

BERKELEY - Pacific Gas and Electric Company (PG&E), in collaboration with the Shasta Land Trust, has officially transferred 3,244 acres of forestland in Shasta county to the University of California (University), adding a sixth research forest to the University's existing network and increasing the footprint of these forests to just under 10,000 acres. Management of the new forest (yet unnamed) will be overseen by Berkeley Forests, UC Berkeley's center for forestry and fire research and outreach, with Research Forest Manager Ariel Roughton at the helm of planning and implementing management across the property.

The new property will be Berkeley Forests' first property in the Cascade Mountain range, creating opportunities for novel research in forest types and ecosystems not currently included in their network of research forests. Berkeley Forests Co-Director, Dr. Rob York, added, "This new research forest will greatly expand the capacity for UC and collaborators to conduct research that is relevant at a bio-regional scale. Climatic impacts are expected to influence forest functioning across huge swaths of land. It is critical to have research forests such as this one in order to test new alternatives for adapting forests to persist in the future."

Climate change research and community partnership development will be priorities at the new research forest. "This new research forest will allow us to look forward with a focus on climate change impacts to working lands," said Dr. Scott Stephens, Berkeley Forests Co-Director. Increased exploration on the effects of climate change on forested ecosystems and expanded experimentation of forest-management techniques in mitigating climate impacts will be an important piece of the research portfolio on this forest.

Berkeley Forests hopes that this research will be done not only in conjunction with researchers throughout the country, but also in partnership with the local entities. Dr. York noted, "The new research forest is in a key part of the state, where a variety of landowners and professionals have livelihoods that depend greatly on the forests. We hope to serve these stakeholders by conducting research that is relevant to them and by demonstrating forest management alternatives that they can see for themselves."

In conjunction with the land donation to the University, a conservation easement was conveyed to the Shasta Land Trust (SLT), ensuring the permanent protection of the land and important habitat within. "The Shasta Land Trust is excited to partner with UC Berkeley in the management of this incredibly ecologically unique and biodiverse property within the Pit River watershed," said SLT Executive Director, Paul Vienneau. "In this environmentally sensitive time, we are assured that the University's studies of the land will better our understanding of our changing ecosystems, as well as provide for a protected habitat for the numerous special status species inhabiting it."

Berkeley Forests currently manages one other forest under a conservation easement (Grouse Ridge Research Forest), and welcomes this new partnership with SLT and other stakeholders in Shasta County. "We look forward to working with partners in the area to help us focus our research and outreach questions," said Dr. Stephens.

The land donation became official with the close of escrow in September 2022. It was originally approved by the Pacific Forest and Watershed Lands Stewardship Council as part of PG&E's bankruptcy settlement, with the goal of ensuring that over 140,000 acres of California's lakes and watershed lands are conserved for the public good and to serve California's young people. "PG&E is pleased to donate this land to the University of California, knowing this critical resource will forever be protected by it and the conservation easement holder," said Mike Schonherr, a director in the PG&E power generation department and member of the Stewardship Council board of directors. "These lands are in good hands will be enjoyed by future generations while providing critical forest research in these challenging times for our climate."

Dr. York concluded, "the new research forest will allow us to contribute to all pillars of our mission at UC: Research, Education, Service, and Diversity. We hope to do this in a way that applies as broadly as possible while also serving local stakeholders."