



# Times-Standard

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## NORTH COAST & STATE

# Conservation easement set up near Willow Creek

### Easement protects Port Orford cedar

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Landowners of a 1,622-acre property five miles west of Willow Creek have completed a conservation easement which aims to protect productive forest land and critical ecological resources in perpetuity, the Northcoast Regional Land Trust announced this week.

According to a press release from the nonprofit, the easement creates riparian and forest preserves, totaling 25 percent of the total property acreage, on sensitive areas with high

habitat and ecological values.

Miller Forest landowners Steve Miller and Yvonne Schell initiated the project in 2008 to protect stands of Port Orford cedar on their property.

"I feel that the work the Northcoast Regional Land Trust and the California Wildlife Conservation Board are doing together is so important; promoting sustainable forestry and keeping large ranches from being split helps tremendously in reducing the risk of fire, erosion and other harmful effects to the environment," Miller said in the release.

The property was purchased by Miller's father in the late 1930s for the cedar resource — the wood was used as a component in batteries due to its

acid resistance. After the use of the cedar in batteries was phased out, a strong demand for the wood came from Japan, where the wood was used in sacred spaces and temples.

Port Orford cedar grows within a 220-mile range from southwest Oregon to northwest California. The forests in Northern California are currently threatened by a lethal non-native root pathogen. The disease develops from water-borne spores that come into contact with tree roots and are often spread by vehicle tires. Once in a stream course, the pathogen quickly spreads downstream, infecting riparian stands along its path. The Miller Forest property, located at the headwaters of

Willow Creek tributaries, is part of the Trinity River watershed and is currently uninfected by the root rot disease. The conservation easement can act as an ecological buffer for the adjacent U.S. Forest Service management area, according to the land trust.

The easement was funded through the California Wildlife Conservation Board and matched by a donation from the landowners.

Working ranch and forestland conservation easements aim to protect and promote private natural resource uses that provide public benefits. Donated or partially donated easements often utilize federal income tax deductions.