



**California
Rangeland
Trust**

NEWS

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Our mission is to conserve the open space, natural habitat and stewardship provided by California's ranches.

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Ranchers Forging Partnerships in Conservation

When the California Cattlemen's Association created the California Rangeland Trust as an initial step to help California ranchers with their environmental self-determination, few probably imagined how it would blossom into a full-fledged grassroots conservation movement. Now, the Rangeland Trust and agricultural producers are taking a leadership role in teaming up with government and the environmental community to help forge partnerships to design and implement conservation programs.

California Rangeland Trust is proud to be a part of this movement. In 1998 when it was created, the fledging Rangeland Trust was the first state conservation organization formed by cattlemen to help cattlemen. The uniqueness of the organization is reflected in its Mission Statement: *"To conserve the open space, natural habitat and stewardship provided by California's ranches."*

Partnerships have been key to California Rangeland Trust's effectiveness and success in conserving these important lands. The Rangeland Trust has focused much energy in reaching out to the environmental community and land trusts oriented toward habitat protection to show how rangeland conservation and habitat preservation can go hand in hand. Over the past eight years, several important projects have been accomplished in partnership with such organizations like The Nature Conservancy, Trust for Public Land and American Land Conservancy. Some, like the Hearst Ranch project, would likely not have succeeded without this team approach and the agricultural and environmental

communities coming together to leverage their diverse resources.

The success of this philosophy is being proven beyond California's borders as well. The California Rangeland Trust is particularly proud of its instrumental role in helping form a group of agricultural-focused state associations called PORT (Partnership Of Rangeland Trusts). Other

members include Wyoming Stock Growers Association Land Trust, Colorado Cattlemen's Agricultural Land Trust, Kansas Livestock Association Ranchland Trust, Montana Land Reliance, Oregon Ranchland Trust, and Ranch Open Space of Nevada.

PORT was established in 2004 to leverage resources for the voluntary conservation of

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Photo: Jim Cunningham

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WHAT'S IN IT FOR ME?

For me, the California Rangeland Trust didn't start out to be such an immense undertaking. It began simply enough with an enabling resolution at the annual California Cattlemen's Association meeting in December 1997. At the time, I knew virtually nothing about the laws and policies related to conservation easements, and had no inkling of the personal politics that affect the funding of our current efforts to conserve rangeland in California. When Matt Echeverria and Jerry Hemsted approached me about helping to start a land trust, I was unprepared for the amount of effort it would take to become conversant in the intricacies of land conservation and the establishment of a fully functioning board of directors. I was also unaware of my impending passion and commitment to what became the California Rangeland Trust and that this enthusiasm would be shared by so many smart, capable, and dedicated people.

"Even the rich and famous disappear over time, unless they leave a charitable legacy."

Initially there were hours of conversation and consideration of how our "ranchers" land trust could best help California cattlemen. We talked about creating directories of rancher friendly experts to help with governmental regulations. We wanted to be a full service rancher support organization. When our doors opened in the middle of 1998, I think the newly appointed board was universally unprepared for the stampede of ranchers who had been waiting to establish conservation easements on their lands. Our customers caused an immediate refocusing of our efforts. Today we have completed some great easements on beautiful ranches around the state, constituting over 176,000 acres of conservation, and we are further behind than we were seven and a half years ago. There are over 49 ranching families on our waiting list, whose past stewardship has preserved nearly a half million acres of valleys, mountains, river lands, oak woodlands and meadows.

There are, of course, other land trusts operating in California. The difference is that our first responsibility is to the

continuation of land stewardship through ranching. We know that most endangered species rely on our ranches and don't understand why any organization thinks a well run ranch should have new management. We don't work on an easement unless it is for a ranching family that appreciates and protects all those other values that we associate with rangeland, but once we agree that a place has been well cared for, our easements simply seek to maintain that care forever.

I have to admit that the thousands of hours that I have spent in meetings, helping develop policies to protect California Rangeland Trust and our rancher partners, working on easements, and agonizing over where we will get the money to save this beautiful state, have taken its toll. Sometimes I simply can't face another email, phone call, or drive to Sacramento. Then I look around and see the bulldozers busily converting our range into terraced tracts of urbanity, and a renewed sense of urgency grips me. So many ranches, so little time.

So, what's in it for me? Other than raising good kids, there aren't that many things that a person can do that make a difference beyond our lifetime. Even the rich and famous disappear over time, unless they leave a charitable legacy. The great businessmen of a century ago pioneered great companies that are mostly gone now, but working with the Rangeland Trust gives me, my incredibly dedicated co-directors, and our supporters the opportunity to make a permanent difference. The landscapes that we can help ranchers protect ensure that future generations will experience what our pioneer ancestors witnessed. The wildlife and woodlands will endure because we joined with conscientious and caring ranchers to preserve a place and lifestyle that provides for more than the owner. We may be forgotten, but what we accomplish will never be.

