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## **Land Trust Movement Is Growing Rapidly**

The Tri-Valley Conservancy (TVC) has been keeping ahead of the national and state averages of gains in acreage by land trusts.

Combined local, state and national land trusts increased 54 percent to 37 million acres between 2000 and 2005, according to a report released last week by the Land Trust Association (LTA). The national non-profit organization publishes a census of lands in trust every five years.

Locally, the TVC had an even better gain, at 57 percent, which brought its total protected land to 4132 acres, said TVC executive director Sharon Burnham.

So far, all of the land has been within the boundary of the South Livermore plan. However, in 2003, the TVC expanded its geographical scope. As a result it is working with landowners in North Livermore, Pleasanton and Dublin, although none has obtained a trust yet.

California is one of the leading states in increasing preserved acreage, said the LTA. The West was also the leading region for growth in land trust acreage. The number of land trusts in the United States grew by 34 percent to 1667 during the past five years. The growth in preservation is a response to the rapid engulfment of the environment, said the LTA report.

Each year, the United States loses two million acres of farms, forests and open spaces to subdivisions, malls and highways. More than 100,000 acres of wetlands are destroyed each year.

Burnham said that the most impressive point in the report was that "all regions of the country have been remarkable (in preservation growth) for the past five years." She attributed the success to people "really understanding the value of protecting land, and not building on every square inch that we have. The land trust movement has been gathering speed for several years. The public realizes the value of preserving open space and farmland."

The public, including farmers and ranchers, are coming to a better understanding of how land trusts can be beneficial to all, said Burnham. "There are a lot of landowners who can take advantage of tax incentives by donating land. In other cases, especially farmers, they can receive money for conservation easements, and continue to farm. The public is understanding how important these natural areas are to the quality of life," she said.

Cooperation among land trusts regionally is important, too, said Burnham. She cited the example of the Save Mount Diablo trust. "They want to make sure that Mount Diablo is not an island in the middle of development, because there would be pressure to build (houses) up the mountainside. It's important to keep a corridor open, and connect it to the (Livermore) Valley. We'd like to keep that open, so there are contiguous habitat corridors. We need to keep it open for animals and for people. It's why you try to plan regionally, not just locally," said Burnham.