

Steve Sinton Receives National Honor

Central Coast cattle producer named American Farmland Trust's 2005 Steward of the Land Award

California Rangeland Trust founding chairman and long-time California Cattlemen's Association (CCA) member Steve Sinton was honored in May for his efforts at preserving rangelands in California. Steve is the winner of American Farmland Trust's 2005 Steward of the Land Award, the largest nationwide award for land conservation and stewardship.

Photo: Jane Sinton



Steve Sinton at his Ranch in Shandon, CA

Steve's ranching experience, legal expertise and commitment to conservation have been instrumental in California Rangeland Trust's success. Under Steve's able leadership, the Rangeland Trust grew from a start-up nonprofit with no staff, to a statewide organization that currently holds more than 173,000

acres in conservation agreements on working cattle ranches.

"It seems to me that people with a historical connection to the land not only care more about it, but also understand it best," says Sinton. "That's why it's so important to support conservation organizations that help ranchers and farmers preserve their family ranches and farms."

In addition to his service to the Rangeland Trust, Steve has served as the vice chairman of the California Cattlemen's Association (CCA) Land Use Committee. Steve has also served as a member of California Association of Winegrape Growers Vineyards and Wildlife Habitat Steering Committee. Locally, Steve has served as chairman of the San Luis Obispo County Water Resources Advisory Committee, as well as the San Luis Obispo County Native Tree Ordinance Advisory Committee.

"While Steve's on-the-ground accomplishments are matched in few places in California, it is his policy and community contributions in combination with the conservation-oriented management of his own ranch that make him

an outstanding recipient for this award," says Nita Vail, executive director for the Rangeland Trust. "Steve's generous leadership is a model for other farming and ranching community leaders."

"Steve's generous leadership is a model for other farming and ranching community leaders"—Nita Vail

A fourth-generation San Luis Obispo County rancher, Sinton is also a graduate of Stanford University and the University of Colorado Law School. Steve practiced water and environmental law in Sacramento and San Luis Obispo for 15 years before returning to manage two family cattle ranches with his father Jim Sinton. Along with his wife Jane, Steve also manages a 120-acre vineyard, marketing premium winegrapes to vintners in the Napa Valley and on the Central Coast of California. Steve and Jane have two children, Julie, age 27 and Daniel, 24, who are currently pursuing their professional careers, but love working on the ranch, becoming the fifth generation on the same land.

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Message from the Executive Director



Nita Vail



The Hearst Corporation, American Land Conservancy, California Rangeland Trust, and the State of California completed a comprehensive conservation project on February 18, 2005

that permanently protects the 128 square mile Hearst Ranch, located in San Luis Obispo County, California. It felt historic and surreal for all involved.

A major component of the project is the conservation easement restricting future development on 80,000 acres of the Ranch located inland, or on the east side of Highway One (commonly now known as the "East Side"). This spectacular Ranch is the largest privately-owned working cattle ranch remaining on the California Coast. It extends from the Pacific Ocean over the Santa Lucia Mountain Range to Lake Nacimiento. The conservation easement ensures that the scenic, open space, agricultural and natural resource values of the Ranch will be preserved in perpetuity. California Rangeland Trust holds, monitors and will enforce the conservation easement.

Hearst Corporation will also transfer to the state some 13 miles of coastline that will be owned outright by the state for public access, including close to 1,000 acres along Highway One. An additional 500 acres has been permanently committed for transfer to the state to allow inland realignment of Highway One. The state has also received a perpetual easement for public access to additional coastal

"Conserving the Hearst Ranch is one of the most important working landscape conservation accomplishments in California to date, and will be remembered and appreciated by many succeeding generations."

land to complete a critical 18-mile segment of the California Coastal Trail. Moreover, historic Old San Simeon Village will be protected by a conservation easement that restricts development to a 100 room visitor's inn designed in accordance with plans by Julia Morgan, and preserves the scenic, cultural and natural resource values of the area. This easement is held by the American Land Conservancy.

Photo: Robert Glen Ketchum



Oak Arroyo at The Hearst San Simeon Ranch.