~Steve Sinton



Ranchers Forging in Conservation

PARTNERSHIPS, CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

America's rangelands and to increase the input of agricultural producers into land conservation issues.

During the fall of 2005, the combined total acreage conserved by the seven members of PORT through conservation easements surpassed the one million mark (1,062,000 acres). Comparatively, one out of every seven acres safeguarded through conservation easements in the United States was accomplished by a PORT member, making participant organizations among the most successful and fastest growing land trusts in the country. This success is attributed to PORT members' unique grassroots structure of being formed by agricultural producers for agricultural producers.

Now, as California Rangeland Trust approaches the end of its eighth year, much pride and some disbelief are experienced as over 176,000 acres are under conservation easements and active projects in process represent 374,747 additional acres.

California Rangeland Trust's directors and staff have been most gratified by the enthusiastic reception and support the Rangeland Trust has received from both the ranching and conservation communities. Moving forward together will preserve California's golden working landscapes and the habitats they provide while keeping the ranching tradition a cornerstone of California's economy and heritage.

Tim Koopmann, California Rangeland Trust Director explains the importance of working together:

"Our member ranchers, the folks who have the land where the species thrive, invited participation and support from segments of California beyond the agricultural community, including enlightened environmentalists and government agency representatives who understand that well managed grazing is one of the best ways to protect the environment. They soon came to realize that animal and plant species thrive on grazed rangeland better than unmanaged land: When you preserve ranches you preserve nature."



Photo: Jim Cunningham

Historic 2563-Acre Orvis Ranch in Calaveras County Preserved

The historic Orvis Ranch will forever continue as a working cattle ranch under a conservation contract between the Orvis family and California Rangeland Trust. The agreement was finalized and recorded March 31, 2006.

Established in 1873 by the Orvis family and still owned and operated by fourth-generation members of the family, Bruce and Roma Orvis, the ranch in Calaveras and Stanislaus counties possesses exemplary grazing, habitat and scenic open space values. The ranch also rests in a precarious position along Highway 4 in the Sierra Foothills with residential and rural ranchette development closing in rapidly from the north, east and west.

"Four generations put it together, and there's no way I wanted to be responsible for the ranch being cut up," says Bruce Orvis. "It's a dream of mine that this place stays big open country."

Bruce and Roma run a cow-calf operation and breed award-winning Hereford bulls.

Project funding was obtained by the Trust for Public Land in partnership with the California Rangeland Trust through the California Farmland Conservancy Program, the USDA Farm and Ranchland Protection Program and the Great Valley Center.



Photo: Bill Orvis

FUNDING EASEMENTS IN A CHALLENGING ECONOMY

When I joined California Rangeland Trust as Transaction Director in February of 2004, there were seven projects waiting to be closed. Five of those projects had funding from the California Wildlife Conservation Board. The other two were mitigation projects with funding provided by the entity needing to mitigate for development elsewhere. The ranches were located in the counties of Alameda, Merced, Placer, Plumas, San Luis Obispo, Sierra and Yolo. It took over a year to close the seven projects and when they were done, Rangeland Trust's portfolio of conserved acreage had increased to nearly 173,000 acres.

Funded easements

Most of the Wildlife Conservation Board funds used for the five projects were the result of Propositions 40 and 50 approved by the voters of California in 2002. Proposition 40 earmarked \$75 million to California Rangeland, Grazing Land and Grasslands, a program specifically designed to conserve working ranches in California. Two of the seven projects mentioned above were funded through that grazing program. Rangeland Trust has one additional project, the El Chorro Ranch (see Fall, 2005 Newsletter) recently completed with funds from this program.

A few of the projects that closed in 2005 also received funds from private foundations to pay for acquisition costs as well as monitoring and transaction costs. These private funds were crucial to the success of the projects because Wildlife Conservation Board funds can only pay for acquisition of the easement and not for any transaction costs or monitoring.

With 172 land trusts in California, the demand far exceeded the amount of bond funds allocated for conservation easements from Propositions 40 and 50. Money from private foundations has also dwindled in the last two years for a variety of reasons including the decline in the stock market.

