A Report on Voluntary Actions California Farmers and Ranchers are Taking to Enhance Wildlife

Commitment to Conservation

California Farm Bureau Federation Second Edition
COMMITMENT TO CONSERVATION

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Below are farmers and ranchers who have committed their resources to the enhancement of wildlife as indicated on the map.

*Individuals’ names are from Commitment to Conservation Project*

*California Farm Bureau Federation, 2002.*

**Animals:** Antelope, elk, deer, wild turkeys, cotton tails and jackrabbits, bears, big horn sheep, muskrats, raccoons, mule and killdeer

**Birds:** Ducks, geese, herons, owls, cranes, egrets, hawks, eagles, falcons, shorebirds, pheasants, ibis, bitterns, song birds, dove, quail and vultures

**Fish / Amphibians:** Steelhead and other trout, salmon, turtles, frogs and river otters
Nearly all listed species in California spend at least part of their life cycle on private lands.

An estimated 75% of private land in California supports habitat.

80% or more of wildlife in the continental US is dependent on private land for food, water, and shelter.

60% of waterfowl in the Pacific Flyway use California rice fields for habitat in the winter months.

Each year private timber owners plant 20-30 million new trees... that's 7 new trees for each one that is harvested.

23,000 pounds of carbon dioxide is scrubbed from the atmosphere each year by 1 acre of California rice, which is approximately the amount that an average car produces in a year.

325,000 pounds of ozone (smog) is removed from the atmosphere each day by California’s 1 million acres of cotton.

The 500 million trees and vines in California produce enough oxygen to sustain the entire population of LA.

Out of 1,197 species listed in the US as threatened or endangered:

- 12 have been delisted as a result of their recovery
- 7 have been declared extinct
- 9 have been delisted after it was determined that the original data was incorrect
- There are 275 listed species in California, 36 million acres have been designated as critical habitat with nearly 24 million on private lands
- Most California counties have 15 or more listed species.
While many wildlife restoration projects take place on state and federal lands, the majority of our country’s wildlife populations spend some or all of their time on private property. This fact puts our nation’s farmers and ranchers in a unique position. Many have chosen to take action in order to see native habitat and wildlife populations flourish on their operations. The California Farm Bureau Federation has noticed this trend in our own state, and we have compiled examples of the efforts taken by many of California’s farmers and ranchers as they work toward promoting healthy wildlife populations on their property.

The following is a series of farmer and rancher profiles that highlight the activities of individual agriculturists like Bill Eiler in Siskiyou County, Mike Hall in Yolo County, Larry Hyder in El Dorado County, Randy Riviere in Merced County, and Ed Holt in Santa Barbara County. These individuals, like countless others throughout the state, have made a commitment to manage their property for agricultural production and wildlife preservation.

Although the profiles in this booklet represent diverse projects for various wildlife species and habitats throughout the state, they are merely the tip of the iceberg. We found that most farmers consider their efforts to help wildlife beneficial to their agricultural operation, discovering that the health of their land is often reflected in the health of their wildlife populations. Says Scott Kemp, an Owens Valley rancher, “If you’re going to stay in the business you’ve got to manage for everything.”

More often than not, farmers and ranchers manage their wildlife as an extension of their agricultural activities, understanding their responsibility to care for the land for both social and personal reasons, including the desire to pass the land on to their children in a better condition. As Stan Hunewill of Mono County puts it, “Few people know the land as well as the people who’ve lived on it for several generations – who’ve seen what works and what doesn’t.” Dave Fisher of San Bernardino County says that they care for their wildlife because “it’s all a part of our operation.”

As Tom Ellis of Colusa County puts it, “I think we really could make a difference.”

California farmers and ranchers participate in activities ranging from wood duck nesting box projects to riparian zone restoration. Northern and Central Valley Californians are often involved in artificial wetlands creation and “egg rescues,” while agriculturists in the Cascades and the Sierras strive to improve fish habitat by restoring waterways and riverbanks. Ranchers in the southern part of the state, used to dealing with water issues, endeavor to develop year-round water sources for both their cattle herds and wildlife populations. Farmers and ranchers on the Central Coast work with endangered species to protect riparian habitats. Foresters throughout the state are particularly interested in maintaining the health of their forest and woodland habitat through responsible resource management.

Some of the operations profiled in this report receive outside financial assistance, allowing them to take additional conservation steps. The majority, however, operate within their own financial means.
and economic viability. Frequently, this influences whether land can be left fallow or what resources can be allocated.

Many of our state’s farmers and ranchers work cooperatively with government agencies while many opt to rely strictly on their own resources. There is, however, genuine concern among the vast majority of the agriculturists we spoke to about excessive regulation and government mandates, especially under the Endangered Species Act. In most cases farmers and ranchers are cautious about giving information concerning endangered species on their property, fearing that if too much information gets out, they risk the possibility of having their right to farm or otherwise manage their land taken away.

We found that in all too many cases, well-meaning government regulations were having the opposite of their intended effects. We heard time after time the fact that it often comes down to providing wildlife habitat at your own risk. One individual said if farmers are threatened with having their right to manage their land taken away by government regulation or mandate, they are unlikely to encourage endangered species or habitat on their property. Unfortunately, it’s frequently the farmers and ranchers who fall under the greatest risk of having the right to manage their property taken away, when they are the ones making the effort to help wildlife on their land through those very management practices.

We’d like to recognize those farmers and ranchers who voluntarily strive to preserve wildlife on their property, even if it means risking regulation. We also would like to point out that there are several government agencies and programs that are truly helping farmers in their efforts, but for many people we spoke with, that’s not happening often enough. The majority of farmers and ranchers grow up surrounded by wildlife and the outdoors, and naturally develop a love and respect for their surroundings.

Larry Hyder probably describes it best, “We love the land and the streams and everything that lives here...the world does not understand how people fall in love with the land.” This sentiment was repeated over and over again by the individuals we spoke with for this project. These farmers and ranchers are committed to conserving the wildlife found on their properties. “I'm a farmer,” Ed Holt says, “but I'm also a manager of a wildlife habitat, and I'm trying to do a good job of it.”
Dear Reader,

Thank you for your interest in the actions farmers and ranchers are taking to preserve wildlife on private lands. In my experience, farmers and ranchers have always had a love and appreciation for the land they work and the wildlife that inhabits their property. It’s gratifying to see the advances in knowledge and technology that allow them to better achieve their goal of ultimate stewardship of the land.

While working on this project, I have had the opportunity to talk to over 50 different farmers and ranchers throughout the state. Their concerns, experiences, and opinions differ as widely as do their commodities and locations. This invaluable experience has shown me a larger picture of the opportunities and difficulties farmers and ranchers face when practicing conservation.

Three main points surface when considering this larger picture. First, farmers and ranchers want to encourage wildlife and habitat on their private property. They believe in the preservation of all species, endangered or not, and they delight in the natural systems they understand so well on their land. They also want to improve the land and harvest their crops. Farmers and ranchers believe all these things tie into a larger goal of stewardship, where the land, the farmer, and wildlife all benefit by positive management practices.

Second, financial incentives and cost-share programs with government agencies encourage farmers and ranchers to implement more conservation practices. Many farmers and ranchers choose to implement these practices without the help of government agencies. However, those that do partner with agencies express willingness and desire to do more, if they can find the additional financial support they need to implement those programs. Farmers and ranchers overwhelmingly agree that flexibility and cooperation in working towards a shared goal is what they’re looking for in a relationship with a government agency.

Finally, though they support the goal of preserving endangered species, sometimes the way the Endangered Species Act is implemented actually makes it more difficult for farmers and ranchers to protect endangered species on their property. Some slight modifications and more uniform application would make the Endangered Species Act more useful. With these changes, the Endangered Species Act could be a tool to encourage the partnership between private land owners and the government in the shared goal of preserving species for future generations.

