

Saving Land on the Trinity Divide: A Pacific Crest Trail Success Story

CASE STUDY | FALL 2019



Partnership for the National Trails System

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U.S. Department
of Transportation
Federal Highway
Administration

BEST PRACTICES

This case study highlights the importance of community engagement and partners working together.

PROJECT PARTNERS

- Michigan-California Timber Company
- Pacific Crest Trail Association
- Shasta-Trinity and Klamath National Forests
- The Trust for Public Land
- The Wyss Foundation

KEY TERMS

- Partnerships
- Resource Protection
- Trail Protection

Department of Transportation Strategic Goal Alignment



SAFETY

The Trinity Divide project helps reduce the risk of pedestrian-vehicle crashes by providing permanent protection for an off-road route for the Pacific Crest National Scenic Trail (NST) and by providing public transportation to a safe trailhead parking area.



INFRASTRUCTURE

The Trinity Divide project directly stimulates the economies of communities and towns in Siskiyou and Trinity counties by providing public transportation to and from a popular trailhead and ensuring that the Pacific Crest NST will be protected for the benefit of current and future generations.



INNOVATION

The Trinity Divide project demonstrated the importance of partnerships and community engagement, and incorporated novel solutions to transportation challenges that benefited local communities, hikers, equestrians, hunters, birdwatchers, and anglers.



ACCOUNTABILITY

The Trinity Divide project helped resolve several challenges in public land management, including better protection and management of the Pacific Crest NST, aggregating public land ownership, reducing public land boundaries, and protecting significant natural and outdoor recreation resources.

About the Partnership for the National Trails System

MISSION

To empower, inspire, and strengthen public and private partners to develop, preserve, promote, and sustain the national scenic and historic trails.

VISION

PNTS envisions a world-class system of national scenic and historic trails that preserves natural and cultural values and provides recreational benefits for all.

PURPOSE

The purpose of PNTS is to promote and support the efforts of national scenic and historic trail organizations, to secure public and private resources, and to serve as a collective voice for policy and action that supports national scenic and historic trails.



Photo Credit: Megan Wargo, Pacific Crest Trail Association

Above: Trinity Divide project partners converse along Section 25, which was acquired in the transaction with the Pacific Crest Trail Association. Shown in the background are Mount Eddy, the highest peak of the Trinity Mountains, and Mount Shasta.

On the cover: Bull Lake in the Trinity Divide, one of the 10 alpine lakes that will now be open to the public.

Seventeen miles of the Pacific Crest National Scenic Trail. Spectacular views. Rare plant species and communities. Crucial habitat for fishers and spotted owls. Headwaters for four watersheds. Ten alpine lakes. Increased access for hunting and fishing. And last but not least, permanent protection for a full day's hike or pack stock ride across one of the most stunning high-elevation landscapes in the country: the Klamath Mountains in northern California.

Congress passed the National Trails System Act more than 50 years ago, and in doing so, officially designated the 2,650-mile Pacific Crest Trail as one of the nation's first two national scenic trails. That didn't mean, however, that the Pacific Crest National Scenic Trail was complete. Far from it. Hundreds of miles of the trail were located on roads—risking the safety of hikers, pack stock riders, and motorists alike. The Pacific Crest Trail Association, the U.S. Forest Service, and many other partners have been working since that time to ensure a safe, off-road route for the trail.

“The Trinity Divide purchase is one of the biggest, single land-acquisition deals ever completed for the Pacific Crest National Scenic Trail,” said Megan Wargo, Director of Land Protection for the Pacific Crest Trail Association. “Trail protection is a long game. This project is an outstanding example of people with different perspectives recognizing that an extraordinary landscape has lasting value in its natural state—and working together to protect it in perpetuity.”



Image Credit: Pacific Crest Trail Association



Photo Credit: Megan Wargo, Pacific Crest Trail Association

How We Did It

The Pacific Crest Trail Association started working on this project more than five years ago. Wargo said that “a lot of credit” goes to the Michigan-California Timber Company, The Trust for Public Land, the U.S. Forest Service, and many others.

“The biggest challenge was getting buy-in from the local counties and communities,” Wargo said. “Once we had community support, we were able to negotiate the details.”

Michigan-California Timber Company’s land ownership in the Trinity Divide Range was a checkerboard of thousands of acres of land in one-square-mile parcels, alternating with U.S. Forest Service lands—a holdover from historic land grants to railroads more than a century ago. Ultimately, the company’s managers determined that these lands were better suited to watershed management, recreation, and wildlife habitat than timber management.

“Michigan-California Timber Company has owned and managed the Trinity Divide lands for nearly 25 years, and we are proud of our stewardship,” said Chris Chase, the company’s Timber Manager. “We reached out to the Pacific Crest Trail Association and The Trust for Public Land and found partners willing to help us achieve our objective. The result has been a cohesive, professional, and effective team.”

Above: Hikers pause on the Pacific Crest NST to take in the view of Mt. Eddy and snow covered Mt. Shasta.

