



Our Mission: To serve the land, people, and wildlife by conserving California's working rangelands.

25 YEARS OF FIGHTING FOR THE FUTURE BY KEEPING RANCHERS RANCHING

25 years ago, the California Rangeland Trust was born out of need— a need to keep ranchers on the land and a need to keep working lands productive in California.

The year was 1997— land prices were rising, taxes were becoming more burdensome, and the threat of development loomed over California's rangelands. Feeling the pressures, some ranchers got out of the business altogether, while others moved across state lines to continue their operations. It seemed like the sustainability of California's ranching industry was in jeopardy.

Matt Echeverria, California Cattlemen's Association (CCA) President at the time, along with his fellow board members, felt the struggles the ranching industry was facing and feared that losing California's cattle producers would in turn put the state at a loss in terms of food production and environmental stewardship.

"There was a mass exodus that we were seeing in the ranching industry," Echeverria stated. "It was a topic of the West, and we wanted our ranchers to be able to have a viable way to keep their home country and fend off development."

With urban sprawl threatening the future, new land trusts were being formed across the United States, but particularly in California. Using a tool called a "conservation easement," they sought to partner with private landowners to conserve open space for the benefit of humans and wildlife alike.

Ranchers were being approached by these groups to conserve their properties. While most were well-meaning, few had practical knowledge of how agricultural businesses operated. Without a clear understanding of how easements worked or who these conservation groups were, producers became apprehensive and worried that their private property rights could be affected in the future. At the same time, development was still lurking around the corner, and easements offered alternative sources of income that could help ranches remain viable.



A group of early California Rangeland Trust Board and Staff members.

Idea for a Rancher-led Land Trust is Born

The ranching community needed a group they trusted to provide objective information, offer creative conservation solutions, and hold conservation easements. So, a group of CCA leaders decided to take fate into their own hands and form a rancher-led land trust. It would be an organization by ranchers, for ranchers, saving rangeland for all Californians.

After networking and learning from groups like the the Colorado Cattlemen's Association who had created the Colorado Cattlemen's Agricultural Land Trust (CCALT) a few years earlier, CCA determined there was enough traction to bring this proposal forward for a vote by its membership.

At the annual CCA Convention in December of 1997, the resolution was made by Jerry Hempstead, First Vice President of CCA, to create a committee of individuals to research and form a 501(c)3, later to be known as the California Rangeland Trust.

"It was a real close vote to pass the resolution. Ranchers feared that it would take away their property rights," Hempstead recounted. "But once we explained that this was going to keep land in private enterprise, there was more of an acceptance." Ultimately, the resolution passed, and that is when the real work began.

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LEADERSHIP LETTER

Dear Friends,

As you read on the previous page, there was a lot going on for the ranching community at the end of the 20th century. Ranchers faced a host of economic and regulatory pressures. And unfortunately, that same story continues for today's ranching community. The issues may be slightly different, but the people who steward our life-giving landscapes are still in a seemingly constant struggle.

Our ranching partners are dedicated and resilient, but they still need help. That's why a group of innovative ranchers formed the California Rangeland Trust 25 years ago, and that's why we continue to fight to keep the state's working landscapes open and viable. As one of our ranching partners reminded me, "sometimes fighting is just putting your boots on and being there for work the next day."

For 25 years, we've partnered with ranchers to provide solutions through conservation. We've offered ranchers a voice. We've influenced changes in public opinion around ranching. We've shown leaders why saving rangeland matters for all of us. And we've helped ranchers keep ranching. Why? Because we know that without responsible people to manage and steward these working lands, we would lose these valuable places and the natural resources they provide.

This is what you help make possible. While there is certainly more work to be done, we believe it's important during this momentous year to take time to pause and celebrate what we've been able to accomplish, together.

