

# Effort underway to protect 856-acre forest in Angwin

**Barry Eberling, St. Helena Star, 9-7-16**

An 856-acre forest near Angwin with redwoods seldom found so far inland could soon be permanently preserved from chainsaws and development.

Two partners in the endeavor are asking community members to help out with the last fundraising push. Another \$2.7 million is needed to finish establishing an \$8 million conservation easement and \$1 million endowment to manage the forest.

Pacific Union College owns the land. It wants to sell the development rights by establishing the conservation easement, a common land preservation tool. It would still own the land, but neither it nor any future owner could cut down the forest.

“I think we see our land as a sacred treasure,” said Walter Collins, vice president for advancement at PUC.

The Seventh-day Adventist college is working with the Land Trust of Napa County on the effort. Cal Fire would hold the conservation easement.

State and federal grants have raised \$6.3 million and the Land Trust is continuing to seek grants. But community money is needed for the endowment and also to show community support to potential grantors, Land Trust CEO Doug Parker said.

“We’re interested in building a corridor of contiguous, protected land across the ridge on the east side of Napa Valley,” Parker said. “The PUC project fits right in ... it’s a key corridor going along that ridge.”

Parker noted that the PUC forest is adjacent to 800-acre Las Posadas State Forest. Together, the properties would create more than 1,600 acres of contiguous protected forest, which equals 2.5 square miles, or roughly the size of Calistoga.

He also sees the project as helping to protect the watershed that feeds Moore Creek, which in turn feeds Lake Hennessey reservoir, the main water source for the city of Napa.

PUC allows the general public in the forest, Collins said. The community uses the land for hiking, mountain biking, field biology and other endeavors, he said.

The college mentions the forest as a selling point on its website in a section that says why prospective students should choose to attend PUC.

“Acres of college-owned forest adjacent to the student residences provide accessible options for getting out in the woods, relaxing and hiking,” the website said.

Even that doesn’t guarantee PUC would keep the forest forever. Collins said there’s a need to protect the land in case a future administration has a different view toward conservation.

“We know the pressures for development and vineyard conversion are only growing, given the value of land and value of vineyard land, particularly in the prestigious Howell Mountain AVA,” he said.

Collins said working with Cal Fire will help PUC with both forest management and fire management. Management includes such tasks as restoring trails, establishing a fire break and thinning underbrush and other fuels.

PUC will use money from the conservation easement to build its endowment for tuition and scholarships, he said.

The college also owns 578.8 acres of agricultural land in the Howell Mountain wine appellation that it is trying to sell. The asking price is \$51.5 million, according to a marketing brochure.

When college officials earlier this year talked about that possible sale, they stressed the school was committed to protecting the nearby, 856-acre forest.

A \$2.8 million grant from California's Greenhouse Gas Reduction Fund recently boosted the grant total for the PUC forest conservation easement to \$6.3 million. The state program protects forests so they can continue to remove carbon dioxide from the atmosphere.

Parker is ready to submit an application for a federal grant. But, even as the grant total inches toward the \$8 million conservation easement price, he sees a need for community help in landing future grants.

"One of the things these sources ask for is private funding," he said.

People can go to <https://community.napalandtrust.org/donations/Protect-PUC-Forest> to donate to the conservation easement effort.