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State grant advances protection of Black Dog Woodlands in Humboldt County

BAYSIDE, Calif. — The Northcoast Regional Land Trust has secured a grant from the California Natural Resources Agency’s Environmental Enhancement and Mitigation Program to help conserve Black Dog Woodlands, a 554-acre working forest and agricultural property in Kneeland, in the hills above Arcata.

The funding will support the creation of a conservation easement on the property, ensuring the long-term protection of its forests, meadows and wildlife habitat while keeping the land intact, productive and under local stewardship.

Black Dog Woodlands represents years of effort by landowners Eric and Mary Almquist, who reassembled the landscape from multiple smaller ownerships and restored it into a cohesive, working property that supports diverse habitats and uses.

“It has such a range — from prairie and hayfields at the top, through oak woodlands, down into deep timber,” Eric Almquist said. “It has all the ingredients of a really important conservation property.”

The property shares a boundary with the Butler Valley Ranch conservation easement, completed by the Land Trust in 2024, and plays a key role in regional habitat connectivity. Together, these conserved lands protect important salmon habitat along Black Creek, which flows through both properties, while also linking the forests of Jacoby Creek and Humboldt Bay to the Mad River watershed.

Once finalized, the conservation easement will permanently prohibit subdivision and development while allowing continued agriculture and sustainable forest management. The agreement is designed to support both ecological health and the long-term economic viability of the land.

“This is not about completely locking the land up — it’s about keeping it working and protecting what makes it unique,” Almquist said. “The goal is for the property to have diverse income streams that don’t rely solely on timber harvest, and now we’re one step closer towards that.”

Black Dog Woodlands is actively managed for forest health, wildfire resilience and sustainable production, including hay and timber. The property is also home to mission-aligned partners and programs, including Karuna Animal Rescue and Sanctuary, the

Forestry Institute for Teachers, and Sacred Groves, a recently permitted conservation burial project.

“This project reflects Eric and Mary’s long-term vision of bringing separate ownerships back together as a single, functioning landscape,” said Dan Ehresman, Executive Director of the Northcoast Regional Land Trust. “It will strengthen a growing network of conserved lands in the region, support ongoing stewardship across a mix of forest and agricultural land, and protect the headwaters of Black Creek, an important salmon-bearing stream. It also includes, for the first time in our work, a new conservation burial site, adding another dimension to how this property serves long-term conservation and community needs.”

The project is now underway, with completion of the conservation easement targeted for next year.

Funding for the project comes through the Environmental Enhancement and Mitigation Program, which supports projects that offset environmental impacts associated with transportation improvements. Protection of Black Dog Woodlands will help mitigate impacts from the Greenpoint Sink slope stabilization project along State Route 299, approximately 15 miles away, by conserving intact headwater ecosystems and supporting watershed health in nearby salmon-bearing streams.

About the Northcoast Regional Land Trust

The Northcoast Regional Land Trust is a nonprofit organization dedicated to conserving wild and working lands across northwestern California. Since 2000, the organization has protected more than 81,000 acres through voluntary partnerships with landowners, tribes, public agencies and community supporters. Learn more at www.ncrlt.org.

Media Contact:

Dan Ehresman
Executive Director
Northcoast Regional Land Trust
d.ehresman@ncrlt.org
(707) 822-2242