Everything about this project has been huge, including the interest it attracted at state funding hearings, in the legislature and in the press. The diverse and often competing interests between the project principles, the myriad of public agencies and community groups representing so many different constituencies made for what has to be one of the most challenging transactions in history. What is also enormous is that, despite the occasional periods of intense controversy and contentious debate among all these players, in the end the immense public benefit to be obtained by the transactions was recognized by all the key players and eventually carried the day.

One of the unique aspects of this project involves the amount of detailed information about the

Hearst Ranch Defined



transaction published by the state Resources Agency last summer (www.resources.ca.gov). All parties to the transaction -- the American Land Conservancy, California Rangeland Trust, Hearst Corp, and the state Resources Agency - voluntarily agreed to this unprecedented level of disclosure. All believed the project is an extraordinary opportunity and an unparalleled bargain.

Here are some of the details of the deal:

Hearst retains the right to build no more than 27 owner homes – all out of the views of Hearst Castle, Highway One and away from fragile natural resources. The criteria for siting these homes to ensure the protection of the property’s natural resources are fully described in the recorded easement document available to the public. The landowners must still comply with all applicable local and state laws, and therefore will have to obtain all the necessary building permits and related approvals prior to any new development.



Coastal viewshed preserved.

The appraisal of the various property interest acquired in the transactions was conducted by an experienced real estate appraiser hired by the state—not by Hearst. The state’s appraisal was then reviewed and approved by an independent appraiser—again hired by the state. That detailed review and summary document was made public.

The full-text of the Wildlife Conservation Board grant agreement was also made public. And, the Resources Inventory made available on-line was some of the most detailed and comprehensive baseline data ever publicly disclosed by an Agency or non-governmental organization.

Monitoring and enforcement will be conducted by the California Rangeland Trust, with a periodic audit conducted by a committee that includes

the State of California, the property owner, the Society for Range Management and the California Rangeland Trust. To date, no other easement project in the state has such auditing provisions. California Rangeland Trust is recognized as a leader and has assumed the monitoring and enforcement obligations from other conservation organizations such as The Trust for Public Land, The Nature Conservancy and American Land Conservancy.

One of the arguments against the Hearst project was the amount of public monies used in the conservation transactions.

Photo: Robert Glen Ketchum

For the protection of the 80,000 acres of working landscape on the “East Side”, the public investment was less than \$900 per acre. Add to that the easement and fee interests acquired by the state along 18 miles of central California coastline, and the overall cost was still under \$1,200 per acre. By the state appraiser’s estimate, Hearst Corporation donated an additional \$130 million or more of value in the transactions. Compare this

with a recent example of taxpayers spending nearly \$825,000 per acre to buy coastal wetlands in Orange County, and the overall cost of the Hearst transactions certainly can be considered a bargain.

Each person who drives Highway One will forever be able to enjoy the beautiful stretch of coastline and pristine majestic hills surrounding Hearst Castle. Some might even wonder, “What was the controversy all about?” Conserving the Hearst Ranch is one of the most important working landscape conservation accomplishments in California to date, and will be remembered and appreciated by many succeeding generations. To every individual whose contributions and support made this project a success, California Rangeland Trust extends our sincere gratitude.



Sierra Valley Ranch Preserved as a Working Landscape

Approximately 7,950 acres of grazing and hay land in the Sierra Valley will forever be preserved as a result of the closing of a conservation easement transaction on March 31, 2005 with the owners of the DS Ranch. California Rangeland Trust now holds conservation easements on 21,570 acres in the Sierra Valley.

Photo: Ceci Dale Cesmat



DS Ranch in Sierra Valley preserves working landscapes.

The DS Ranch owners, Louie Damonte of Reno, Nevada, and Dave Stix of Fernly, Nevada, are both long time ranchers in western Nevada and eastern California. Louie's sons Louie Jr., Steve and Darren Damonte all of Reno, Nevada and Dave son Dave and daughter Deana both of Fernly, Nevada, joined with their fathers to permanently protect the agricultural and natural resources of DS Ranch.

