

PLT establishes largest conservation easement

More than 500 acres will be preserved

- By Garrett Cabeza, Daily News staff writer
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The Palouse Land Trust now holds a conservation easement on 509 acres of land south of Colfax owned by Maple K Enterprises LLC, seen on the right side of this image. The PLT previously established an easement on 113 acres of MKE's land, which can be seen on the left, to protect water quality and wildlife habitat on the South Fork of the Palouse River.
Palouse Land Trust photo

The Palouse Land Trust now holds a 509-acre conservation easement on Maple K Enterprises LLC's land south of Colfax and east of U.S. Highway 195 - the trust's largest ever conservation easement, said Nick Norton, PLT conservation projects manager.

"Everyone here is just very excited to have that done, and it will have a very important, lasting difference in the area," Norton said.

He said the easement, which was established May 14, was largely to protect the productive agricultural land.

"The majority of it is about limiting anyone's ability in the future to subdivide or develop that for residential use," Norton said.

Norton said MKE approached the trust on how the two entities could help protect the land. He said the process took years, as many partners were involved.

Norton said MKE will continue to own and manage the land, but the land - the majority of which has been highly productive farmland for more than 100 years - will be preserved.

He said the U.S. has lost hundreds of thousands of acres of high-quality farmland in the past decade, but this easement will not fall victim to that trend.

Norton said drivers on U.S. 195 will also benefit from the easement as the western side of the property includes a long, highly scenic corridor along the highway that will continue to be preserved.

The easement was not the first one the trust and MKE agreed upon.

Norton said the PLT also holds a conservation easement on a 113-acre MKE piece of land that abuts the 509-acre parcel on the east side. He said the easement protects wildlife habitat and water quality on the South Fork of the Palouse River.

Together, the easements provide 622 acres of continuous protected open space.

"The combination of those two creates a really great wildlife corridor," Norton said.

He said deer, coyotes, turkey and other animals travel between the two easements, and the new easement will ensure open space for the animals' unimpeded movement.

Cheryl Kammerzell, who owns and operates MKE with her husband, Tom, said MKE purchased the property about 10 years ago from the Meyers family, who owned and managed it for more than 100 years.

Kammerzell said she and her husband purchased the land with the goal of managing it for agricultural purposes.

While more than 300 acres of the 509-acre space is farmland, another large chunk is pasture ground for the Kammerzells' cattle.

"It's nice to know the property is secure," Kammerzell said.

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