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Paddlers tour Mountain Meadows Reservoir in the morning Saturday, June 1 when birdwatching is at its best. The paddle was organized to celebrate a conservation easement held by Feather River Land Trust. Photo by Susan Cort Johnson

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News

Trust celebrates property purchase near Westwood

June 16, 2019 Susan Cort Johnson, Westwood Editor



Sitting on a log near Mountain Meadows Reservoir, three hikers who had accessed the water via the gateway project marveled that they had just

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witnessed a Sandhill Crane take flight across the reeds that create nesting habitat along the water's edge.

They were part of a group that had gathered to celebrate the purchase of the Mountain Meadows Gateway property in 2018 by Feather River Land Trust with funds donated by a foundation. The 8-acre property is within walking distance of Westwood.

The parcel is small compared to the amount of acreage the Quincy-based land trust will protect by 2020 throughout the Feather River watershed, which is 70,000 acres. However it was an important purchase, according to Shelton Douthit, executive director of Feather River Land Trust.

"It is one of the most meaningful acquisitions because it provides access to the lake," said Douthit.

A celebration of the acquisition took place at 1:30 p.m. Saturday, June 1, with apple pie from the Old Mill Café and coffee prepared by Jason Staniger, owner of J.P. McWalsh Coffee Co. Douthit ceremoniously opened a gate marking the northern property line, which is adjacent to the waterline for Mountain Meadows Reservoir at capacity. Before the purchase of the parcel at the south end of Delwood Street, the only access to the reservoir was across privately owned land.

Feather River Land Trust holds the conservation easement on the reservoir that is part of the Pacific Gas and Electric Company hydroelectric system. The 7,000-acre parcel is part of a 140,000 acre PG&E land conservation program coordinated by the Pacific Forest and Watershed Lands Stewardship Council. The conservation easement prevents the land from being developed no matter the owner.

A celebration of the conservation easement, finalized in the fall of 2018, took place earlier in the day with a paddle on Mountain Meadows Reservoir. Douthit said it is the land trust's first conservation easement on PG&E property. However in the next two years it will acquire conservation easements on 45,000 acres in the Almanor Basin, which is part of the PG&E hydroelectric system.

Representatives from a multitude of entities that are part of these projects took part in the daylong celebration. Representing Feather River Land Trust were Douthit, Nils Lunder, stewardship manager of the Westwood properties, Vanessa Vasquez, people and land coordinator, and board members Clare Churchill and Allan Morrison. Also attending were Steve Schweigerdt, land conservation program manager for the Pacific Forest and Watershed Lands Stewardship Council; Ann Marie Cannon, a land agent for PG&E; Ron Lunder, president of the board of directors for Mountain



Meadows Conservancy, and Garry Pritchard, board member for Mountain Meadows Conservancy. Nils Lunder is the director of the conservancy.

Three board members for the Plumas Audubon Society were present to help identify the bird species seen during the morning paddle on the reservoir from Indian Ole Dam and the afternoon walk at the gateway project. They were Suzanne McDonald, Jill Slocum and Janet Swirhun.

During Douthit's speech at Indian Ole Dam at the morning gathering, he said he wanted to encourage those participating in the celebration to be part of the future. Lunder explained what the future holds.

Plans for Mountain Meadows Reservoir at the Indian Ole Dam access include an improved parking area, a pit toilet, two picnic tables, five benches, interpretive signs and a walking trail. Mountain Meadows Gateway will have a parking area with a kiosk and possibly a wooden walkway across Robbers Creek and a community garden.

The day-long celebration was meant to introduce the public to the two conservation efforts initiated by Feather River Land Trust in the watershed near Westwood.

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