



Campstool Ranch ‘eased’ into perpetual conservancy

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After receiving grants from environmental conservancy groups, Campstool Ranch and the rural flavor of Calaveras County are preserved in Rail Road Flat.

Tim Lane, an attorney in Danville, was awarded \$3.1 million dollars from the Pacific Forest Trust and Sierra Nevada Conservancy in exchange for promising to forever ban all commercial activity from his 2,170 acre ranch in the county’s north eastern end.

“I wanted to see the place preserved,” Lane said. “There is so much history on it. We (Tim and his family) felt like it



Figure 1 Tim Lane, owner of Campstool Ranch in Rail Road Flat, sits next to a placard awarded to him by conservancy groups after his ranch was placed in a protective easement.



Figure 2 Campstool Ranch owner Tim Lane and his twin granddaughter's girl scout troop get ready to go for a swim. From left, Heaven Gerould, Jordyn Venard, Madison Burrows, Ava Vailey-Torres, and McKenna Burrows and Lane.

was the right thing to do.”

The property’s history dates back nearly a century when a tract of land was homesteaded by Thomas and Anna Lane. Thomas, a teamster who brought provisions to miners during the Gold Rush, was interested in the property because of its potential for grazing cattle.

“There was definitely mining activity going on in this county 60 years after the initial Gold Rush,” Lane said. “My dad told me that grandpa got wind of an opportunity to homestead 160 acres, and they laid a claim in 1919.”

That original claim has been expanded over the years and saw an increase of 574 acres in 1945 when Lane’s mother, Blossom, inherited \$5,000 dollars and chose to invest in land.

“My mother was someone who really pushed the expansion of this property,” he said. “She told me, ‘I could have joined a country club or bought a Stutz Bearcat, but I went to Rail Road Flat, and I bought 570 acres.’”

Today, the expanse of ranch land is still used to raise cattle and is also home to 1,700 acres of conifer forest which, paired with water resources and rare wildlife, caught the eye of the Pacific Forest Trust.

Although Lane felt that agreeing to the easement would mean more regulation of his property, the conservancy group he chose understands his position and is interested in practical forest preservation, he said.

“The leaders of that organization are very capable people, and they think like I think on how a forest ought to be managed,” he said. “There’s a segment of our population that thinks you should never cut a tree down, and that is absurd. Prudent forest management calls for periodic timber harvests.”

The agreement allows for what Lane calls a non-industrial timber-management plan, meaning that a maximum of 25 percent of the entire forest volume can be harvested in a decade.

“It’s not our style here to take more timber than should be cut,” Lane added.

Lane plans to start harvesting timber within about 10 years, and although the property will still be turning a profit, the easement regulations are taking their toll on the property’s value.

“Because of the restrictions, our property is not worth as much as it was before easement,” he said. “But that doesn’t matter to me.”

Aside from the forest land that the conservancy groups felt was important to preserve, the water that springs from and flows through the property was judged to be worth investing in.

Running through Campstool ranch is a three-mile stretch of the Calaveras River – a river that is a main tributary to the San Joaquin Delta. The Calaveras, and several other streams, will be protected from any commercial activity and the threat to water quality and availability it brings with it.

The property had all the ingredients necessary to win the financial support of environmental groups, but selling the surveyors from the groups on awarding the property with an easement was not an easy task.

“There are lots of landowners who are interested in doing these conservation easements,” Lane said. “Part of the process is appealing to state agencies and convincing them that you have something that ought to be preserved.”

But a Wildlife Conservation board member told Lane that he fit the four-point criteria of land diversity, good stewardship, a rich history and family involvement.

Lane’s daughter, Erin, of Reno, Nev., still gets involved in sustaining the ranch that she remembers from her youth.

“I just want to continue to maintain for future generations, so people can come back and enjoy it like we did,” she said. “It’s nice to come back and have no cell service; this is an escape from the day to day.”

The future generations Erin is speaking about are her two daughters, twins Madison and MeKenna Burrows. The twins visited the ranch with their Girl Scout troop Saturday to receive instruction from Lane on the art of carving soapstone, which is found in abundance on the ranch.

Like their mother, both girls have plans, big and small, for the ranch that they will inherit, making them fifth-generation owners.

“I wanna make it a museum or like a touring place or something,” Madison said. “I want it to show everybody around here.”

MeKenna said her first order of business as a ranch owner is going to be “cleaning the cobwebs.”

Having secured the sentimental value of the ranch for generations to come, Lane can look back and enjoy this historic decision.

“This ranch has significant value,” he said. “Not value in terms of dollars, because we’ll never sell it, but value because of what we do today – having friends here and enjoying the property.”