It has been a rewarding experience for me to work with so many positive, enthusiastic farmers and ranchers throughout the state. I appreciate their cooperation in allowing me to compile their experiences in a booklet we can share to show what farmers and ranchers are doing to conserve wildlife. The personnel and staff at the California Farm Bureau Federation have been incredibly supportive and helpful to me as I developed the second edition of this booklet. I’m proud to present this as a cooperative effort to showcase the ‘commitment to conservation’ found on private lands in California.

Sincerely,

National Affairs and Research, California Farm Bureau Federation

Janie Phippen is a recent graduate of Cal Poly, San Luis Obispo with a degree in Agribusiness Management. After her summer internship at the California Farm Bureau Federation, she will earn a law degree from University of the Pacific’s McGeorge School of Law in Sacramento. She plans to serve the agriculture industry in the area of policy, concentrating on land use and water law. Janie is from Ripon, on the northern end of the San Joaquin Valley, where her family has grown and processed almonds for three generations.

This second edition represents an enlargement of a series of profiles first developed by Melissa Heringer of Chico.
COMMITMENT TO CONSERVATION

NORTH MOUNTAIN REGION
Herb Jasper’s hay and cattle ranch is located just south of the Oregon border in Modoc County. It includes sections of Lassen and Willow Creeks, which feed into the nearby Goose Lake. Jasper says that he tries to make management decisions that will benefit and improve all aspects of his ranch, including wildlife. He refers to this philosophy as “total resource management.” The ranch is home to populations of mule deer, antelope, elk, geese, ducks, pheasants, quail, and at least eight species of fish. Predator populations, including mountain lions and coyotes, are also large.

Jasper is involved in several efforts to help wildlife on his ranch and in his community. He is currently serving on a committee that is designed to deal with management decisions concerning the thriving population of elk in the area. He also is involved in efforts to protect the red band trout.

Jasper has many new projects he’s working on to conserve wildlife and resources on his property, but most have to do with stream conservation. He’s upgrading rock wing projects from the past that have been damaged or partially failed during floods. In decades past the Army Corps of Engineers channeled out and straightened Willow Creek, which runs through his property. That caused big erosion problems, “so we’re trying to stabilize the banks by adding native vegetation and rocks.” He is installing new fence along a mile of the creek to provide “better management of the cattle,” protecting the riparian areas of his land. These areas also contain nesting sites for geese, and Jasper says that he’s tried to make the fencing itself “friendly to deer and antelope” by putting smooth wires along the tops to keep them from getting hung up if they try to jump them.

Surprisingly, antelope are more likely to crawl beneath the fences than to jump them like deer, so Jasper has actually raised the level of the lower wires for easier access. In fencing off the stream, he loses the ability to water his cattle during some parts of the year, so he’s also working with the Resource Conservation District to develop off-stream water troughs for his herds. “We’re trying not to have as much activity on the stream banks,” and more riparian fencing is in the works.

He also uses fish screens on his ditches to keep the fish in the creek, and is planning additional screens in various parts of the ranch. In addition, he is installing a more efficient irrigation system for his ranch which includes a gated pipe rather than open ditches to transport water. Jasper adds, “We also lay out pastures in accordance to vegetation and ecosystems represented, so we can better manage them.” He believes in total resource management, and the deer, fish, antelope, and elk are just as important to him as his cattle.

Along with these efforts he has put in “fish-friendly” diversions and is planning to install one in the near future that will present “no obstacle at all” to the fish, as it diverts water from a deeper level in the creek and leaves the surface undisturbed.

Jasper is proud of the health and variety of wildlife on his property.

Wildlife beneficiaries:
- Mule deer
- Antelope
- Elk
- Geese
- Ducks
- Pheasants
- Quail
- At least 8 species of fish

Conservation practices:
- Stream conservation
- Bank stabilization
- Wildlife friendly fencing

Commitment to Conservation

Positive Efforts Guide This Cattle Ranch’s Operation
Jasper is proud of the health and variety of wildlife on his property. Several years ago the red-band trout found in his streams was a candidate for listing on the Endangered Species Act, but “the trout populations have bounced back so dramatically, they decided not to list it.” He believes one of the reasons for the fish’s recovery was the cooperative effort of ranchers in the basin. But he also thinks “the fish have survived for centuries, and they’re going to continue,” though he knows his efforts to improve their habitat certainly help.

Jasper has worked with many agencies for conservation, including California Department of Forestry, Bureau of Land Management, Trout Unlimited, US Fish and Wildlife Service, CA Fish and Game, and the California Farm Bureau. He’s also working with the EPA and the State Water Resources Control Board to develop water conservation practices, using a 319 grant, where his funds and efforts are matched 60:40 to provide habitat and improve streams. He’s used many grants to develop conservation practices, but more than half of the total funds have come from his own pocket.

Working with many of these agencies is not always easy. “Some of the agencies are at odds with each other, and waste time arguing.” He adds that some agencies are very helpful and proactive, where others tend to be critical about projects, but never offer any alternate plan of action. Sometimes he gets frustrated with prolonged “bureaucratic processes,” but he enjoys working on conservation projects, so he tries to be patient with the different agencies he works with. He believes conservation programs should be strictly voluntary and flexible. He says, “if there are any strings attached we shy away from it.” Jasper also says, “I don’t think the government should have the right to decide how we operate,” though he believes they have every right to structure a project or grant the way they want to. One way he tries to help is by being proactive in his community. “We sit on the Fishes Working Group, where ranchers, farmers, environmentalists, and any interested agencies meet to work together in finding conservation solutions.”

Because of these types of success stories, Jasper hopes that, “if we take care of ourselves and our land maybe in the future there won’t be so much pressure” as far as regulations are concerned. Jasper wants to pass his ranch on to his children, but he knows that, “we’ve got to take care of the land... if we don’t take care of it we’ll lose it.”

“Sometimes,” says Jasper, “we don’t blow our own horn enough” about the good things ranchers are doing to help wildlife. He is concerned that such voluntary efforts are not receiving adequate attention, and “that’s a major emphasis that we should continue to put forward...we accomplish more through a voluntary effort than a mandatory effort.” He says, “I don’t think I’m much different than the majority of ranchers in this area.” Jasper and his fellow ranchers are motivated to help wildlife simply because they “enjoy being in the outdoors and seeing wildlife in the outdoors.” He’s positive about conservation practices, and says “we want to work with both sides, but people need to recognize agriculture needs to survive, too.” “We just try to stay ahead of the ball,” he says with a laugh. “We’re not doing things perfectly, but we try to improve every day.”
The McArthur Ranch consists of 8,000 acres under ownership, with an additional 31,000 lease acres in Modoc County, with a cattle operation, as well as timothy hay, peppermint, grass hay, and wild rice production, under the direction of George McArthur. McArthur uses conservation practices to encourage many species of wildlife, including populations of ducks, geese, blue heron, coyotes, deer, turkeys, wild pigs, elk, fish, cranes, egrets, cacklers and sand hill cranes. McArthur believes strongly in conservation for the benefit of wildlife, and is involved in several projects, including stream bank restoration, planting willows, bank stabilization projects, tail water return systems, and rotational grazing. George even collects eggs in his hat if he sees a nest when he’s harvesting a field, so they can incubate the eggs and release the birds later in the year.

McArthur says they’ve worked with NRCS and CWA to fence off one mile of the Fall River, which runs through their property, so they can limit cattle access to the riparian area and encourage waterfowl nesting. UC Cooperative Extension has worked with the McArthur Ranch to monitor water content and temperature, and monitor foliage on native plant species, in order to better protect the land they work on. Although the projects can be costly, George McArthur says it is “just the cost of doing business. Some years it’s more affordable than others, but we do what we can.” About 2,000 acres of the land is on the Pacific Flyway. The conservation practices include restoring riparian areas and building check dams “We’re acting like beavers!” knocking down some banks, and planting willows for habitat.

