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# PRESERVATION RANCH PROJECT DESCRIPTION

## INTRODUCTION

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Premier Pacific Vineyards (PPV), dba Preservation Ranch, a Napa Valley-based winegrower and vineyard company specializing in the planting of high quality vineyards, is the manager of several affiliates that collectively own an approximately 19,652-acre<sup>1</sup> property in northwestern Sonoma County, California, known as Preservation Ranch (Property/Project). The Property consists of approximately 160 certificates of compliance parcels<sup>2</sup> (103 Assessor parcels) and is located north and east of the Town of Annapolis (see Figure 1).<sup>3</sup>

Preservation Ranch's vision is to establish an integrated land use plan for the Property that will convert a small portion of timberland to sustainably farmed vineyards (9% of Property) in order to make possible the preservation and restoration of the remaining 91% of the Property for sustainably managed timber production and wildlife habitat. The integrated land use plan establishes the following: (1) 1,861 acres of sustainable vineyards; (2) 14,868 acres of Sustainable Timber Management Area; (3) 2,702 acres of core wildlife habitat called Windy Gap Preserve; (4) a 221-acre expansion of the Soda Springs Reserve; (5) a 5-mile public trail easement; and (6) extinguishment of 97 legal parcels via voluntary merger. These components of the Project not only bring the Property into conformance with the General Plan land use densities but, through conservation easements, timber rights easements, and third party certification ensure that the Property will be responsibly managed as a single resource, in perpetuity. This integrated land use plan maximizes forest resource protections and environmental benefits while integrating agriculture and wildlife conservation with a large working forest, over the entire landscape.

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<sup>1</sup> Acreage figures available from official records at the Sonoma County Assessor's Office indicate that the 103 Assessor parcels in the Project area total approximately 19,300 acres; however, acreages derived from the County Geographic Information System (GIS) indicates a total Project size of approximately 19,652 acres. Both acreage figures are only estimates until such time that a full Property survey is recorded with the County. The GIS generated acreage figures and boundaries have an uncertain margin of error and do not supplant officially recorded acreage and/or property boundaries. Nevertheless, since the GIS acreage is within 1.8 percent of the Assessor's official acreage, the GIS generated acreage is considered to be within an acceptable margin of error sufficiently accurate and representative for purposes of depicting the location and components of the Project proposal. This Project Description references the County Assessor acreage total of 19,300 only when discussing the size of parcels or the existing and proposed zoning acreage (rezoning) and relies on the larger GIS generated 19,652-acre total for all other planning and environmental discussions.

<sup>2</sup> The previous owner, Coastal Forestlands, Ltd. ("CFL"), submitted applications for 178 certificates of compliance (COCs) to the County. In a letter dated July 13, 1995, the County concluded that out of the 178 COCs applied for that 14 would be denied, one had already been issued, and 163 would be issued upon CFL's request. Of the 163 COCs the County determined could be issued, 158 would be unconditional administrative COCs and five would be conditional COCs. Based upon research of Preservation Ranch's existing ownership and the Coastal Forestland applications submitted to the County, Preservation Ranch has determined that approximately 160 COC's are within its existing ownership (see Figure 4).

<sup>3</sup> All acreage numbers and related percentages referenced in this Project Description are approximate (see footnote 1).

Preservation Ranch is submitting applications to Sonoma County for an immediate rezone<sup>4</sup> of the timber conversion areas from Timber Production (TP) to Resource and Rural Development (RRD), a rezone of portions of RRD land to TP and TP land to Public Facility (PF), and a conditional use permit (CUP) for the timber conversion process necessary for establishing the vineyards. Preservation Ranch will subsequently be submitting applications to the California Division of Forestry (CDF) for a Timber Conversion Permit (TCP), also necessary to establish vineyards, as well as an associated Timber Harvest Plan (THP). Parcel merger, forest restoration, park dedication, conservation/working forest easements, and other public benefits discussed below would be conditioned on approval of the rezone, CUP, TCP, and THP. All relevant information pertaining to the TCP and THP shall be provided to the County for consideration in the Project Environmental Impact Report.

For the past three years, Preservation Ranch has studied and analyzed the environmental characteristics of the Property, the restoration needs of the resources present, and solutions to address the existing 160 certificate of compliance parcels (see Figure 4) (103 Assessor parcels; see Figure 2). Preservation Ranch's goal is to minimize the potential impacts of the Project through environmentally sensitive design and best management practices that not only mitigate impacts but create public benefit by reducing development potential, preserving and restoring timberland, enhancing wildlife habitat, increasing carbon storage, and improving water quality.

