Chinook salmon and breeding grounds for the Cow Creek deer herd. In addition, the property contains a stretch of Little Cow Creek that was once an important fishing resource for the Northern Yanta Native Americans.

The landscape, characterized by undisturbed flat valley areas to rolling foothills with blue oak woodlands, old growth white oak and gray pines, faces increasing urbanization and conversion of grazing lands to higher intensity uses. As Shasta County and Redding grow in population, developers look to the Cow Creek Watershed to provide open, developable land.

The Rickert Ranch Conservation Easement Project advances multiple goals of the Sierra Nevada Conservancy, including providing increased opportunities for tourism and recreation; protecting, conserving and restoring the region's physical, cultural and natural resources; preserving working landscapes; reducing the risk of natural disasters; improving air and water quality; assisting the local economy and enhancing public use and enjoyment of Sierra-Cascade lands. Rickert Ranch is located with SNC's North Sierra Sub-region.

Protection of the Rickert Ranch fits directly with federal, state and regional conservation plans and strategies, including the Department of Fish and Game's Cow Creek Conceptual Area Protection Plan (CAPP); the *Cow Creek Watershed Assessment*; the Resource Protection Strategies and Agriculture and Open Space Elements of the Shasta County General Plan; the Bureau of Reclamations *Anadromous Fish Restoration Plan* and Habitat Restoration Program; the California Resources Agency's *Restoring Central Valley Streams: A Plan for Action*; and the CALFED Bay-Delta Ecosystem Restoration Program.

Shasta Land Trust and the Trust for Public Land are working together to secure a willing seller option agreement. The estimated purchase price of the conservation easement is \$2.5-3.5 million. A grant from the Sierra Nevada Conservancy of \$1 million for the purchase will be matched with pending requests to the Environmental Enhancement and Mitigation Program (\$350,000) and the Wildlife Conservation Board (\$1.0 million). With development pressures steadily increasing, timely action is needed. A Sierra Nevada Conservancy grant will take advantage of this critical opportunity.