



Dear Friend,

The hills are turning green! Like everyone else, I enjoy seeing the seasonal changes in our foothill landscape. But, for farmers and ranchers like myself, these first rains of the year always raise our spirits because in California water really does mean life. Many ranchers now see themselves as grass farmers, so rather than “drill, baby, drill” our mantra is “grow, grass, grow”.

As the president of the Mother Lode Land Trust, the green countryside has yet another meaning: the end of one year and the beginning of another. More importantly, a new year to work with local landowners to conserve our landscapes. In every discussion of land use, the number one priority of foothill residents is protection of our rural quality of life—knowing our neighbors, supporting our communities, and being connected to where we live through work or appreciation. We understand that we are blessed to live in an uncrowded portion of the world with some peace and quiet and views of rolling hills, farms, and forest lands, unobstructed by housing developments.

The land trust was busy in 2008 doing our best to ensure the continuation of our quality of life. We added 340 acres to our total of 17 easements covering 3,000 acres, and we continued discussions with several landowners committed to placing easements on their properties. We assisted the Sacramento Valley Conservancy in placing an easement on my own 180 acre farm, Winterport Farm—near Ione. And we have intensified our efforts to create conservation committees in both Calaveras and Tuolumne counties to better serve these communities. Enclosed, please find our most recent newsletter, highlighting some of our work from the past year.

Looking ahead, the land trust has many projects that will continue to conserve and celebrate our rural character. A major effort is the acquisition of an easement on the 1600 acre Garibaldi Ranch near Amador City. Another big undertaking is the protection of PG&E properties in Amador, Calaveras, and Tuolumne counties.

PG&E is required by bankruptcy court stipulation to divest itself of fee title and place conservation easements on properties not essential to their operations. We are currently negotiating an easement on the first property to be transferred—240 acres at Kennedy Meadows in Tuolumne County. Our goal is to allow the continued operation of the Kennedy Meadows Pack Station, a treasured recreational opportunity in Tuolumne County, while protecting sensitive habitat on the property. Once protection of Kennedy Meadows is completed, the land trust will work just as hard to conserve PG&E lands in the Upper Mokelumne River watershed.

As a nonprofit organization, the land trust relies on support from folks like you that want the Mother Lode to retain its rural character. This does not mean that growth should not occur. This simply means that we value open spaces, room to move, and a bit of nature—whether it be farmland or forest—just out our backdoor.

We know finances are tight for many families this year. But as you develop your holiday and end-of-year budget we ask that you consider making a donation to the Mother Lode Land Trust. Consider the landscape you would like to see during next year's first rain and the first rain 20 years from now.

The land trust promises to continue conserving our foothill landscape and our rural quality of life. We want to see forests, rolling hills, oak trees, meandering creeks, and cattle grazing. Please join us in turning this vision into reality. Grow grass, grow.

Best Wishes for the New Year,

Dan Port
President