Below: Michigan-California Timber Company recognized that the timber had greater value to the public if it was left standing along the Pacific Crest NST.



The Trust for Public Land and the Pacific Crest Trail Association agreed early on to set things up so that they were coleads for the project. Both signed the option agreement equally to purchase the property from the Michigan-California Timber Company. The Pacific Crest Trail Association took the lead in building local support and contracting appraisals with the U.S. Forest Service. The Trust for Public Land took the lead on completing the environmental assessment and title work. Both organizations collaborated on raising public and private funds for the purchase.



Though these lands contain valuable timber resources, it is evident that the highest and best use of the property is recreation, aesthetics, water production, and wildlife habitat.



- Chris Chase, Timber Manager, Michigan-California Timber Company

The Missing Pieces of the Puzzle: Local Support and National Resources

Public meetings, and more public meetings.

“Local support was absolutely necessary to get funding. Once the counties and local communities were on board, we were able to go to Congress,” said Wargo. “It took patience, time, and effort. However, ultimately it was all about everyone recognizing what this project was going to do for the public good.”

The Pacific Crest Trail Association held and attended meetings in many of the small communities in Siskiyou and Trinity counties. Representatives from the Pacific Crest Trail Association, the Michigan-California Timber Company, and the U.S. Forest Service formed the Mt. Shasta Trail Partners, and listened closely to what local representatives and citizens had to say. How would their communities benefit?

What would the Trinity Divide project do for local economies? One step at a time, the project proponents addressed local concerns. Trailheads would be improved. Access to public lands would bring more hunters, hikers, equestrians, birdwatchers, and anglers into the area, and more dollars into the local economies.

“The communities near the Trinity Divide project have historically depended on timber harvests and other resource extraction industries to generate jobs,” said Liz Bergeron, Executive Director and CEO of the Pacific Crest Trail Association. “But we are seeing these small, rural economies shift from resource extraction to tourism and outdoor recreation.”

The Outdoor Industry Association recently reported that spending on outdoor recreation in West Coast States exceeds \$149 billion—and, on average, western counties with the greatest percentage of Federal lands experienced faster growth than counties with less Federal land.

“The Michigan-California Timber Company was perhaps our best ally in explaining how this project could benefit the surrounding communities. The timber values on these high-elevation lands were marginal, and the recreation opportunities realized through this project were significant,” said Bergeron.

On the national front, the Pacific Crest Trail Association submitted a proposal for one-third of the funding as part of the Partnership for the National Trails System’s Fiscal Year 2017 Request for Land and Water Conservation Fund monies to purchase the first third of the property. The U.S. Forest Service also sought approval for the project. Both initiatives were rewarded when Congress appropriated \$4.9 million in funding for the project in the Fiscal Year 2017 Land and Water Conservation Fund budget. Congress approved another \$5 million appropriation from the Land and Water Conservation Fund in Fiscal Year 2018.

The Wyss Foundation, a private, charitable group dedicated to “supporting innovative, lasting solutions that improve lives, empower communities, and strengthen connections to the land,” put up the final \$5 million that was needed to complete the project.

Finally, the entire 10,300 acres was transferred into public ownership, to be managed by the Shasta-Trinity and Klamath National Forests, uniting public ownership of the Trinity Divide landscape and making it much more efficient and effective to manage public resources.



Photo Credit: Megan Wargo, Pacific Crest Trail Association

A festival in the city of Mount Shasta celebrates the Pacific Crest National Scenic Trail and the deep connection between the town and the trail.



Hikers near Bull Lake in the Trinity Divide.

Photo Credit: Rachid Dahnoun, The Trust for Public Land

Safety, Infrastructure, and New Approaches: Partnerships are the Key

Now, as a founding member of the Mt. Shasta Trail Partners, the Pacific Crest Trail Association continues to work with the counties to extend bus routes from the towns to the trailhead, and with the U.S. Forest Service to improve the Parks Creek Trailhead—a popular Pacific Crest Trail trailhead accessing Deadfall Lakes. The Pacific Crest Trail Association is also helping to market the area’s recreational opportunities in the Bay Area five hours away, which will bring outdoor tourism dollars into the communities in Siskiyou and Trinity counties.

In addition to providing hikers with safe, public transportation into nearby towns, the Trinity Divide project also provides a permanently protected off-highway route for the trail. By keeping hikers off of main highways and travelways, the project enhances public safety and reduces the potential for crashes or hiker/vehicle collisions.

The Pacific Crest Trail Association also is promoting the conservation of the Trinity Divide as the “Top of the Tap” watershed protection for Trinity and Siskiyou counties, as well as the headwaters for the Klamath and Sacramento river basins. The project helps the U.S. Forest Service and local governments improve public land and watershed management by aggregating public land ownership, reducing public land boundaries, and protecting significant natural and outdoor recreation resources.