We are grateful to you and this wonderful community of conservation enthusiasts for helping 84 ranching families forever protect 371,000 acres of pristine rangeland. You've helped ensure there will always be land available to support local food production, fresh flowing water, clean air, climate resiliency, rich biodiversity, protection against wildfires, and magnificent viewsheds. That's a lot to celebrate *because* of conservation!

With 25 years of experience that shows this solution is working, we now have another noteworthy benchmark standing before us: 100 ranches conserved in perpetuity.

Just how close are we to 100? At the time of printing, 84 ranches have been conserved through the Rangeland Trust. To track our progress, look for this badge on our website and in future newsletters!



As we look back on our history, it's also important that we keep looking forward. After all, a brighter future is why each of us put on our boots and show up for conservation day after day. Help us continue this fight for a better future by first reaching the goal of conserving 100 ranches during this iconic anniversary year.

Sincerely,



Michael Delbar
CEO

THE BENEFITS OF GIVING IN YOUR WILL

Have you resolved that this is the year to make or update your will? A recent study done by Caring.com estimated that more than two-thirds of Americans (68%) do not have a will, so you're likely not alone! With new estate tax exemptions and other opportunities going into effect this year, it's a good time to review your legacy goals.

You know a will is vital when it comes to distributing your assets to the people and causes you care about, but did you know that creating one has personal benefits? This is particularly apparent when you use it to give a gift to a cause you love, such as conserving California's life-giving rangelands.

Here's how including a gift in your will benefits you:

1. **It can lessen anxiety.** Thinking and planning ahead can make it less daunting to talk about what happens when you're gone. How? It gives you reassurance that the people and causes close to your heart are taken care of.
2. **It can lend perspective.** Taking stock of what's important can help you focus on your goals and be more aware of how you want to impact the world.
3. **It sets an example.** Your gift can be an inspiration. Your story can have a ripple effect on your loved ones or others who you share it with.
4. **It just feels good.** Giving makes you feel good. Really, it does. Research shows that the act of giving reduces stress-related activity in one area of the brain while increasing reward-related activity in another.

Join Others Like You

Providing for the future of rangelands in your will or other designation means you share a common goal with others who have joined our **Visionaries' Circle**. Use the enclosed envelope or contact us to let us know about your gift. It would be our honor to welcome you into this group of exceptional supporters.

Leave a Gift in One Sentence

Supporting rangeland conservation in your will is as simple as providing the following to your attorney or online tool:

I give to California Rangeland Trust, a nonprofit corporation, Federal tax ID 31-1631453, _____ [written amount or percentage of the estate or description of property] for its _____ ["unrestricted charitable use" or a specified purpose].



LEGACY COUNCIL

The California Rangeland Trust Legacy Council is hard at work raising awareness in support of rangeland conservation.

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25 YEARS CONT.

Getting Off the Ground

Due to his legal knowledge and ranching background, Steve Sinton was asked to lead the charge. Although he was a lawyer, creating a novel land trust was new territory.

"For me, it didn't start out to be such an immense undertaking. 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 efforts to conserve rangeland in California," said Sinton. "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."

By mid-1998, CCA had appointed the first Board of Directors to govern the new organization. It included: Jack Hanson, Joe Russ, Cindy Noble, Darrel Sweet, Nita Vail, Greg Harlan, Carson Scheller, and Glenn Drown, with Sinton serving as chairman. Each of these individuals had direct ties to ranching and represented different zones covering the state, making this board truly unique.

"We had this rancher-led board that made us successful amongst our peers," Hanson explained. "I think the skepticism that came from ranchers towards the other organizations is that they didn't understand or appreciate what it takes for a ranching business to endure."

Within the first year, the group outlined goals and laid a solid foundation. They sought to provide real tools, common vision, and collaborative opportunities for ranchers.

"This board was a trailblazing board," reflected Vail. "This group of individuals was willing to problem solve and take risks to do this right because it is what they had to do in their everyday operations."