The goal of conservation for wildlife remains strong on the McArthur Ranch with motivation to use conservation practices because “we have a sense of responsibility. We see benefits not only to our operation but to the wildlife as well.” The financial benefits of the conservation work leads to capital improvements to the operation, which has a domino effect in helping the wildlife. The more efficient the operation becomes, the more time and capital is available to invest in wildlife conservation. “We love the fish, and we love the elk.” McArthur believes conservation is important because “we want to pass it on to our kids,” both the land, and their respect for wildlife and the environment.
Mike Bryan’s great grandfather started ranching in the Scott Valley in 1852, and Bryan is the fourth generation to follow in his footsteps. He runs a 700-acre hay and cow/calf operation in Siskiyou County that provides a home to hawks, quail, doves, ducks, geese, squirrels, deer, beavers, and muskrats.

Bryan has developed an appreciation for wildlife that is reflected in his management practices. He has fenced off the riparian zones along the Scott River on his ranch where he practices controlled grazing. This promotes the health of the vegetation along the river and provides undisturbed nesting habitat for wildlife. Bryan has also been involved in projects to improve the riverbanks and has done several plantings both on his own and with the help of government monies. Bryan noticed an increase in the salmon population, but he comments that the fish population increases or declines are influenced more by weather, offshore fishing, and other factors as opposed to farming practices.

Bryan is concerned that “with the Klamath Basin crisis everyone on a tributary of the Klamath River is in danger of losing their water rights. The Endangered Species Act needs to be thrown out or amended. Without irrigation water we are all out of business. Then what happens to all the animals, birds, fish, and people we feed?”

The idea of federal mandates concerns Bryan, who thinks that voluntary actions are the most effective way to preserve and enhance habitat. Although he appreciates incentive programs and suggestions, he believes that that’s as far as the government should go. He also adds that many of his neighbors are reluctant to pursue active conservation practices since they are afraid of the consequences of having endangered species on their property. But as for Bryan, he will continue in his efforts to promote wildlife and habitat on his property, because as he puts it, “I enjoy it... I enjoy seeing [wildlife] and having it around.”
Bill Eiler grows hay and small grains along the Scott River in Siskiyou County on a farm that his grandfather bought in the 1960s. His farm is home to deer, ducks, doves, quail, coyote, steelhead and salmon. The Eilers have taken measures to restore and provide habitat for other species of wildlife as well. Eiler has been involved mainly in bank stabilization projects along the river, including riprap and tree planting projects to slow erosion and provide more habitat for the fish, who like the deeper, cooler pools created by the rocks used in the riprapping. They are currently involved in stabilizing a creek channel by raising the bottom and planting trees along the banks to prevent sediment erosion into Scott River. The Eilers also maintain a buffer zone between the river and the land that they farm to help stem erosion. In addition to these projects, the Eilers have built a pond to help correct drainage problems and capture wastewater on their land. Now there is a year-round source of drinking water for wildlife in an area that used to be completely dry by April.

We cooperate with agencies and we get things done. Eiler’s hoping the government takes note of his community’s willingness to help out wildlife.

Bill Eiler, Siskiyou County Field Crop Grower

Common Sense Guides this Hay and Grain Farm’s Restoration Activities

Despite his willingness to participate in conservation projects, Eiler is getting more discouraged from excessive regulation. “The government has everyone shell-shocked as to what you can and can’t do. Many people are afraid to do things we know are positive for the wildlife.” Excessive paperwork is a deterrent for projects, as well. He feels regulations cause a situation where “you can’t do common sense things.”

“We’re hoping agencies don’t want to kill proactive communities,” but he doesn’t know if there will be a future for agriculture in his area, as some have indicated Scott Valley may be the next “Klamath.” Eiler sees that “people here work to solve the problems...we know how to fix it better than the bureaucrats in Washington D.C., just help us with some true biologists and some good scientific research.” He knows farmers are genuinely concerned about wildlife.

“We’re always working with other agencies and trying to do good things” for wildlife, says Eiler. Many of the projects they do are cost-share efforts with the Resource Conservation District (RCD) and other agencies. Eiler is very positive about his relationship with the RCD, and describes it as being “like a middleman to us,” between the government and his farm. “They keep it on a working level with us, kind of like a contractor.”

The Klamath Basin issue frustrates Eiler. He sees evidence that the action taken by the Bureau of Reclamation to save the three endangered fish species will “do the fish more harm than good. Because releasing so much water all of a sudden may ‘trick the fish into thinking it’s a wet year and a good time to spawn.’ This situation has emotionally disrupted my way of life.”

“Up until April of this past spring when Klamath Falls farmers were denied water, I was confident that my future and possibly my daughters’ would continue in farming, but now I think otherwise. I’m seriously thinking ‘should we sell,’ before they take our water away and the land’s not worth anything?”

Eiler wanted to conserve the land so he could leave it to his children, but now he’s no longer secure in his future as a farmer. He is positive about the conservation efforts of farmers in his area, though. “We cooperate with the agencies, and we get things done.” He’s hoping the government takes note of his community’s willingness to help out wildlife.
COMMITMENT TO CONSERVATION

NORTH COAST REGION
Frog’s Leap Winery in Napa County was one of the first to establish a river restoration project in the county. Frank Leeds, who’s also heavily involved in the Napa Valley Grape Growers Association, is the vineyard manager for the winery, and has worked for Frog’s Leap for over a decade. When Frog’s Leap owner/winemaker John Williams approached Leeds with his idea to purchase Galleron Ranch in Rutherford, within close proximity to the Napa River, Leeds reacted by saying that while he did not advise the purchase, he would do his best with the land. Since that time Leeds has gone above and beyond his promise by producing premium sauvignon blanc, merlot, and petite syrah as well as creating a highly effective river restoration project along the 3,000 feet of Galleron Ranch that borders the Napa River.

Leeds began the river restoration project in 1997, after the Galleron Ranch vineyard was purchased by Frog’s Leap Winery. The immediate problems were erosion issues caused by a mid-channel gravel bar with vegetation and the need for stabilization of the riverbanks. Embracing the philosophy that a healthy river means a healthy environment for the adjacent vineyard, Leeds was committed to finding an environmentally friendly river restoration management program that would incorporate natural repair.

Leeds consulted with Evan Engberg, a preeminent bioengineer in the western states. Engberg proposed a river restoration plan based on the implementation of living systems, primarily willow mattresses. This method is based on German and Austrian engineering from the 1920s-30s. The Live Willow Brush Mattress, set in a boulder-filled toe trench, is an excellent method of stabilizing and re-vegetating eroding stream banks. Willow branches used in the mattress were gathered within the Napa area. The brush mattress gives complete surface protection of the reshaped bank and grows rapidly into a stable plant community that provides food, habitat, and overhanging shade.

The work is done in late summer when the water flow is at its lowest point. Engberg, who is also an independent contractor, came out to Galleron Ranch with a crew for 2-3 weeks to work on the project. While public monies are available for river restoration projects, Frog’s Leap Winery funded the work for the first two years because using private capital tends to speed up the process, although there are several public agencies involved with the project’s approval process, including the Department of Public Works and Napa County’s RCD.

Frog’s Leap was careful to only work on areas where erosion control is needed. The willow mattresses are placed in the stream to slow the velocity of the water and allow the flow to drop to a level that does not erode the bank. The willow branches are cut into lengths that will fit in the toe trench, and the mattress is attached with wire. The plants grow through the wire, and the willow branches hold the soil in place. The Live Willow Brush Mattress is a versatile method that can be used to stabilize a variety of situations, from small creeks to large rivers. The method is simple and does not require any special equipment. The willow branches are gathered within the Napa area, and the brush mattress gives complete surface protection of the reshaped bank and grows rapidly into a stable plant community that provides food, habitat, and overhanging shade.
with what needed to be done. For example, they left two acres untouched to flood naturally in the winter and picnic on during the summer. Leeds has also been able to remove wild, non-native plants, such as blackberries, mugwart, vinca, and wild grapes, and is planting native oaks, plum trees and cottonwoods in their place along the top of the riverbank to prohibit the spread of Pierce’s disease. It is important to note that although willows are a habitat for the Blue-Green sharpshooter, they do not carry the bacteria that causes Pierce’s disease.