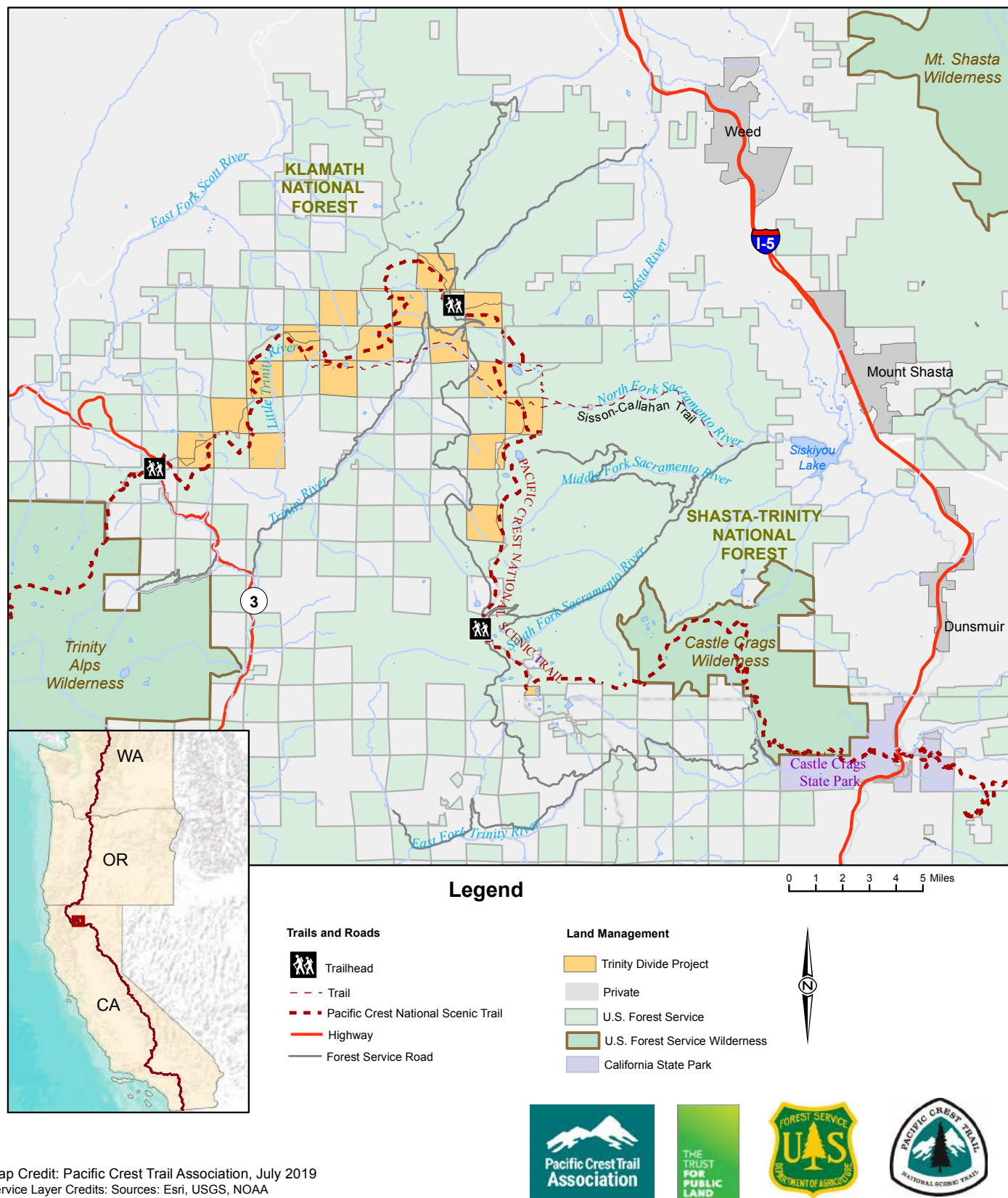
“It’s great when a lot of hard, persistent work by many partners pays off,” said Wargo. “We could not have done this on our own. This really is the largest single public land acquisition that we’re going to see for the Pacific Crest Trail in a generation. Everyone wins, too. We had a big celebration in July, and representatives from the Michigan-California Timber Company, the U.S. Forest Service, both counties, and many of the communities came to celebrate with us.”

“We have really enjoyed working with our partners at PCTA and TPL and are proud of the work we have done,” Chase said on behalf of the Michigan-California Timber Company. “Completion of this project will result in a substantial public benefit and allow our company to focus on our core mission to sustainably manage productive timberlands.”

“The Pacific Crest Trail is so important for the communities in Siskiyou County. Not only is it a draw for tourists who help drive our small-town economies, it’s an asset for locals who escape to it for the health of their minds and bodies. The trail is part of our identity as a mountain community because we care deeply about the place we live. And the community is important to the trail users as well. Together, we will care for both the town and the trail.”

- Ed Valenzuela, Siskiyou County Supervisor

Trinity Divide Pacific Crest National Scenic Trail Map



Map Credit: Pacific Crest Trail Association, July 2019

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For More Information

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