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The View from Andy's Desk

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April 27, 2012-Andrew R. Cassano is a City/Regional Planner and Professional Land Surveyor with over 43 years of experience in Northern California. He is CEO of Nevada City Engineering, Inc., a firm offering regional planning, surveying, and civil engineering consulting to the private and public sector since 1978.

Bear Yuba Land Trust: A Safe Place for Us All

I was very surprised and greatly honored to accept the "William Nickerl Award for Conservation Leadership" from the Bear Yuba Land Trust. My thanks to their Board of Directors and the folks that attended the fund raising presentation dinner, the Oak Tree Ball. As you know, the Bear River Land Trust (formerly Nevada County Land Trust) is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization that facilitates voluntary open space conservation and trail development.

I told the folks at dinner this memory: In the early 1990's one of my clients was TMI Analysts, Inc. that then owned Loma Rica Ranch. TMI was a Newport Beach firm that raised money from small investments from school teachers who wanted to dabble in real estate development. TMI then bought land and worked to increase its value. TMI brought forward a major master planning effort for Loma Rica Ranch through the City of Grass Valley.

They leased the historic horse barns to an operator that ran a stable business. One of the persons boarding her horse there was an energetic lady named Jean Brook Dunning, who became extremely alarmed at the prospect of seeing the ranch developed. She quickly worked to form the "Loma Rica Ranch Preservation Committee," which garnered a lot of grass roots support, and set about to defeat the TMI plan.

Jean and I were at complete odds. She was tireless in her efforts to run TMI out of town and defeat their plan. I was tireless in defending the small teacher investors and singing the merits of the land use plan whenever possible.

Suddenly one day, Jean and I found ourselves on the Land Trust Board of Directors together. To the organization's

credit, we left Loma Rica Ranch at the door and rolled up our sleeves, side by side, to turn our mutual efforts and energy to the common goals of the Land Trust. I can still remember the feeling of peacefulness and relaxation as I realized that the Land Trust was a safe place for citizens of all different view points. It was a needed respite from my normal existence between the rock and hard spot of community policy versus individual land use expectations.

Jean is deceased now and greatly missed. But she outlasted TMI which was caught up in a scandal of mismanaging the money of other projects. Eventually, Loma Rica Ranch reverted back to my earliest client and amazing friend, Fred Knoop, who operated the world class thoroughbred training farm there. He eventually sold the ranch for the third and final time to the current owner.

So much of our lives is focused on the things that we disagree on. And wow, is this ever brought home during a presidential election year. My eternal thanks to the Bear Yuba Land Trust for continually demonstrating the incredible value and power of focusing on the things we can all agree on.

Everyone in our community has something to bring to the Trust, whether as land owners, volunteers, or financial supporters. Land owners include investors, developers, ranchers, loggers, and miners. Volunteers and financial supporters come from all ages, skill sets, and philosophies.

My nine years on the Land Trust Board was a wonderful time of witnessing amazing vision, amazing generosity, and incredible collaborative efforts between sometimes seemingly polar opposites. For me it was a chance to apply my profession, that I love so much, to a charitable cause. As Lands Committee Chairman, my knowledge of title, easements, boundaries, CEQA, lot line adjustments, land divisions, zoning, surveying, and local politics all came in handy. Let me know if I can help you.