The implementation of the willow mattresses has had numerous beneficial results. The project has resulted in immediate and permanent bank stabilization, erasing a 30-foot drop in the bank and replacing it with a gradual slope with both vegetation and habitat. Moreover, the cost of the project is half the amount of the typically prescribed riprap projects. Fish Friendly Farming techniques such as the use of logs and overhangs are also incorporated into the toe rock to provide shade for fish.

This particular river restoration project has been endorsed by several public agencies. In fact, it is the first project of this sort to receive funding from the Napa County public works department. The Department of Public Works began matching funds for the Frog’s Leap river restoration project in 2000. It has even revised its criteria for approving these projects based on the Frog’s Leap model.

Frog’s Leap Winery, under Leeds’ guidance, has spearheaded the issue of river restoration and has triumphed. Leeds is an example of a progressive farmer using private capital, with no mandate from the government, to make substantive, genuine improvements to the Napa River environment that benefit the entire community.

Source: Grower Advocate, Vol. 3 No. 3, published by the Napa County Farm Bureau and Napa Valley Grape Growers Assn., written by Emily Barouch
Davie Pina says operations in the Napa County vineyard management company he’s involved in always stresses conservation, particularly erosion control. That’s good news for the numerous species that inhabit the 1,000 acres he manages, which include deer, wild turkeys, coyotes, rabbits, raccoons, opossums, gophers, moles, mice, squirrels, numerous song birds, quail, blue jays, starlings, hawks, buzzards, numerous waterfowl, geese, ducks, pigeons, dove, and owls. Also on the properties are bobcats, mountain lions, wild pigs, and an occasional bear.

Pina uses conservation practices that reflect “normal management,” which include drip irrigation rather than flood or sprinkler which conserves water, planting cover crops to encourage beneficial insects and cut down on the need for pesticides, using recycled compost and grape pumice for fertilizer, and reusing waste water from wineries to irrigate. Some of the land is farmed organically as well.

Pina is also very involved with watershed restoration projects, and several groups associated with them. His work on the Hopper Creek watershed includes replanting banks and riparian areas with native plants, planting native trees and grasses in other areas, and bank stabilization projects. Pina says these practices are just part of “being a good steward of the land.” He believes, “All farmers try to be good stewards...the better we take care of the soil, the better environment we have to grow our crops.”

Much of Pina’s work is focused on reducing erosion, and he’s involved in or worked with several groups to that end. In particular, he’s part of the Hopper Creek Stewardship Group, which is made up of farmers, citizens, government agencies, and soil conservation groups. Their goal is to educate everyone, including farmers and non-farmers, about stewardship practices. They focus on erosion, and California Fish and Game works with them to educate and give presentations on new practices. They also work on sediment problems, and agency representatives give workshops on paperwork for different programs. The group is a valuable source of open information to the community that surrounds the Hopper Creek Watershed. Pina also has worked with the Napa Valley Sustainable Agriculture Group, the Napa County Soil Conservation Group, CA Fish and Game, the County Public Works Department, and the Army Corps of Engineers.
Pina says most costs of conservation practices are factored in when they install a vineyard. His biggest challenge when practicing conservation is “making a bunch of different owners understand what we need to do, and having the public also understand what we’re doing is beneficial.” He says, “Farmers always get a bad rap about ‘polluting the world’ when in fact we’re working hard to use better, safer chemicals, use them less often, and use other important conservation practices. It’s tough to educate people about what we’re doing.” He feels the government listens more to the public’s frenzied environmental outcries than to levelheaded people trying to present the facts. He doesn’t agree with government mandates, saying, “[the government] uses regulations to control us when they don’t really understand what it is we’re doing. Farming practices are so much better now.”

Pina stresses voluntary actions get the most mileage. “It’s always better when the actions are voluntary. A farmer fulfilling a mandate will do only what’s demanded, because he may not understand or agree with the way it’s implemented. But when it’s voluntary, farmers see the value to it and work harder to keep the program going, and growing.”

On the ranches Pina manages, they have to be especially sensitive to some areas of wetlands. “The government came in to look for red-legged frogs...they didn’t find any, but we agreed to stay back from the wetlands and change our practices to meet their goals of improving the wetlands.” The experience was both positive and negative. “Certain wetlands you can see the value in protecting. They are unique and special, and we want to preserve them. Others are not really wetlands, though, someone just got a little carried away, and wherever they saw water became wetlands.” Pina says working with the many knowledgeable people in the agencies was a good experience, though he disliked having to work with some who were unreasonable and on a “power trip.” Though “overall,” he says working with agencies “was a positive experience.” Pina says “You should conserve every chance you get,” and adds, “I like to see ground being productive and enhancing habitat.”
The Mailliard Ranch in Mendocino County is home to a vast array of wildlife, as well as a long-standing family commitment to conservation practices to “help Mother Nature out,” says Larry Mailliard, who manages the timber operation. The Mailliard Ranch encompasses 10,000 acres of forest, including old growth, redwood, Douglas fir, and oak stands. It’s a family-owned operation, and Larry’s children, who are becoming involved in the ranch, will be the fourth generation to manage the land.

“Conservation was beat into my head as a boy by my grandmother,” Mailliard says with a chuckle. He selectively harvests the timber, and also runs 60 head of leased cattle to help with habitat management. When picking an area to harvest, Mailliard evaluates the health of the stand of timber, and harvests only what he needs from it, leaving a healthy habitat behind. And if it doesn’t make sense to harvest, ecologically or economically, he doesn’t.

“We’re not logging this year because prices are low,” and it’s not worth the effort. Mailliard works to take dilapidated trees out with some of the good ones, to improve the health of the area. He exceeds standards issued by the California Department of Forestry in harvested areas with improvements to the land, and has planted over 900,000 seedlings as part of his management practices. “We’ve had a phenomenal response to our program. The growth rate is excellent” with the conservation practices he’s used. His ranch is often used as a model for conservation forestry.

Mailliard is also involved in a spring development program, to improve the watershed on his land. It includes road upgrades and fencing riparian areas to keep the cattle out of the creek. “It’s an extreme cost. The expense has to come out of the product, and it’s not a one-time cost, you have to maintain it.” But Mailliard says, “It’s worth it to me because my kids are into it,” and he plans to pass the ranch on to future generations, so passing it on in the best condition possible is important to him.

Mailliard is involved in another water project, this one in partnership with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service for a grant establishing a stream restoration program. He’s also worked with the Resource Conservation District and the Farm Bureau, and feels he’s had a good working relationship with most agencies.

Some regulations concern him, though. The confiscation of property rights for endangered species seems unfair to Mailliard, who works...
to protect the species on his land. 
“[Ranchers] should be compensated for their property rights.” New regulations each year drive up his production costs: his harvest plans now cost around $30,000 to $40,000, and are over 200 pages long, when they used to be about 20 pages. “I don’t know how the smaller people make it,” he says.

The Mailliard ranch is home to the Spotted Owl, which is a federally listed endangered species. He’s not a fan of the Endangered Species Act; speaking of the old growth area on his ranch that’s protected because it’s potential Spotted Owl habitat, Mailliard says “We’ve worked around it, and we weren’t going to cut it anyway.” He says predators really have more of an influence on wildlife, especially the fish and mammals. He’s upset about the government taking property rights away from landowners. “When the land is taken like that, it loses its value, so there’s no incentive to manage it in a positive way for wildlife. Otherwise, we could have enrolled it in an easement and gotten a tax credit, which makes it have a value to us even though we’re not harvesting it. The government is killing motivation for good management.”