While the amount of funds available to fund projects is diminishing, the interest in conserving rangeland is increasing. California Rangeland Trust currently has 49 project applications representing nearly an additional 400,000 acres. In order to facilitate the conservation easement on these

ranches, we have been exploring new funding sources. Working with Trust for Public Land, funds were secured for a Central Valley ranch from the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA)-Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) Farm and Ranchland Protection Program and the California Department of Conservation Farmland Conservancy Program (see *Orvis Ranch project in this newsletter*). The Great Valley Center also provided grant funds for that project. We are hopeful this combination of federal and state funds may work for other California Rangeland Trust projects that meet the specific requirements of the two programs.

Donated easements

California Rangeland Trust has been in discussions with a few ranchers who are willing and able to donate a conservation easement. The donation of a conservation easement is a charitable contribution for federal and state tax purposes, and should be considered by any owner who can utilize the tax benefits. Even a partial donation of the value of the easement can provide tax benefits.

The future of funding

The prospect for substantial new bond funds earmarked for agricultural conservation is unlikely. A bond measure is expected to appear on the November 2006 ballot. It is not expected that this bond will provide the needed funds for agricultural conservation easements. An initiative bond measure is also currently garnering signatures to qualify for the Fall ballot. That proposal, unfortunately, only proposes a paltry sum for all agricultural conservation easements in California.

In order to estimate a meaningful amount needed from any future bond measures to fund the list of applications Rangeland Trust has accepted, I looked at the range of per acre easement prices for the projects closed in 2005 (excluding Hearst Ranch which is an anomaly due to its enormous size) that were funded through Propositions 40 and 50. The 2003-2004 appraised per acre conservation easement value ranged from \$209 to \$730. Using this

range, the amount needed for acquisition only of conservation easements for the existing 49 applications is between \$83 Million to \$292 Million. Obviously, that range is low with the escalation of real estate values throughout California, and will not provide the additional funds needed for monitoring and transaction costs.

California Rangeland Trust is participating in discussions on the bond measures urging legislators to include a significant amount of funds for the acquisition of agricultural conservation easements, but we need your help. Contact your local state senator and assemblyman and express your support of



agricultural conservation easements. Tell them about the benefits of privately owned rangeland and why it is important to include a significant amount of funds in the bond measures for agricultural conservation easements. (See inset box.) A grassroots appeal may help the legislators realize the long-term benefits to California of acquiring agricultural conservation easements.

-Michele Clark

BENEFITS TO CALIFORNIA FROM CONSERVATION EASEMENTS

- Land remains on tax rolls and landowner continues paying property taxes.
- Less expensive for California to acquire development rights through a conservation easement than to own fee title and pay on-going maintenance and management
- Maintains Western heritage of California
- Keeps agricultural base within local community
- Helps family ranchers continue their livelihood and helps maintain the long-term viability of their agricultural businesses

ESTATE PLANNING

As many of you consider your estate planning options, please be sure to remember California Rangeland Trust as a beneficiary. Your financial planning efforts can contribute greatly to conserving rangeland in California and providing a historical legacy to the ranching families of tomorrow. When discussing options with your tax advisor, attorney or financial planner, California Rangeland Trust remains a resource to assist you and your family in finding a way that you personally can contribute to the efforts of "conserving the open space, natural habitat and stewardship provided by California's ranches".

Pools in the Grass

Amid the Central Valley's vast sea of now exotic grasses lie some of the oddest ecological islands in California. Known as vernal pools, they are home to dozens of tiny plants and animal species that live nowhere else in the world. From microscopic fairy shrimp to dainty white popcorn flowers, each has adapted to a world that floods in winter and dries to a crisp by summer. Vernal pools owe their existence to a confluence of geology and climate. When winter and spring rains fall on hardpan and claypan soils, the resulting pools may linger for many weeks or months. The sudden arrival of moisture rouses the pools' dormant residents to life. During the heady few months while the ponds are wet, a frenzy of hatching, courting, and mating goes on. After all, there isn't much time. Clouds can disappear and pools evaporate with no whisper of warning.

So the first chance they get, spadefoot toads dig their way upward from several feet beneath the soil and set out to catch their meal of the year. After nightfall, tiger salamanders waddle out of borrowed ground squirrel burrows and look for mates beneath the stars. Just add water to the cysts of tadpole and fairy shrimp—really embryos in suspended animation—and they'll hatch into instant adults. Their wiggling legs and waving antennae offer a welcome



Photo: Jim Cunningham

snack for waterfowl migrating along the Pacific Flyway. As the waters recede, the animals vanish too, hunkering down into the soil for another year. Now the wildflowers emerge, surrounding each pool in rainbow rings. Yellow tidy-tips, their toothy petals edged in white, may grow in concentric circles along with violet-bearded downingia, lilac-tinted meadowfoam, and carpets of miniature goldfields. Each week of drying brings one or two new blooms as another species sets seed and fades.