"California Rangeland Trust has been so impressed by the landowners' commitment to involving all succeeding generations in the conservation easement decision making process. The landowners' main motivation was to ensure that the ranch remains a ranch forever," said Nita Vail, executive director of the Rangeland Trust.

The DS Ranch will continue to be a privately owned cattle and hay ranch, and will remain on the county's property tax rolls, contributing to

"The Rangeland Trust, along with support from The Nature Conservancy, furthered our goal of protecting a critical mass of rangeland agriculture in the Sierra Valley."

—John Donnelly, Wildlife Conservation Board

the local economy. Along with providing rich and open views of the Sierra Valley, the DS Ranch is a critical point in the Pacific Flyway and provides habitat for numerous species of waterfowl.

"The Wildlife Conservation Board was pleased to partner with California Rangeland Trust and the Sierra Business Council to provide funding for this transaction. It will ensure the preservation of the DS Ranch," said John Donnelly of the Wildlife Conservation Board. Steve Frisch speaking on behalf of the Sierra Business Council said, "The Rangeland Trust, along with support from The Nature Conservancy, furthered our goal of protecting a critical mass of rangeland agriculture in the Sierra Valley."

Yolo Ranch Preserved

On March 25, 2005 Yolo Land & Cattle Company and the California Rangeland Trust finalized a conservation agreement that will preserve 6,983 acres of ranchland in Yolo County. The California Wildlife Conservation Board and the Great Valley Center provided funding for the land conservation agreement.





SOUND SCIENCE CORNER Happy Cows as Wetland Caretakers

After years of studying ecological factors governing vernal pools and California's annual rangeland, a strong case may be made for the benefits of livestock grazing vernal pool habitats on California's annual grasslands. Native vernal pool plants and fauna have co-existed in these grazed ecosystems for at least the past century. The extent to which grazing animals impacted vernal pool ecosystems before the arrival of Spaniards in California may be debatable; but, with the arrival of Spaniards the grasslands surrounding the vernal pools in the Sacramento Valley significantly changed. It is this "newly" evolved grassland, full of exotic aggressive annuals that must be managed properly if California's endemic floral and fauna species are to be conserved. Management of California's annual grasslands with vernal pool habitat should not only prevent exotic species from invading vernal pools, but also should not compromise the hydrology that creates vernal pool habitats. Intelligent cattle grazing has been proven to provide in many cases an effective option to manage the surrounding grasslands to support and encourage biological diversity.

- Sheila Barry

Photo: Andy Mills



Sheila Barry is the Bay Area Natural Resources/ Livestock Advisor for the University of California Cooperative Extension based in Santa Clara County. In the Bay Area Counties she serves, there are over 20 different public entities using grazing to manage open space lands. Sheila works with these entities and private landowners to promote sustainable working landscapes.

Executive Director travels to DC in Support of NFWF

Last month, California Rangeland Trust was invited, along with a handful of other selected organizations across the United States, to present testimony before U.S. House of Representatives Resources Subcommittee on Fisheries & Oceans concerning H.R. 1428, The National Fish & Wildlife Foundation Reauthorization Act of 2005, sponsored by Congressman Richard Pombo. Nita Vail, Executive Director, testified in support of the legislation on April 26, 2005. She provided background on the role of National Fish and Wildlife Foundation in providing matching seed funds for California Rangeland Trust's start-up in 1997. Since that time, NFWF has awarded approximately \$420,000 in matching grants to the California Rangeland Trust for the protection of watersheds, riparian areas and rangeland conservation easements in California.

The hearing also offered an opportunity to talk about CRT's successes in California, as well as the significant and growing movement of landowner based, agriculturally-oriented land trusts in the country, a trend we believe reflects a fundamental shift in conservation where agricultural producers are playing a larger role in designing and implementing conservation programs. The Partnership of Rangeland Trusts, or PORT, a recently formed non-profit organization of cattlemen affiliated land trusts from Colorado, California, Wyoming, Kansas, Montana, Oregon and Nevada was highlighted as an example. PORT's goal is to leverage resources to effectively advance the voluntary, incentive-based conservation of America's private ranchlands. Collectively, PORT organizations hold over 700 easements on close to a million acres of land. Also, the National Beef Cattlemen's Association and respective state cattlemen's groups participate with PORT in auxiliary roles. Again, the National Fish & Wildlife Foundation has taken the lead in providing support for this private land conservation organization, with a \$15,000 grant being awarded last November, 2004.



