

# California Rangeland Trust



CALIFORNIA RANGELAND TRUST

## Annual Report 2001-2002

2002 has been the most successful of the California Rangeland Trust's first four years. The Rangeland Trust now holds easements on more than 50,789 acres of rangeland in California, representing a significant swath of working landscape, open space, and natural habitat. The Rangeland Trust's Board and staff reached out to an increased number of ranching families through numerous conferences, workshops, and other presentations designed to inform families about solutions to the important issues facing them and their ranches. The Rangeland Trust's staffing and funding levels increased dramatically in response to the significant needs of the ranching community. The Rangeland Trust is building on the foundation it established in its first three years as it works to fulfill its mission to

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

The Rangeland Trust was very fortunate to receive a capacity-building grant through the David and Lucile Packard Foundation's Conserving California Landscapes Initiative (CCLI) in June 2001. This grant, the largest of its kind ever awarded by the foundation, will ensure that the Rangeland Trust's staffing levels meet its strategic program needs for the next two years.



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### *Mission:*

**To conserve the open space, natural habitat and stewardship provided by California's ranches.**

## Saving the Land: Successes

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At the end of 2001-2002 fiscal year, the California Rangeland Trust holds 50,789 acres of rangeland and seven conservation easements. Working with the Trust for Public Land (TPL) and the American Land Conservancy (ALC), the Rangeland Trust accepted conservation easements on more than 30,000 acres of working rangeland in

March 2001. Purchase of the 16,683-acre Varian V6 Ranch in Monterey and Fresno Counties was funded through grants from the Wildlife Conservation Board, Caltrans, and the David and Lucile Packard Foundation. The Rangeland Trust worked with ALC to complete the transaction on the 12,893-acre Bear Valley Ranch in Colusa County,

in which the Gabrielson Cattle Company purchased fee title to the ranch and the Rangeland Trust purchased the conservation easement. As easement holder, the Rangeland Trust will be protecting conservation values on the ranch that include a world-renowned wildflower display.

In December 2001, the Rangeland Trust closed an easement transaction on the 2,642-acre JK Ranch in Mendocino County. This easement balances cattle grazing and protection of extensive habitat areas with limited vineyard development. The ranch is a model for how to maximize agricultural sustainability by using the best agricultural areas for optimal viability while protecting the majority of the property, which contains important habitat. The JK Ranch project has attracted significant interest from the local community, which has suffered from the impact of a trend toward partitions of larger holdings into small, non-productive recreational properties.



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## Land Stewardship

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The Rangeland Trust has developed several policies and systems for monitoring its conservation easements. The Conservation Committee has completed a comprehensive stewardship monitoring policy. In addition, the Rangeland Trust's stewardship endowment currently holds \$76,000 and is pledged an additional \$40,000.

In October 2002, the Rangeland Trust began monitoring its first

four recorded easements according to its stewardship monitoring policy. As part of

this policy, the Rangeland Trust conducts an annual monitoring visit and will participate in an aerial review of the easements every five years to document and photograph the ranches.

*... as cattlemen we do care  
for the grazing lands of  
California ...*

*- Darrel Sweet*

## Funding the Work

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The Rangeland Trust developed an annual fundraising plan as part of its strategic plan revision. The plan emphasizes non-traditional funding programs including fees for service and project-based transaction cost recovery as well as more traditional tools such as direct mail and events.

Grant funding has also been provided by the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation, the Sorenson Foundation, the Bull Foundation and the Smart Family Foundation, totaling \$387,750 for the year. The Rangeland Trust has been fortunate to receive significant financial support from a variety of sources. Contributions from the Rangeland Trust's Board of Directors, from other private donors accounted for \$33,000 in revenue—more than twice last year's individual contributions.

### **The David and Lucile Packard Foundation**

- \$14,400 for a strategic planning process
- \$50,000 for capacity building and program

planning.