Each pool—and there may be dozens in a single field—shelters a unique community of animals and plants. Across California, naturalists have identified more than 100 species that live only in and around vernal pools. "Their disappearance or decline would mean a significant loss of state biodiversity," says Jaymee Marty, an ecologist with The Nature Conservancy. By the early 1970s, California had already lost approximately 80% of its pools. Fast-growing Sacramento County alone has lost more than 30% of its pools over the last decade.

Biologists are studying how best to preserve the few pools that remain. Most occur in areas that have been rangeland for the past 100 years. To determine whether cattle grazing is good or bad for vernal pool health, Marty studied 72 pools on 12,362 acres of the Howard Ranch in eastern Sacramento County (a non-CALFED-funded study). She allowed grazing cows and calves to graze on some pools, but excluded the livestock from others. She also surveyed the species diversity at each pool annually during the three-year experiment.

"We suspected we wouldn't find a perfect fit, that for some species grazing would be positive and for others, negative," Marty says. "But in the end, we found the historic level of grazing actually had the highest diversity for both native plants and aquatic invertebrates." Without grazing, native plant cover dropped by 20% to 50% at both pool edges and upland areas, while exotic grasses increased their territory. Wildflowers and other forbs declined, while grasses began to dominate.

In addition, protected pools dried an average of two months faster than grazed pools. The extra time can spell the difference between life and death for species like the California tiger salamander. "They need 90 days

for larvae to turn into adults and walk out of the pools," says Marty. If the pools dry up too fast, salamanders "are going to be stranded and die." She suspects much of the water in the ungrazed pools was sucked out of the pool by the extra grass.

Non-native grasses pose another threat to this fragile habitat. Most invasive species can't withstand the dramatic moisture swings and alkaline soil found within the pools. Unfortunately, those defenses don't faze all non-natives. Pepperweed, for example, marches right in on spreading subterranean runners. Growing up to three feet tall, it starves petite natives of nutrients, moisture, and sunlight.

Biologist Niall McCarten of Environmental Science Associates managed a CALFED study to determine how to eliminate pepperweed from a 320-acre vernal pool site at the former McClellan Air Force Base. He faced a terrible dilemma. Pulling up the plants and their runners by hand would disturb the soil, and could upset the ecology of the pool. And while herbicide spraying would kill the weed, it might also contaminate pool water and kill native wildflowers, including endangered species. He opted for a more painstaking approach instead. After the pools dried, his scientists trimmed the tops from many pepperweed plants with hand shears. They handpainted some with the herbicide Roundup, and left the other clipped weeds alone.

A month later, the weeds that had been clipped and painted were dead, and some species of endangered grasses in those plots increased in size and number. Meanwhile, those that had only been clipped were regenerating. Control plots, where pepperweed had been left unmolested, had done even worse, losing an average of four individual endangered grass plants per experimental plot. The group plans to return this summer to see how the plots have fared a year later.

"It is labor intensive, but the results are worth it," McCarten says. After all, the pools are also the only known habitat for Solano grass, a federally endangered species. "When you've got such rare species, we'd rather not take big risks."

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Events Round Up

Nominations Open for Leopold Conservation Award

The Sand County Foundation is seeking nominations for The Leopold Conservation Award for properties in California that exhibit innovative leadership and innovation in conservation.

The Leopold Conservation Award Panel will be evaluating properties in three broad categories: Nurseries and Crops; Dairy, Beef and Poultry; and, Rangeland and Timber. The review panel will use criteria based on responsible and sustainable land management, economics, innovation, overall land health, and community outreach and leadership.

The award program is a partnership between the Foundation and the California Farm Bureau Federation and Sustainable Conservation. The Leopold Conservation Award winner receives a crystal rendering of Aldo Leopold and a check for \$10,000.

For more information and a nomination form, go to the Foundation's web site at www.sandcountry.net.

Fifth Annual "A Western Affair" California Rangeland Trust's Annual Benefit

This year's signature event will be held at John and Carole Harris's, Fifth Annual "A Western Affair", June 3, 2006. Join us for a special evening at this beautiful venue on the Kings River near Sanger.

Our supporters know what fun it is to enjoy an evening of superb food and great company while contributing to conserving our Western legacy and California's rangelands. Through work of the California Rangeland Trust, more than 176,000 acres of rangeland, open space and habitat have been protected, creating a stable business environment for the state's ranchers and a healthy future for Californians.

Be a part of this California tradition of conservation, stewardship, and charitable giving. There are still tickets left, so call Jennifer in the CRT office at (916) 444-2096 or go to www.rangelandtrust.org if you would like to join us for a memorable and fun evening.



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