

Working ranches in Kneeland, Rio Dell protected

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Two ranches in Kneeland and Rio Dell are now protected from subdivision or development, while their owners will be able to keep the land working for cattle and timber production.

Easements have been secured by the North Coast Regional Land Trust, which spearheaded a four-year effort to broker agreements with the ranchers, state and federal funding sources and private conservation groups. The 4,700-acre Iaqua Ranch in Kneeland is owned by Francis Carrington, and the 1,280-acre Price Creek Ranch outside Rio Dell is owned by Arlin Grandy.

The easements will also restrict most road building, large clearcuts and home building. Should the current owners or their heirs choose to sell, the easement and its protections remain in place.

"It's definitely a partnership and a partnership approach," said land trust Executive Director Jim Petruzzi.

The state Wildlife Conservation Board, the U.S. Forest Service Forest Legacy Program and the California Department of Forestry contributed \$3.5 million to the Iaqua Ranch easement's purchase. Carrington donated an additional \$635,000 to the effort.

The same agencies, and the California Coastal Conservancy, funded the Price Creek easement to the tune of \$1.6 million.

"This ranch has been in my family for three generations, and this agreement helps me keep the ranch in one piece for my grandkids," Grandy said in a statement.

Ranchers in Humboldt County are increasingly faced with dilemmas that can split up ranches and deplete their value as working farms, and increase the environmental effects of home and road building. Many do not have heirs interested in running a ranch or those heirs face huge estate taxes when the owner dies. Those and other financial pressures can make it attractive or unavoidable to sell at development prices.

"A conservation easement works well for landowners who want to keep their property undeveloped and in one piece," Carrington said, "because not only is there compensation for some of the development value that's given up, but the easement allows for continued grazing, timber harvesting and hunting."

Two county roads run through the scenic Iaqua Ranch, part of a larger effort called the Six Rivers to the Sea Initiative, which would place easements on some 25,000 acres, keeping them as working ranches.

The Price Creek Ranch butts up against the 3,660-acre Howe Creek Ranch Conservation Area, under its own easement. It also is next to Pacific Lumber Co. timberlands, which connect to Humboldt Redwoods State Park.

Other ranches in the area are parts of conservancies or have shown interest in being part of the land trust project.