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New land trust director learning the ins and outs

John Driscoll / The Times-Standard
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Jim Petruzzi believes that beautiful and isolated Northern California is a place where a land trust can make a difference.

As the new director of the North Coast Regional Land Trust, Petruzzi hopes to expand the capacity and influence of the group by building partnerships and adding a greater focus on education. Petruzzi is taking over for Maya Conrad after her three-year effort helping the land trust get off the ground.

Petruzzi said that his primary mission is to get land -- especially working land -- under the protection of easements. The Six Rivers to the Sea project, which aims to protect 17,000 acres on a string of ranches in Humboldt County while keeping them in agricultural production, is an example of such an effort.

"It's just so unique and so threatened," Petruzzi said of the North Coast. "I love that and I like working where there's that sense of urgency."

Petruzzi has spent time in the West, attending Colorado State University and directing conservation groups, before family issues drew him and his wife back East. Petruzzi has worked as a consultant for nonprofit groups in Delaware since 2004.

But his daughter attended Dell' Arte in the 1990s, and when a friend pointed out an ad for a job with the land trust in Humboldt County, Petruzzi jumped at the chance.

Petruzzi said that he wants to build the land trust's capacity by tapping new funding sources and bringing in more support staff.

"The more projects we do, the more people we're going to need to be involved," he said.

Another project that could take on an educational component, Petruzzi said, is the Freshwater Creek estuary effort. The land trust recently acquired part of Freshwater Farms' land, and it is planning to restore part of the estuary that was diked long ago to create farmland.

Petruzzi said that the close proximity of the property to many schools -- for which transportation can be expensive -- could make it an ideal property for learning.