- \$405,475 for implementation of the strategic plan (over two years)

### **The National Fish and Wildlife Foundation**

- \$65,000 for the Rangeland Conservation Tools Project

### **The Greenville Foundation**

- \$15,000 for educational workshops for ranchers

### **Gabilan Foundation**

- \$25,000 for the Conservation Easement Transaction Program

### **Great Valley Center**

- \$10,000 for the Rangeland Trust's efforts to protect vernal pool habitat on private ranchland
- \$25,000 joint grant with 3 other land trusts for a Board development project

### **The Sorenson Foundation**

## The Organization

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Appointed Executive Director of the California Rangeland Trust in September 2001, Nita Vail is a fourth-generation rancher, former Assistant Secretary for Environmental and Agricultural Policy at the California Department of Food & Agriculture and founding Board member of the Rangeland Trust. As managing director of CRT, Cristi Bozora Creegan directs the internal operations of the organization.

Andy Mills, the Rangeland Trust's stewardship director, continues his outreach and stewardship efforts. Adriana Sulak is working on marketing and out-

reach with CRT through the Sustainable Communities Leadership Program of the Environmental Careers Organization. As Transaction Consultant for CRT, Darrell Sweet oversees all aspects of negotiation and agricultural easement transactions. The Rangeland Trust has been fortunate to recently hire Emily Franciskovich as a staff assistant.

The committee structure was revised during the strategic planning process to more effectively meet the needs of the strategic plan. The Rangeland Trust's

standing committees are the Board Development Committee, Conservation Committee and its Easement Review Subcommittee, Finance Committee, Fundraising and Membership Committee, and Outreach Committee. The Rangeland Trust currently has three task forces to consider Legislation, Water Quality, and the organization's legal representation. Use of the committee structure has streamlined meetings of the full Board and has increased the level of satisfaction of Board members by making them feel more involved in the organization.

## Communicating the Mission

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The Rangeland Trust sponsored or co-sponsored five workshops throughout the state in 2001:

- Sierra Foothills: Mariposa, April 26 (with Sierra Business Council and Sonoran Institute)
- Sierra Foothills: Lincoln, April 27 (with Sierra Business Council and Sonoran Institute)
- Sierra Nevada/Northeastern California: Vinton, May 18 (with Sierra Business Council and Sonoran Institute)
- Central Valley: Fresno, May 19 (Rangeland Trust only)

Central Coast: San Luis Obispo, June 19 (with The Nature Conservancy and Cal Poly, San Luis Obispo)

Approximately 20-30 people participated in each workshop except for the San Luis Obispo workshop, which drew a crowd of 120. While the agendas varied

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from workshop to workshop, based in part on pre-workshop assessments of the community and its needs, standard presentations for all the workshops were:

- General introductory information on agricultural conservation easements;
- Financial and tax planning issues;
- Ranch income diversification, including presentations on guest ranching, direct beef marketing, and micro-enterprise development;

Conservation legal issues.

Each workshop had its own personality, based on location, sponsorship, and participants. The three workshops cosponsored by the Rangeland Trust with the Sierra Business Council and the Sonoran Institute (SI) emphasized ranch income diversification as discussed by SI's Ben Alexander; materials handed out included his publication "The New Frontiers of Ranching: Business Diversification & Land Stewardship." The San Luis Obispo workshop was the most well-attended of the five, drawing a crowd of 120 professionals and landowners to a general discussion of conservation easements, their tax consequences, and policy considerations.

The Fresno workshop included a powerful presentation by Jack Varian, owner of V6 Ranch in

nearby Parkfield who had recently completed an easement transaction with the Trust for Public Land in which the Rangeland Trust became the easement holder. Mr. Varian, a strong proponent of land conservation, had been hesitant about working with a conservation organization until the Rangeland Trust was created. "We were very interested in working with the Rangeland Trust," Mr. Varian told a crowd of about 20 landowners. "This organization understands the needs of the ranching community because its creation has grown from grassroots in the agricultural world."

The Rangeland Trust was very pleased with the outcome of this workshop series. Our strategy of using a landowner-to-landowner format, coupled with presentations by experts such as tax advisors and economic development specialists, was effective in educating the landowners about options available to them in terms of income diversification and business planning. As a result of these workshops, the Rangeland Trust has been asked to sponsor an additional workshop in Southern California in the fall, to fit in with the seasonal ranching schedule. Numerous landowners and one local watershed group have requested additional information and follow-up meetings about conservation easements with an eye to placing one on their land as well as other conservation tools.