

Big gains in voluntary land conservation despite recession

PVP — The first census of land trusts in five years found 10 million new acres conserved nationwide since 2005, including 2,303,442 acres in California.

The National Land Trust Census, released by the Land Trust Alliance, shows that voluntarily protected land increased 27 percent between 2005 and 2010. In the same time period, the federal land and Water Conservation Fund, a major federal conservation program, added just more than 500,000 acres and saw a 38-percent funding cuts. The census is online at www.lta.org/census.

A total of 47 million acres are now protected by land trusts. A greater percentage of the new acreage comes through local and state land trusts like the Palos Verdes Peninsula Land Conservancy. In California, land trusts conserved 2,303,422 acres between 2005 and 2010, a 34-percent increase in land protected.

“California residents value their land, and we are conserving it at the community level,” said Andrea Vona, executive director

of the PVP Land Conservancy. “Here in California we are investing in our future with land trusts that ensure clean water, scenic vistas and places to play for our children and for generations to come.”

In the last five years, the PVP Land Conservancy has been able to preserve nearly 600 acres of coastal open space, bringing the total amount of land conserved by the organization to 1,600 acres. During the last five year, volunteers donated nearly 46,000 hours to support this important conservation work.

An enhanced tax deduction for conservation easement donations has helped America’s land trusts work with farmers, ranchers and other modest-income landowners to sustain a remarkable pace of more than 1 million acres protected by conservation easements each year. But if Congress allows this incentive to expire at the end of 2011, fewer landowners will receive tax benefits from the generous donation of development rights on their land.