Conservation Campout Promotes Collaboration

Editor's Note: Jack and Zee Varian, along with their family, and the California Rangeland Trust hosted a Conservation Campout on April 16-17 at the V6 Ranch located in Parkfield, California. California Rangeland Trust has held a conservation easement on the V6 Ranch, a beautifully maintained 17,000 acre property, since March 2001. The purpose of the Conservation Campout was to offer an opportunity to editors and environmental writers, conservationists, and people in public service to experience the ranching way of life and to see firsthand what cattlemen and women do on the range. Participants rode on horseback for several hours and then settled down for a barbecue dinner and a fruitful exchange of ideas around the campfire.

Having owned and operated their ranch for over forty years, the Varian Family was ideally suited to host this special gathering. In his words, Jack Varian, describes his reasons for hosting the gathering...

"I've long felt that any cause needs dedicated people and periodic times when those involved can get together and talk about problems and successes. To this end, my family and I thought it appropriate to offer the beauty of the Little Cholame Valley and its surrounding mountains as a meeting place, to bring people involved in the conservation movement together.

Getting to Mustang Camp outside of Parkfield, California is a two and a half hour ride best done by horse so you get to really appreciate what a wonderful year this has been. The costs were a few sore muscles upon arrival. But there's an old saying that goes like this, 'The outside of a horse is good for the inside of a man,' and if you add to that a poem that my uncle wrote, 'Once you have entered the world of the mountains, you will look forward with joy to each successive return as one looks forward to a return

home, for you are returning to the clean simple world in which your remote ancestors grew to fit and love.' Include a campfire, lots of good food and

Photo: Steve Sentin



Conservation Campout participants saddle up for a weekend on the range.

without saying a word those who experienced this halcyon time I am sure will leave rededicated and invigorated, knowing that helping to save parts of mother nature's handy work is a very noble cause, indeed."

California Rangeland Trust thanks the Varian Family for its gracious hospitality and everyone who participated in this event.



Rosemary Cueva

CRT WELCOMES NEW STAFF ASSISTANT

California Rangeland Trust welcomes its newly hired staff assistant, Rosemary Cueva. In her new duties, Rosemary will work to ensure the smooth operation of all of the California Rangeland Trust's programs. Rosemary brings an extensive amount of human resource and public service expertise to the organization. In addition, Rosemary has experience in software consulting, customer service, personnel services and administrative support. A native to California, Rosemary brings her love for the land as well as her appreciation for agricultural stewardship to the California Rangeland Trust. Rosemary has one daughter, Carla of Vacaville and two granddaughters, Angelina and Evelyn, also of Vacaville. We welcome Rosemary to our team!

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Coming Events Roundup



June 4:

California Rangeland Trust Signature Event "A Western Affair" to be held at the Hearst Ranch in San Simeon, California. This cowboy event by the seaside will include silent and live auctions, live music, hosted bar and a cowboy gourmet dinner. Don't miss this opportunity to celebrate the completion of the Hearst Ranch conservation project! Tickets can be purchased at: www.rangelandtrust.org or by calling (916) 444-2096.

June 18:

The High Sierra Resource Conservation and Development Council, Inc. will host the "Sierra Valley Barns, Birds and Barbecue" agricultural tour to highlight the Sierra Valley's agricultural heritage and natural beauty. For more information call 530-823-5687.

SLOPE Event Benefits Conservation

Creative Conservation: California Rangeland Trust, American Land Conservancy and the San Luis Outdoors Painters Enterprise hosted an elegant art sale auction at the Hearst Ranch in April 2005.



CONTRIBUTING TO THIS ISSUE Nita Vail, Andy Mills, Jack Varian, Emily Franciskovich and Holly Foster



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www.rangelandtrust.org

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