

Conservancy to consider \$1 million toward Petrolia ranch easement

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The California Coastal Conservancy is expected to contribute \$1 million toward the protection of a ranch in Petrolia when it meets next week in Monterey.

The money would go to the California Department of Forestry for the purchase of a conservation easement that prohibits the ranch to be divided or developed, and imposes some conditions on logging and other uses of the land. The Valley View Ranch is 1,500 acres just a ridge away from the ocean, and close to the little, but slowly growing community of Petrolia.

The ranch is owned by Francis and Lorana Sweet, who have raised sheep and cattle and cut timber there since 1974. They have agreed to be part of a Northcoast Regional Land Trust effort called Six Rivers to the Sea that looks to preserve working ranches. The program just wrapped up a similar deal for the 4,700-acre Iaqua Ranch outside Kneeland.

The Sweets have struggled to make the ranch pay, and have several heirs that might inherit the property, a situation that often leads to the breakup of larger properties.

The \$1 million will add to \$400,000 provided by the federal Forest Legacy Program. The deal should be closed by summer of next year, according to a conservancy staff report. The easement would be transferred to any future owner of the property.