Mailliard is skeptical of government involvement in private lands with regard to conservation practices. He doesn’t agree with governmental regulations, because “blanket mandates don’t work” for everyone’s specific land situation. He believes they should instead have workshops of conservation ideas, so he can take that information and apply it to his land. “Regulations need to be flexible because every operation is different,” Mailliard says. He appreciates guidelines as long as implementation is allowed to be specific to the property. He believes voluntary conservation practices are the most successful, because “you get the most good out of it.” He says he’s “open to suggestion—show me a better way, easier way, or less expensive way, and I’m all for it.”

Mailliard sees effective management for wildlife as a long-term commitment to the future of his operation and way of life. “We plan to be here for a long time, so we take care of the land and the wildlife on it.”

“Regulations need to be flexible because every operation is different.”
Philo and Gloria Barnwell and their family are continuing a 115-year tradition on their 9,000-acre cattle and timber operation 35 miles east of Fortuna, in Humboldt County. While 6,500 to 7,000 acres of the property have been devoted to timber for the last 50 years, the Barnwell family continues to raise cows and calves on the remaining 2,000 to 2,500 acres of open country. The entire sustainable operation provides a home to large numbers of diverse species of wildlife, including golden eagles, peregrine falcons, various birds, deer, bears, bobcats, and salamanders.

To help promote the populations of such wildlife on the property, and particularly in the timber areas, the Barnwells practice careful harvesting and maintenance techniques. For example, they will not harvest areas that are used for nesting during the nesting season; and while clearing brush and maintaining the property, areas used for nesting are avoided and left undisturbed. Says Mrs. Barnwell, “we try to log carefully so that wildlife isn’t hurt or damaged.” The Barnwells encourage wildlife even around their home, where they’ve hung wood duck nesting boxes. “We are thankful to live in an area where things naturally flourish,” says Barnwell, and “we take care of what we have.”

The Barnwells have other conservation practices as well. They have cleared many acres of tan oak brush and planted about 28,000 redwood and fir trees, in addition to clearing white oak and black oak growing over established natural fir seed beds. They work on stand improvement, where they take only the less desirable trees, leaving the healthy ones to grow; and they participate in pre-commercial thinning. These practices are very costly for the Barnwells, but they see many benefits. “We see wonderful stands of second growth fir, and the first growth redwood now have more grass around them,” which is an “Agri-forestry” practice that helps maintain feed for the cattle. “We see more and varied wildlife and habitat with these practices, and it employs several families.”

The property includes a high cave that serves as a nesting site for peregrine falcons, a species listed under the Endangered Species Act. The Barnwells have been a bit frus-
trated with the actions of governmental agencies concerning that cave. Regulations brought on by the Spotted Owl have been “a costly nuisance, even though our forestry practices improve their habitat as well as the peregrines.” According to Barnwell, the government promised them they would only impose “minimum” restrictions on their logging activity, but what happened in reality was a long term, $1.5 million setback to their operation, “even though we had diary records from the 1920s and Department of the Interior studies.” In addition, the “possible Murrelet habitat” has cost the Barnwells missed redwood sales. Now that they’re finally allowed to cut, the market is so poor they’ll probably cut and deck the trees for future sale instead of letting the trees grow more, says Barnwell. This intrusion frustrates them, because they have logged their property responsibly for years, and wildlife populations, including peregrine falcons, are flourishing. Barnwell sums it up by saying, “They, the federal government, aren’t doing a good enough job themselves to tell us what to do.” She points out, “Our managed forests seem to provide far better, more diversified wildlife and habitat than natural brush lands.”

Barnwell has had some positive experience with government agencies, though. “CDF has some good people in their programs such as the Vegetative Management Unit.” However, she says, “Too many

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CAREFULLY SO THAT
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OR DAMAGED.”

help her conservation practices is to “Let us plant, nurture and harvest our crops (timber) with good management for the future.”

Barnwell says government regulations and regulators make it difficult to practice conservation. “Regulations combined with a shortened logging season create a situation where we can’t generate enough funds for [conservation] projects.”

Wildlife, to the Barnwells, is considered a part of the ranch, and, “we do what we are allowed to enhance wildlife habitat.” She adds, “we need some incentives because it’s getting bad—it’s hard to pay everyone.” The costs in the Barnwell’s operation are getting out of control. “Before the Spotted Owl regulations, our production costs were just 10% of what they are now,” Barnwell says. She’s discouraged that the effects have filtered throughout her family, too. “It’s too late to save our rights or way of life. It is illegal to take my granddaughter fishing on our local creeks. She is the sixth generation on the ranch where all previous generations fished, camped and recreated. Now it’s no more.”
George Hollister’s 450-acre timber operation has evolved in his lifetime from a cattle and timber ranch to a hunting club and timber ranch in Mendocino County. Hollister may not see cattle on the ranch anymore, but he pays a lot more attention to the numerous species found there, most of which are not hunted. The ranch is home to over 50 bird species including falcons, hawks, eagles, tri-colored black birds, hooded orioles, merlins, Cooper’s hawks, golden eagles, turkeys, doves, ospreys, cormorants, blue herons, king fishers, wood ducks, mallards, mergansers, sand-pipers, godwits, migratory birds, quail, and band-tailed pigeons as well as coyotes, bobcats, mountain lions, deer and raccoons. The Hollister ranch is a family operation, with his mother owning half and his wife and two sons involved in the ranch. Much of the timber on the Hollister ranch is redwood, and Hollister works to leave unmarketable trees standing instead of felling them, securing popular nesting sites for birds. He also built a pond on the ranch a decade ago, which is now home to many species of amphibians, turtles, and mosquito fish. The creek running through the ranch used to dry up in the summer and fall, but now has water year-round thanks to the pond’s slow discharge. This creates an assured water source and habitat for wildlife. Hollister provides feed for the wildlife on his ranch with the money he earns from the hunting club. He also has cultivated Himalayan berries for cover on the property. All of these practices lead to a welcoming atmosphere for wildlife on the Hollister ranch, but managing for wildlife is not without its difficulties. “My time is a major cost,” says Hollister, and the wildlife can sometimes interfere with his forestry efforts. “The deer sometimes browse on the young seedlings I plant, and rodents eat the bark off trees, killing the tree tops.” He is managing the antics of deer and rodents on his property, though, and says he enjoys seeing the natural cycle of things. He’s frustrated by outsiders who call themselves naturalists, but don’t understand the natural cycle. “Lots of people think in a stable environment, everything is ‘in harmony,’ and that’s just not true.” Hollister says “populations go up and down in a natural environment; it’s never actually in balance.” Hollister’s conservation efforts are done voluntarily, and on his own. He’s dubious about government involvement in any private land operation, because “they have preconceived notions that what you’re already doing is bad for wildlife.” He says, “The regulatory climate is fueled by misinformation,” and he’s not interested in dealing with the government for those reasons. Hollister points out, “Voluntary efforts have been successful for years and years, while government mandates in forestry have failed. I’ve not seen any environmental benefits from governmental regulations at all.” He does support forest improvement projects and thinks incentives are a good idea. Hollister himself doesn’t feel he needs incentives, though, saying, “What incentives do you need with all the positive side effects of wildlife?” Hollister believes land usually is managed for the benefit of wildlife, but when people are taken out of the equation, wildlife usually suffer. He points out Native Americans managed the land before we did, and no one would question their efforts to encourage wildlife, since they were dependent upon it for survival. That’s why he feels environmental pressure to “retire” the land in permanent preservations without any management is misguided. Hollister reminds us “the hand of man is an important part of the natural environment.”
Gary and Wanda Johnson are the fifth generation of their family to live in an area settled by their ancestors in the 1850s. The 2,000 acres they live on in Mendocino County have been in the family for over 70 years. The Johnsons also lease 3,000 acres adjoining the original property and own 4,000 acres elsewhere. On their acreage, they run cattle and a small ewe herd, which used to be larger but in the early 70s coyotes destroyed most of the sheep. The Johnsons run a hog hunting business on their land to supplement the ranch income and control the wild pigs, which are a non-native species that do considerable damage to the ground.