Building Credibility

By the end of that first year, the demand for easements was greater than anyone could have anticipated, prompting the Rangeland Trust to bring on its first staff members. Dan Macon was hired as the first executive director, Chris Leininger as the administrative coordinator, and Andy Mills as the field staff member. Each of these individuals worked hard, along with the board, to get the word out and establish a sense of validity for the organization.

Credibility was one of the greatest challenges the organization faced. It presented itself as a classic chicken and egg situation: to build credibility, funding was needed, but funding required established credibility.

The first big break came when current U.S. Representative, John Garamendi, and his wife, Patricia, donated a conservation easement on their Calaveras County ranch. "Starting with our first easement, which was the Touch the Earth Ranch with the Garamendis, was sort of an icebreaker, and once that went through, the floodgates started to open," Mills recounted.

Suddenly, there was a gaining interest in conservation easements from ranchers all over the state, which meant the organization needed additional bandwidth. In 2001, the David and Lucile Packard Foundation awarded a two-year capacity-building grant to assist in meeting this demand. With Macon ready to step down, the grant afforded the Trust the ability to bring on a new leader, which it found in Nita Vail.

Having experienced personal heartache after losing her family's intergenerational ranch, she set out on a mission to help others avoid similar fates. In doing so, she helped take the Rangeland Trust to unforeseen heights.

Gaining Momentum

Historically, there has long been a division between agricultural and environmental interests. Vail recalled when she and a group of fellow Rangeland Trust members attended a Land Trust Alliance Rally (a national convention that brings together land trusts of all kinds) in the early 2000s. While standing in a coffee shop line dressed in denim jeans, leather boots, and cowboy hats, the group overheard a person behind them scoff: "What are cowboys doing at a conservation convention? What an oxymoron!"

The Rangeland Trust spent many years countering stereotypes and working to establish itself as a bridge organization between ranchers and environmentalists. It developed relationships with government agency partners, worked to generate a broad base of philanthropic support, educated people from all walks of life on the public benefits of rangelands, and most importantly, it let the conservation impact of the ranching community speak for itself.

To strengthen the effectiveness of its advocacy efforts, the Rangeland Trust joined forces in 2004 with four other state-wide agricultural land trusts to form an alliance. Known today as the Partnership of Rangeland Trusts (PORT), the coalition now has 9 members which have collectively conserved nearly three million acres across the U.S.



The Trust also went on to gain national recognition in 2005 when it completed its largest and most challenging project of all time. In partnership with the Hearst Corporation and American Land Conservancy, it conserved 80,000 acres of the Hearst Ranch in San Simeon, California. Forever protecting 128 square miles of rangeland, including 18 miles of coastline along California's scenic Highway One, this landmark conservation agreement went on to serve as a model for rangeland conservation around the country.

In 2010, the organization hit another milestone, gaining accreditation through the Land Trust Accreditation Commission. Resulting largely from the hard work of Ben Higgins, who then served as COO, accreditation signified the Rangeland Trust's status as a top-notch entity upholding the highest ethical standards and practices. The Rangeland Trust was earning respect from environmental and ranching groups alike.

In the decade that followed, the Rangeland Trust worked to garner support from and provide education to a broader audience. In 2015, it launched a program to bring inner-city youth and their families onto the land to learn about agriculture. It also embarked on a journey in 2018, spearheaded by volunteers of the Rangeland Trust Legacy Council, to raise private funds to conserve the Rock Front Ranch in San Luis Obispo and Santa Barbara counties. Completion of the effort signified the first time in which 100 percent funding for conservation was raised through private, community support.

By the end of its first 20 years, the Rangeland Trust had accomplished more than anyone had initially dreamed possible. It had worked with differing groups to establish common ground, and in doing so, it became the largest statewide land trust in California, having conserved over 320,000 acres of pristine rangeland for the benefit of all Californians.

Capitalizing on Success

In April of 2020, longtime COO Michael Delbar took the reins as CEO, filling the boots of Nita Vail. Today, the Trust continues to capitalize on past successes to inspire forward momentum and move the needle in agricultural land conservation.

