

Poor economy a boon for public land trusts

By Robert Lewis, Sacramento Bee

The Great Recession may have devastated development across the region, but it has proven a boon for public land trusts, nonprofit groups that use public funds and private donations to buy land for conservation.

These public trusts have been snapping up large tracts of land or buying conservation easements – agreements in which landowners essentially promise not to allow development on their land in exchange for money – while developers have been sitting on the sidelines or going out of business.

Forget the “silver lining.” They call it the “green lining” of the downturn. With land prices a bargain and some owners desperate to sell, land trusts are taking advantage of pots of public money to close big deals.

“There’s no doubt there have been easily five times as many opportunities due to the economy,” said Jeff Darlington, executive director of the Placer Land Trust.

While land trusts don’t have enough funding to keep pace with the sudden supply, they have been able to buy some fairly notable pieces of land in the past few years. Most recently, the Placer Land Trust partnered with the San Francisco-based Trust for Public Land to buy nearly 1,800 acres of oak woodlands just outside Auburn for \$9.5 million. The land is part of the 2,600-acre Bruin Ranch property owned by businessman and developer Lloyd Harvego.

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