Preservation Ranch believes the proposed improvement of the Property: (1) is consistent with the long-term land use and timber resource policy goals of Sonoma County; (2) contributes to the economy of Sonoma County by selectively adding a limited amount of premium agricultural use and ensuring a long-term timber resource; (3) significantly reduces both its development potential and resulting fragmentation of natural resources; (4) positively addresses the currently degraded environmental condition of the Property with restoration and preservation of the timber resource and fish and wildlife habitats; and (5) serves a lengthy list of related public benefits including the expansion of Soda Springs Reserve including a trail easement and establishment of Windy Gap Preserve easement.

It is important to understand the context into which the Preservation Ranch Project fits. Five significant man-made issues have contributed to the current condition of the Property:

- i) **Issue:** Legacy of haphazard, unplanned parcelization. Over many decades the parcels on the Property (and adjoining properties) were created and conveyed for the convenience of prior owners without the benefit of contemporary land use policies, environmental review, or impact mitigation. As a result, the Property is currently inconsistent with the Sonoma County General Plan, with existing parcel boundaries creating the potential for resource fragmentation and environmental impacts associated with residential development of each legal parcel.

**Solution:** Voluntary parcel merger and a working forest conservation easement ensuring sustainable/environmentally sensitive timber management and restricting future timber conversions.

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<sup>4</sup> See California Government Code Section 51130 et seq.

- ii) **Issue:** Depleted timber resource. Over the last 60 years, the Property's timber has been aggressively over harvested, leaving the productivity of the forest resources in a depleted condition with currently less than 25% of the timber volume that would be found on a similar age well-managed forest. Much of the area that is capable of producing redwood and Douglas fir is now dominated by tanoak, a historically minor forest component.

**Solution:** Forest restoration of 3,738 acres that includes planting approximately 1 million (3 trees planted for every 1 tree cut for vineyard development) redwood, Douglas fir, and sugar pine seedlings, with a working forest conservation easement on 14,868 acres that requires sustainable/environmentally sensitive management of the timber resource by one or more entities holding timber rights over all Timber Production acreage.

- iii) **Issue:** Damaged fish and wildlife habitat. Historical logging of the Property has left a dense forest of small trees that lack canopy structure and therefore, provides minimal habitat value for wildlife species. Although portions of the road system have recently been stabilized, for the past 60 years, the extensive logging road network has been a significant source of sediment that has contributed to declines in water quality and associated salmonid habitat.

**Solution:** Upgrading approximately 92 miles of road to significantly reduce future sediment delivery to the Gualala River watershed, creating a sustainable/environmentally sensitive working forest conservation easement on 14,868 acres that includes large tree management areas, expanded riparian protection areas, and establishing the 2,702-acre Windy Gap Preserve easement.

- iv) **Issue:** Excessive fire risk. Due to aggressive over-logging in the past, the current forest is comprised of dense, young, even-age stands, most with both vertical and horizontal continuity (vegetation reaches from the forest floor to the tree canopy and then between trees), providing fire the opportunity to travel from the ground to the crowns of the trees and then across the crowns. This increases the risk of catastrophic wildfire. In addition, overly dense conditions reduce tree vigor and result in unhealthy forest conditions that can further exacerbate fire risk due to high fuel loading.

**Solution:** Forest restoration of 3,738 acres that includes thinning dense stands of tanoak and planting approximately 1 million new conifers (3 trees planted for every tree cut for vineyard development) and a working forest conservation easement on 14,868 acres that requires management of fire hazards.

- v) **Issue:** Reduced carbon storage. Due to historic aggressive logging of the Property, significantly less carbon is being stored compared to the Property's carbon sequestration potential. In addition, the current dense second growth forest with a high tanoak component significantly increases the risk of catastrophic crown fires, which can release carbon held in trees into the atmosphere.

**Solution:** Offset all carbon impacts associated with the conversion of timberland to vineyards, restore 3,738 acres of forest including planting approximately one million conifers, sustainably manage 14,868 acres of forest, create a 2,702-acre Windy Gap Preserve, dedicate 221 acres as an expansion of the County reserve all resulting in a carbon neutral project from day one with increased carbon storage over time.

The Project will address the environmental, resource, land use, and economic challenges, briefly discussed above and addressed in detail below, in an integrated fashion, and, using private funds, implement a restoration and preservation of the Property.