Helping ranchers achieve their dreams of conservation for the benefit of all remains the Rangeland Trust's top priority. In recent years, the organization has developed relationships with mitigators seeking to offset habitat impacts and has refined its strategic grant writing processes to garner needed conservation funding through government agency programs. Additionally, it has sought private support from local communities to fund specific projects. Since completion of the Rock Front Ranch easement, the organization has raised private dollars to support other projects, including Bloom Ranch in Tuolumne County, Spanish Ranch in Santa Barbara and San Luis Obispo Counties (pg. 6), and Bufford Ranch in Kern County (pg. 10).

Furthermore, by elevating rangeland concerns amongst policymakers, the Rangeland Trust has been able to promote legislative discourse about the need for resources to protect private land. In 2020, the organization rolled out its Ecosystem Services Study, which shows that land conserved by the Trust provides nearly \$1.5 billion in ecosystem services annually to the people of California. Backed with credible, science-driven data, recent outreach efforts have helped influence the allocation of needed state dollars to support working lands conservation, which has been a huge win for the land, people, and wildlife of California.

"Just as the founders intended, we remain committed to a collaborative, science-based approach to ranch conservation," said Delbar. "We are grateful for this wonderful community of volunteers, landowners, and donors who are helping to increase general understanding and attract new and important allies to the cause of protecting the state's dwindling rangelands as they continue to face a host of economic, environmental, and regulatory hurdles."

Ensuring a Brighter Future

The ranching way of life is something worth fighting for. That is why 25 years ago, the Rangeland Trust founders banded together to help give ranchers a fighting chance against the outside factors that were stacking up against them. Their unwavering passion for the land and its bounty led to the creation of a diverse community bound by a shared tenacity to keep the Golden State's working lands productive forever.

To date, the Rangeland Trust community has helped 84 ranching families forever conserve over 371,000 acres of rangeland. This was made possible by the efforts of many, including the ranchers who had the foresight to form the organization, the founding board who got the organization off the ground, the staff and volunteers who demonstrated deep dedication to further the mission, the landowners who made the admirable decision to conserve, and the donors and funders who made it all possible.

While there is certainly more work to be done, Californians can breathe a sigh of relief knowing that there will always be places available for local food to be grown, air to be cleansed, freshwater to flow, wildlife to roam, and spectacular viewsheds to be admired. The future is a little brighter *because* of what has been conserved so far. 25 years in and the California Rangeland Trust is just getting started. ☺



State political leaders touring the Spring Valley Ranch in 2022 to learn about the importance of rangeland conservation.

By: Madison Goss, Communications Specialist

SPANISH RANCH CONSERVATION UPDATE

Last year, Rangeland Trust supporters made a strong declaration for the importance of securing working lands for future good.

Your gifts to conserve the historic Spanish Ranch in the scenic Cuyama Valley surpassed \$1 million in December 2022, more than we've ever raised before, thereby helping to match the commitment from the Natural Resources Conservation Service. ***You met the initial funding challenge and have continued to persevere to conserve this special place.***

This is something to really celebrate! We are grateful to everyone who has been part of this effort, who has come out to learn more about the ranch, and who has reached out to partner with us to help raise such significant funding. You are showing us, the community, and even our legislators, that these projects matter. Thank you!

So where are we now? We are leveraging your tremendous support to achieve our shared goal, but we aren't there yet. The sooner we close this gap, the sooner we can celebrate conservation on the Spanish Ranch.

You can still be part of this story. You can use the enclosed envelope to further support the Spanish Ranch today, or make a general gift to help the Rangeland Trust conserve this and other working lands awaiting their moment of victory. Whatever you can give, your gift will matter in the fight to ensure that our rangelands and their stewards can thrive in the future, in service to all of us.