His father, who valued controlling erosion on his property and keeping the roads stable with erosion-halting innovations, taught Johnson the importance of conservation practices. Johnson remembers how proud his father was to hear others comment on his “clean ranch” where erosion didn’t seem to cause the problems it did on other people’s property. Johnson has been planting redwood and fir trees along creeks since the early 80s to stabilize stream banks, culverts, and ditches. His road system is rocked to prevent erosion, and he uses managed grazing to keep the land healthy. He has used controlled burns to encourage native vegetation; he limits hunting of most species on his ranch, and he makes sure the wild turkeys have feed available through the winter. He also manages some predator control through depredation permits, which helps the deer survive on the ranch. Johnson notices “the fawn survival rate is higher in areas where we use predator control than in other areas.”

Reversing the effects of erosion is Johnson’s motivation for water-barrier ring his roads, which takes the water off the roads and stabilizes them through the wet spring months. He’s also established rock barriers along some roads to stop erosion. He doesn’t mind the costs of his conservation efforts, pointing out that he saves money by seldom having to re-work the roads. He has taken advantage of some FSA cost-share programs to help fence off streams and stabilize streambeds. He also allows UC Davis to conduct studies in his creeks on steelhead and salmon populations.

Johnson believes “less government is better,” and wishes mandated programs would have funding to implement. “I’m afraid to let government people in because they might tell us we have to do something we can’t afford.” He points out some regulations are not practical in every place, so they should have more flexibility in their application. He says, “We take care of the land we own; it’s been in the family for generations. There’s no need for so many restrictions.” His views may seem contradictory to his work, since his “day job” is working with wildlife for a government agency, but he says that experience just highlights his views as a rancher.

Johnson has had a lot of experience with endangered species in his government job, though not at his ranch. He says, “Most of the work I do for endangered species is around cities, involving loss of habitat.” He says, “Farms are the place the endangered species have a chance of surviving,” so he feels farmers and ranchers should be encouraged by the government rather than restricted. He believes government involvement that would “return profitability to farming would be helpful to wildlife...the farmers would set more land aside for wildlife, because they won’t have to plant every inch of land just to be profitable.” Johnson thinks the government’s priority should be to preserve family farms and ranches, because “farmers have to keep tightening the belt and tightening the belt...we’re strangling.”
Mike Wolf is involved with a vineyard management company and oversees about 400 acres in Napa County. In this wine grape Mecca, Wolf establishes vineyards and farm acreage with habitat conservation in mind. The wide variety of wildlife found here, which includes squirrels, rabbits, gophers, coyotes, hawks, falcons, many insects, migratory waterfowl, shorebirds, and countless species in the riparian zones, prosper under the conscientious management Wolf promotes.

Wolf says, “we evaluate the needs of specific areas with regard to management. If just one corner of the vineyard needs an application of spray, just that corner gets sprayed, not the entire field.” Wolf concentrates on using Integrated Pest Management to control pests in the vineyards. Water conservation is also important. “We conserve water by using drip systems on all the vineyards. If we have sprinklers in a field, they’re only used for frost protection.” He also has established cover crops, which promote erosion control, encourage beneficial insects, and naturally fertilize the vines.

In particular, Wolf is involved in a river restoration project on half a mile of riverbanks and levees in Rutherford. “We’re planting willow trees, and finding natural ways to restore the banks.” He’s also installed owl boxes and helped improve old riprap projects by planting grass on willow mattresses over the top. Wolf and many of his neighbors have moved away from the hardscaping tactics used for river control in the 1990s, which included riprapping, in favor of less costly, more habitat-friendly bioengineering to accomplish flood protection goals in an environmentally friendly manner. “You have to think of [the river and farmland] as an entire entity, and consider the whole ecosystem.” Wolf has worked to improve the flow, plant shade trees over the river to encourage fish populations, cleaned gravel bars for spawning, and helped protect the banks from erosion with bioengineering techniques.

Wildlife beneficiaries:
- Squirrels, rabbits, hawks, falcons, migratory waterfowl, fish species, and shorebirds

Conservation practices:
- Integrated Pest Management, erosion control, encouragement of beneficial insects, natural riverbank restoration, owl boxes, stream-bank riprap projects

California Fish and Game has been involved with the river restoration as a cost-share project. Wolf says it was a significant challenge to clear Fish and Game hurdles and separate county hurdles, which caused delays and expense. “I disagree with the way it has been administered,” though he says it was worth it to help prevent erosion. “They have the same goal as we do, we just get there faster.” Wolf also disagrees with the recent mandates he’s had to deal with. “The rules are due to a few irresponsible farmers.” He resents the mandates, saying, “most farmers are conscientious enough to do this themselves with very limited supervision.”

When reflecting on his motivations to use conservation practices, Wolf says, “It’s just the right thing to do. The healthier we keep the environment, the easier our job is; we become an integral part of a healthy environment.”
Sacramento Valley Region
Cooperative Efforts Pay Off For Wildlife on Diversified Operation

The 17,500-acre Conaway Ranch, located between Davis and Woodland in Yolo County, is actually farmed by about 25 different farmers. Local farmers lease the land for crops, including rice, corn, tomatoes, alfalfa, safflower, and sugar beets. The Conaway Ranch itself was purchased nine years ago by PG & E Properties (not Pacific Gas and Electric, as many people think), and their partners. According to Wildlife Manager Mike Hall, “Nine years ago there wasn’t a blade of grass here.” PG & E Properties and their partners decided to make a concerted effort to restore wildlife habitat and populations, and over the last nine years they have achieved some incredible successes. Hall is very proud of the progress that has been made.

From the roadways and ditch banks to the nesting fields and tree lines of native oaks, almost every square inch of the ranch is a paradise for wildlife. What is especially significant about this particular ranch’s efforts is the fact that it involves the cooperation of some 25 individual farmers, the Conaway landowners, and agencies such as California Waterfowl Association, Wildlife Conservation Board, Ducks Unlimited, California Fish and Game, U.C. Davis, and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. These agencies and individuals, through cooperation and a willingness to try new things, have provided a refuge for countless species of wildlife.

From the start, the Conaway Ranch did away with “clean farming,” says Hall, allowing vegetation to closely hedge in roads and field edges. The ditches and canals are also thick with vegetation. If the vegetation becomes too dense, impeding water movement, only one side of the ditch will be cleaned at a time, ensuring that there will be continuous cover for wildlife. Allowing this cover to grow, remarks Hall, creates “incredible corridors for pheasant, cottontails,” and other species. Birds and small animals can be seen diving into the vegetation on the roadsides as vehicles pass, while broods of waterfowl, including wood ducks, take cover in the reeds and cattails growing in the waterways.

Hall comments that fallow fields are typically disked up and cleaned regardless of whether or not any crops will be put in. This is not done on the Conaway Ranch, where fallow fields are left completely undisturbed in order to provide secure nesting habitat. Fallow fields are often left in the middle of large areas of alfalfa, rice, and other crops to provide nesting cover. These nesting fields provide immediate alternative sites for hens looking to relocate their nests when they’ve been disturbed by normal farming activities. Hall describes one small, triangular field surrounded by larger fields of alfalfa that has 108 nests in it. Many of these nests were established by hens that had actually nested in that same field for each of the past three years, showing that wildlife continues to come back to the Conaway Ranch, and often to the exact field.

“Hen-flushing” and egg rescue activities are also common during harvest on the property, says Hall, who describes a device that they provide to each of the farmers on the ranch that is used to scare, or “flush” hens from their nests before the equipment reaches them. It is comprised of bars, hung with bells, that reach...
out 14 feet in front of the harvesters and swathers. This creates enough noise and distraction to scare away the hens, who instinctively do not want to leave their nests. This keeps the hens from being injured or killed by swather blades and other harvesting equipment. In addition, once a nest has been located using these hen-flushing devices, the eggs are gathered and taken to hatcheries like Daryl Daley’s in Live Oak. Here the eggs are incubated and hatched, and the chicks and ducklings are cared for until they are mature enough to be released.

