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RICE GROWER MONTNA WINS 2010 LEOPOLD CONSERVATION AWARD

Sand County Foundation, the California Farm Bureau Federation and Sustainable Conservation, today named Al Montna of Yuba City as the 2010 recipient of the Leopold Conservation Award in California.

The fifth annual Leopold Conservation Award for California was presented today at the California Farm Bureau Federation Annual Meeting in Monterey.

The \$10,000 Leopold Conservation Award is named in honor of world-renowned conservationist Aldo Leopold. The award is presented annually in eight states to private landowners who practice exemplary land stewardship and management.

“Al Montna’s commitment to the health of the land, water, and wildlife that are in his care is truly inspiring, and his leadership within California’s agricultural community helps ensure that his dedication to conservation will endure, especially in future generations of farmers and ranchers,” said Dr. Brent Haglund, Sand County Foundation president.

Montna operates Montna Farms, which consists of more than 2,500 acres of specialty short grain rice in Sutter County. His commitment to the enhancement of natural resources has led him to implement several conservation practices on his land. For more than 35 years, Montna has flooded his rice fields, which has increasingly provided valuable habitat for waterfowl. He also monitors the quantity and quality of water on his farm and utilizes laser leveling of his fields, which results in lower herbicide costs due to better water management.

In 2008, Montna built a solar power facility to offset energy usage at Montna Farms Rice Dryer. He helped pioneer the practice of knocking rice stubble down into flooded fields, rather than burning it, which creates winter habitat for many wildlife species. This process also allowed Montna Farms to bank and sell emission reduction credits for added revenue.

His desire to see his land remain in agriculture for future generations led him to place approximately 2,000 acres into California’s first wildlife-friendly agriculture easement, which provides habitat for waterfowl and shorebirds for migration, wintering or breeding.

Montna, who is widely regarded as a leader in California’s agricultural community, has held numerous positions in agricultural organizations and public policy boards, such as

the Northern California Water Association and California Bay-Delta Authority. He currently serves as president of the California State Board of Food and Agriculture.

Along with Montna, the 2010 Leopold Conservation Award had two other finalists:

- Bill and Kay Burrows – Red Bluff, Tehama County
- Tim Koopmann – Sunol, Alameda County

Bill and Kay Burrows employ holistic management techniques in the operation of their ranch. Their family works to improve the biodiversity on their land, increasing the productivity of the soil, plants and animals. They run cattle, as well as meat goats and sheep for brush control. The family diversifies its operation through agritourism, including hosting hunting and fishing tours. Bill and Kay also engage in community outreach, hosting an annual Stewardship Day at the ranch where local residents, agencies and organizations are invited to their ranch to learn about sustainable resource management.

Tim Koopmann is a third-generation rancher who owns and operates a cow-calf operation on 850 acres of rangeland. He has been able to maintain the ranch in the face of increasing development due to conservation easements that were the first of their kind in Alameda County. Koopmann was instrumental in the creation and implementation of a pioneering approach to watershed management, which has improved water quality in the Alameda Creek watershed, as well as San Francisco Bay. He has held several positions of leadership within agriculture and participated in numerous workshops and field tours to help with conservation outreach to other livestock producers. Koopmann's ranch was also the site of the development of the California Rangeland Conservation Coalition.

The Leopold Award in California is supported in part with generous contributions from the S.D. Bechtel, Jr. Foundation; the Bradley Fund for the Environment; California Audubon; and Farm Credit.

In 2010, Sand County Foundation is presenting Leopold Conservation Awards in California, Colorado, Nebraska, South Dakota, Texas, Utah, Wisconsin and Wyoming. The awards are presented to recognize extraordinary achievement in voluntary conservation on the land of exemplary private landowners; inspire other landowners in their own communities through these examples; showcase conservation leaders in the agricultural community to people outside of agriculture; and build bridges among several private and public sectors in support of private land conservation. For more information, please visit www.leopoldconservationaward.org.

ABOUT SAND COUNTY FOUNDATION

Sand County Foundation is a private, non-profit conservation group dedicated to working with private landowners to improve habitat on their land. Sand County's mission is to advance the use of ethical and scientifically sound land management practices and partnerships for the benefit of people and the ecological landscape. Sand County Foundation works with private landowners because the majority of the nation's fish,

wildlife and natural resources are found on private lands. The organization backs local champions, invests in civil society and places incentives before regulation to create solutions that endure and grow. The organization encourages the exercise of private responsibility in the pursuit of improved land health as an essential alternative to many of the commonly used strategies in modern conservation. www.sandcounty.net

ABOUT SUSTAINABLE CONSERVATION

Sustainable Conservation believes protecting the environment can also be good for business. The organization's climate, air, water and biodiversity initiatives promote practical solutions that produce tangible, lasting benefits for California. Founded in 1993, Sustainable Conservation's effectiveness lies in building strong partnerships with business, agriculture and government, and establishing models for environmental and economic sustainability that can be replicated across California and beyond. www.suscon.org

ABOUT CALIFORNIA FARM BUREAU

The California Farm Bureau Federation is California's largest farm organization. It works to protect family farms and ranches on behalf of 53 county Farm Bureaus throughout California, whose members include farm families and those who support the farming way of life. www.cfbf.com

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