***This will be the 4th Ranch conserved by your support;
this is the direct impact of your giving.***

Maybe you help because you believe it's the right thing to do, or because you want to give back to the lands that provide for us in so many ways. Or maybe there's something more intrinsic and personal that drives you to be part of this work. **Whatever the reason for your support, every bit matters.**

Thank you for being part of this journey for the Spanish Ranch. We see the light at the end of the tunnel, and can't wait to celebrate with you soon.



REUNIR WITH THE RANGELAND TRUST

What an honor it was to bring together such a dynamic group of friends on February 16th during our annual Reunir event in Santa Barbara County. This year's gathering welcomed over 200 people to the Santa Barbara Club – which is more than double the attendance of when the event first began just four years ago!

The event featured a special panel presentation with Elizabeth Poett Campbell (star of *Ranch to Table* on the Magnolia Network) of Rancho San Julian and Richard and Sharon Kline of Rancho San Lorenzo about how local ranching families are succeeding in their fight to keep ranching operations viable and rangelands thriving in the 21st century. Additionally, local cowboy poetry legend, Dick Gibford, recited a handful of poems celebrating our shared Western heritage and reminding everyone what we are working to preserve for the future through rangeland conservation.

At the California Rangeland Trust, we believe gatherings like this one are important because it gives us all the chance to reinforce our connections with the land and with one another. We hope you will join us next year for Reunir 2024 in Santa Maria, CA – details on date and venue coming soon!



Visit our blog to view
more photos from the
event:
rangelandtrust.org/blog



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DARREL AND KAREN SWEET*+
 IN MEMORY OF DR. BERT AND GRETCHEN JOHNSON

ANOTHER PIECE OF THE BUFFORD RANCH FOREVER CONSERVED!

We are pleased to announce the first conservation easement closing of 2023! Roughly 65 acres of rangeland on the Bufford Ranch, located east of Bakersfield on the north side of the Walker Basin in Kern County, will be forever protected thanks to the generous support of private donors during *A Western Affair 2021* and public funding received through the Wildlife Conservation Board (WCB).

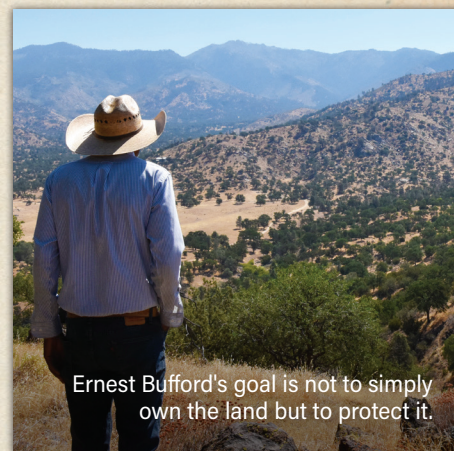
After visiting the Walker Basin, Louis L'Amour was so inspired by the magnificent, sweeping valley bound by rugged mountains that he featured it in several of his novels. But unfortunately, today the Walker Basin is at risk due to development of "ranchettes" that are segmenting the region into properties as small as 2.5 acres.

Former Los Angeles CHP officer and first-generation rancher, Ernest Bufford, is a man on a mission. After acquiring several parcels in the early 2000s, he partnered with the Rangeland Trust in 2013 to conserve the whole 575-acre ranch. With the easement money, he purchased an adjacent stretch of land in 2016, which he then conserved. The income from the second easement was then put toward the purchase of a third piece—the 65-acre, recently conserved parcel. In total, Ernest has conserved 910 acres in the area. His goal is not to simply own land but to protect it.

Home to six different ecosystems, the Bufford Ranch's ecology and topography are truly unique. The ranch consists of open savannah terrain dotted with blue oaks, canyon live oaks, California juniper, buckbrush, and gooseberry. The newly conserved portion also boasts grasslands, riparian drainage channels, and small mountain wetlands. The entire landscape serves as a critical wildlife corridor for many species, including California condors, deer, bears, mountain lions, ducks, various raptors, and more.