The Conaway Ranch has implemented two cost-share projects with the California Waterfowl Association and the Department of Fish and Game, both consisting of “brood ponds” that harbor shorebirds and waterfowl as they raise their young through the months of April to August. Several other ponds are located throughout the ranch on areas of poorer soil. The areas are flooded and dense vegetation is encouraged to grow around the edges to provide cover for black-necked stilts, egrets, ducks, and other species of shorebirds and waterfowl. Some of the ponds are actually flooded year-round to provide brood pond habitat during every month of the year. These ponds are surrounded by nesting fields and teem with wildlife. Along with the brood ponds, Hall indicates that 3,000 to 6,000 acres of fields are flooded each winter for migratory waterfowl.

In addition to all of these projects, Hall describes an area of wood duck nesting habitat along a canal lined with native oaks. Wood duck hens nest in the boxes set among the trees, and their ducklings take cover in reeds growing along the water’s edge. According to Hall, approximately 50 wood duck nesting boxes have been established. Hall explains that “farmers...are the best stewards of the land there are.”

The Conaway Ranch works cooperatively with its individual farmers as well as several agencies, such as, Dan Loughman from the California Waterfowl Association. Hall adds that the sentiment of the farmers on the Conaway is that, “farming might as well benefit wildlife” rather than harm it.

“I just like wildlife,” says Hall, it’s important to “be good stewards of the land.” Hall stresses that most farmers have grown up on the land and have developed a love and appreciation for wildlife. But, he cautions, farmers are not going to want to set aside areas and go out of their way to help wildlife if their right to farm those areas is taken away because of it. He says that there is a real concern among farmers who want to help wildlife but who are afraid that, because they’re providing habitat, they risk having that land forced out of production because of more stringent regulations regarding wildlife habitat, even if that habitat was already being pro-

“[Farmers] are motivated by a desire to leave the land better than they found it for their children, and by their own deep appreciation for wildlife and the outdoors.”
Pat Collmer, a member of the California Waterfowl Association, manages the Aloha Farm Company Duck Club just north of Marysville, in Yuba County. Four members of the club, which was established in the 1950’s, own the 450 acres. While 210 acres are put into rice and managed by a local farmer, about 248 acres are set aside and managed as permanent wildlife habitat. This area, according to Collmer, includes 100 acres of semi-permanent marsh and one 148-acre seasonal marsh. While the semi-permanent marsh provides wetland habitat almost year-round, the seasonal marsh is flooded from September through early spring. The wetland areas provide habitat for many species of ducks, egrets, yellow-headed, tri-colored, and red-winged blackbirds, bitterns, killdeer, white-faced ibis, and other shorebirds. Coyotes, pheasant, and many other upland species also use the areas when they are drained.

Recently, Aloha Farming Company has been working with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service on a restoration project of about 200 acres. The Partners in Wildlife program helped provide some of the funding, and overall “it has been a very positive experience.” Wood duck nesting boxes and mallard nesting tubes have been put up around the marshes and Collmer reports that in the past few years, 406 wood ducks have been hatched on the farm as well as 287 mallard ducklings. The wood ducks are all banded and monitored by Collmer. “It’s something that interests me,” he says. Barn owls also use the wood duck boxes and Collmer notices that swallows build their nests just beneath them.

Collmer sees voluntary efforts to help wildlife, like those on the Aloha Farm Company, as much more successful than federally mandated efforts, explaining that, “if you’re interested in it, you’ll probably pay more attention to it than if you’re made to do it.” Although he believes that certain government programs can help farmers help wildlife, he doesn’t see any sense in excessive regulation and mandates.

Collmer, like other farmers, ranchers, and managers throughout the state, is simply doing what he loves to do in helping to preserve and promote wildlife. “I feel Aloha Farming Company is a great working example of the owners and management team working together to provide quality wetlands. As a working farm, Aloha strives to provide a wildlife-friendly atmosphere for all wildlife. Aloha feels all of these practices blended together help to provide a great experience in the marsh and habitat for many species of wildlife.”
Tom Ellis’ family has been farming in southern Colusa County for over 60 years. Ellis grows various crops near the town of Grimes, but he is especially interested in his alfalfa crop, where he finds ample opportunities to help wildlife. Ellis notes that ducks, geese, pheasants, and jackrabbits love to use the fields for feeding and nesting. He is actively involved in efforts to rescue pheasant and duck eggs, but acknowledges that he’s “just a Johnny-come-lately” to the project, crediting men like Roger Moore, the late Pat Murphy, and Charlie Jensen with pioneering the program in his area 30 years ago.

Ellis and other concerned farmers have lobbied equipment dealers to install warning devices on swathers to scare off nesting birds during harvest. “We still use a pipe frame attached to the swather with plastic containers on the end, and they’re working pretty well, but I think we could do a lot better” with more technology from equipment manufacturers. He has been a proponent of an electronic warning device for swathers that alert wildlife in the path of the machine. He stresses that it’s not just the eggs that are salvaged through the use of flushing mechanisms, but the hens as well. When a hen is flushed from a field before any equipment reaches her, she is given a second chance to nest and raise another brood.

Ellis conducts all of his conservation practices voluntarily, without the help of any groups or agencies. In fact, he’s disappointed with some groups for their support in creating the Sutter Wildlife Refuge in his area. He is not opposed to preserves, but this one puts the farmland where Ellis lives in extreme danger of being flooded by the Sacramento River. He’s in favor of providing habitat for species, but not when it endangers the lives of people who live there, and the land those people depend upon to make a living.

Ellis is opposed to the idea of federal mandates, opting for the use of voluntary efforts like his to help wildlife. Says Ellis, “We don’t need federal mandates…we don’t need the federal government telling us what to do. We ought to be able to do it ourselves.” He says, “We help wildlife simply because we noticed a problem and wanted to fix it.” He explains, “I’ve witnessed this [nest disturbance]…and felt it was a problem. We believe that if farmers continue to work together, and especially if they are able to get equipment manufacturers interested, we really could make a difference.” Ellis and his neighbors in the Grimes area have already made a difference for thousands of pheasants and ducks.

“WE DON’T NEED [MORE] FEDERAL MANDATES…WE DON’T NEED THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT TELLING US WHAT TO DO. WE OUGHT TO BE ABLE TO DO IT OURSELVES.”
Charlie Rominger’s family has been farming in Yolo County for five generations, or since his great-great grandfather came to California. Rominger still farms with his family on land that was purchased by his grandfather in the 1930s. Together they farm about 2,500 acres of corn, tomatoes, alfalfa, wheat, sunflowers, safflowers, grapes, organic vegetables and rice, but their farm is also home to wildlife, including ducks, geese, pheasants, turkeys, doves, deer, coyotes, muskrats, foxes, hawks, and owls. Many of the things that they do on the farm, according to Rominger, benefit not only their agricultural operation but the health of their land and wildlife populations as well.

Rominger stresses the fact that wildlife benefit from responsible farming practices, even if no projects are implemented solely for wildlife. The Romingers are involved in several projects that help with flood and erosion control, groundwater recharge, and decomposing rice stubble. These same projects also happen to benefit wildlife tremendously. For example, the Romingers have been involved in efforts to plant roadways and ditch banks with perennial grasses. These grasses provide excellent cover for wildlife while greatly aiding in erosion control. They use no-till planting practices on about 700 acres of wheat, safflower, and corn. The benefits of these practices include money savings due to less labor cost, higher water infiltration rates, and less runoff. They have also put in around 15 to 20 foothill ponds on the farm and plan for more, starting with the first ones put in by his uncle when Rominger was “a little kid.” These ponds not only provide flood control and groundwater recharge, but nesting and feeding habitat for various species of waterfowl as well. The Romingers flood their rice fields to decompose the stubble in the winter, again providing habitat for waterfowl.