Inspired by his mission to stop the rapid subdivision and protect the land, habitat, water resources, and wildlife connectivity provided by the region, donors at *A Western Affair 2021* rallied behind Ernest and raised over \$101,000 during the fund-a-need portion of the live auction to forever safeguard the 65-acre parcel. This was the first time ever that funds were raised by the Rangeland Trust in a single night to achieve conservation!

"The Rangeland Trust community is truly a savior for California. It was the first time that I met any of those people, and they all rallied behind me to protect the ranch," said Ernest. "I am not sure that they will ever know how much it



Ernest Bufford's goal is not to simply own the land but to protect it.

means to me, that with their help, I was able to conserve more of the beautiful rangeland."

While the private donations were enough for the easement acquisition, additional funds were still needed to cover the cost of the transaction. Fortunately, the private money raised offered significant leverage to successfully secure funding through the WCB and close the gap. What a great example of how public-private partnerships can protect biodiversity, wildlife habitat, and natural resources!

Thanks to the donors and public agency that supported the project, Ernest will be able to stay his course and purchase more land to protect from future development. It just goes to show what can be accomplished for California's working lands when we all work together.

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California Rangeland Trust is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit
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A WESTERN AFFAIR 2023

We have a lot to celebrate. For 25 years, the Rangeland Trust community has come together to conserve California's working lands and keep ranchers ranching. Now we can look around us and see all the good that is resulting. Because of what has been conserved, today we can enjoy the fruits of our labor.

As we gather 'round the table at **Yolo Land & Cattle**, we will celebrate the achievements of the past 25 years, enjoy good company and pasture-to-plate flavors, and look ahead to all that is possible.

Event Co-Hosts: Morris Noble, Jr. and Bruce and Robyn Rominger



Schedule of Events

FRIDAY, MAY 19, 2023

Exclusive Pre-Party

California Agriculture Museum
Woodland, CA
5:00 PM – 8:00 PM

Enjoy an intimate Taste-of-Yolo experience alongside the Museum's impressive collection of farm and ranch artifacts for everyone to enjoy! During this VIP event, guests will hear from our hosts and special guests while enjoying bites by acclaimed regional chefs, superb local wine, and live music.

SATURDAY, MAY 20, 2023

A Western Affair

Yolo Land and Cattle Co.
Esparto, CA
5:00 PM - 10:00 PM

We'll bring the spirit of the West to life as we enjoy the abundance of the land that is possible today because of conservation. The evening will kick off with hosted cocktails and a silent auction, followed by a Pasture-to-Plate dining experience, fabulous live auction, and dancing to live country music.

Individual Tickets

A Western Affair (Saturday only): \$300 per person*

Exclusive Friday Pre-Party + A Western Affair: \$550 per person

**We are pleased to offer discounted tickets at \$195 each to our landowner partners and the next generation of conservationists (under 35 years old).*

Table packages are currently sold out.



to purchase tickets or visit
rangelandtrust.org/a-western-affair/

Thank You to our Sponsors



You only live once! As you plan your trip, be sure to check out other fun things to do in Yolo County.
Visit: visityolo.com/california-rangeland-trust/



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HAVE YOU HERD? WE MOO-VED!

In the last newsletter, we told you that we had sold our office building in downtown Sacramento. Just like our conservation portfolio, the Rangeland Trust staff has also grown to meet the ever-increasing needs of our ranching partners.

Now, we are pleased to announce that we've found a new place to hang our cowboy and cowgirl hats! We have officially relocated to the North Natomas area of Sacramento.

Mail is being forwarded to our new office so if something was sent to 1225 H Street, rest assured that it will still reach us.

If you are in the area, please feel free to drop by and visit us! We always welcome the opportunity to connect with you face to face.

Our new address is:
3900 Lennane Drive, Suite 210
Sacramento, CA 95834