These practices have led to increasing numbers of wildlife. Says Rominger, “We never used to see geese around here... now we see them almost year-round.” Other populations are increasing as well, and according to Rominger, “we see ducks by the hundreds whereas before you’d see a duck in an irrigation ditch every once in a while.” The Romingers used to use cost-share programs to develop their ponds, but now for the most part they do it on their own. Rominger explains, “even though [most cost-share programs] try to be user-friendly, most farmers would rather not have to bother with the paper work.”

In fact, “the permit process takes longer and costs more in the end.” Rominger recalls that in one application process they were told that they’d have to wait six months when it actually turned out to be two and a half years. The Romingers put in ponds at the rate of one to two per year, not including those they put in for neighbors. Nonetheless, implementing these projects takes...
time, labor, and equipment. Says Rominger, “It’ll take us another 20 years” to plant all the grass strips they want, put in all the ponds they would like, and continue developing other programs such as the use of beneficial insects and silt traps. But, he explains, “There’s going to be tremendous savings over the years as we get these things implemented.”

The biggest challenge to implementing conservation practices is “right now there’s no financial wiggle room. We can only do a project if it has a very minimal cost, or it shows a significant short-term pay-off,” both of which are rare in conservation projects. There are some groups that ease the pressure, though. Rominger has worked extensively with the Audubon Society, planting native vegetation along irrigation canals, and building a tail water pond. “They’ve been great...they provided the funding for the project, and I don’t even remember the paperwork. [Their program] is designed to be user-friendly, and it was!” He’s had positive experiences with other groups as well. The USDA Agriculture Research Service is conducting a study on farming practices on some of his land now. “We have a 320-acre block with 5 fields: one certified organic, one perennial grasses, one no-till, and two conventional farming. The inlet water source is the same for all of them, and they all have silt traps. It’s an excellent opportunity to study the effect of different practices in a side-by-side comparison.” The USDA ARS service is doing the study and conducting the research, but Rominger benefits by being one of the first ones to get the information found in the study. It’s a way to document the effects of different conservation practices, compare them, and see which work the best and are the most cost effective. He enjoys working with agencies in this kind of partnership, because it “creates a win-win situation.”

All of the work the Romingers do to benefit wildlife is done on a voluntary basis, and as for his views on government mandates, Rominger says, “Incentive programs are the way to go.” He believes that “incentive programs are probably some of the best money the government spends.”

Rominger says that he enjoys seeing the large numbers of wildlife coming to the farm, and he is excited about the way “everything works together” as his family implements and carries out programs to benefit the operation, wildlife, and the environment. As he puts it, “the more tie-ins, the more benefits. It just keeps snowballing.”
Charley Mathews was one of the first people to pioneer the use of rice rollers on his Yuba county farm just northeast of Marysville. The farm, which was bought by Mathews’ great-grandfather in 1860, is located in an area known as District 10, a region noted for its waterfowl populations. The rice roller is used on the operation to incorporate rice straw into the soil after harvest, allowing for easier breakdown and helping to establish “artificial wetlands” for migrating waterfowl. He has created around 200 acres of artificial wetlands by taking land he was using to farm rice out of production. On these wetlands, channels and islands are constructed along with plantings of trees and vegetation that create habitat for wildlife. Some of the 70 different species that frequent Mathews’ ranch include great blue herons, egrets, ducks, geese, shorebirds, and even bald and golden eagles.

Mathews floods his rice fields after harvest around the first of October, and he leaves the water on until early March, allowing adequate time for the later-migrating species to stop and find rest and feed on the farm. Flooding the fields also encourages populations of invertebrate species that provide a source of protein for the migrating birds. Although Mathews was concerned at first about the risk of disease, he hasn’t burned any of his fields for many years. He has seen the occurrence of stem rot increase, but he says it’s been controllable. Mathews’ neighbors are involved in similar efforts and he adds that both he and his neighbors are able to do it without government assistance.

The people in his community, according to Mathews, recently came together to build an egg hatchery, putting up the money themselves. Mathews and his neighbors now conduct “egg rescues” in their fields before harvesting them, saving, hatching, and releasing 25,000 to 30,000 birds each year for the last several years. These efforts are having an effect on wildlife populations. Mathews, who has hunted in the area for 55 years, or “since my dad used to carry me out on his shoulders,” comments that in the last 15 years he has seen species of birds that he’d never seen there before, such as golden and bald eagles. He also believes that the populations of some of the more uncommon species, including egrets and herons are growing as well. He is enthusiastic about the success of his conservation practices: “Wildlife benefits have been phenomenal! In the last Audubon count of birds out here they identified about 65 species in just 24 hours.”

Mathews is concerned about the rising costs of his practices: fighting stem rot and using rice rollers both have a hefty per acre price tag. He is also concerned about the Water Resource Control Board limiting water available for irrigation of artificial wetlands in the early winter months. If he doesn’t have enough water from October to December, Mathews says botulism will be a big threat to his farm. He is discouraged that protection of threatened or endangered fish has impacted efforts to conserve many other species of wildlife in his area.

Mathews believes incentive payments will increase wildlife conservation practices on farms like his. Personally, he would like to see yearly incentives in the form of water bank payments to ensure water in the sometimes dry, early-winter months. “Winter irrigation is crucial to migrating species that use the artificial wetlands,” and it is important for the health of his land as well.

Mathews likes to take people for bus tours on the farm so that they too have an opportunity to enjoy the wildlife that makes it their home. Says Mathews, “I’m interested in wildlife and it’s part of our stewardship of the land to make it better than we found it.”
Along with 900 acres of vineyards, Tom Muller and his partners farm 6,000 acres of crops in Yolo County, including tomatoes, bell peppers, corn, cabbage, sunflowers, safflower, wheat, and alfalfa. His farm is home to many species of wildlife, and much of what Muller does is aimed toward enhancing their habitat.

Muller explains that he likes to have nesting habitat on his farm, and he, along with an increasing number of farmers in California, lets his ditches and field lines be covered with grassy vegetation rather than be clean-farmed. In fact, Muller even plants native grasses and trees in these areas and at the low ends of fields to provide additional cover. These practices provide benefits to wildlife and the farm, reducing maintenance costs, increasing habitat, decreasing soil erosion, and increasing water infiltration rates.

Muller also uses Integrated Pest Management (IPM) programs to reduce the need for spraying. Planting grasses between rows in his vineyards and alternately mowing them at certain times increases habitat, encourages beneficial insects, and reduces dust in the air by avoiding tillage.

All of these practices, according to Muller, have been a learning process. He says it’s best to “go slow” because implementing some of these programs can be quite expensive at first. Muller adds, “You can’t afford to put everything in at once.”

Unfortunately, he’s having trouble maintaining his conservation practices because low commodity prices are decreasing the farm’s profit. “We’d do more, but with commodity prices so low it makes it impossible. There are cost savings with these practices, but initially you have to spend a large amount of money that’s not available right now.” Regardless, wildlife numbers are increasing due to the practices he has already established, says Muller.

Commenting on voluntary actions versus government mandates, Muller says, “If we don’t start [protecting wildlife] ourselves and be good stewards of the land, it will all be mandated...We can do all these practices here on a local level with the agency people.” He’s worried about the government mandating the conservation techniques he usually practices on his farms because he won’t be able to afford them when profit is low. “How are we supposed to [comply with mandates] with commodity prices so low?” He would like to see the government offer payments to help farmers voluntarily start and maintain conservation practices, especially when commodity prices are low. If the government offered more programs, Muller says he would expand his conservation practices, particularly setting up more nesting boxes for ducks and planting more native grasses for habitat.

Muller has had very positive experiences working with government agencies. He says, “We already work closely with our local RCD and the NRCS office in Woodland. They truly have a handle on how to establish and maintain habitat as well as filling the gap between hands-on experience and theory.”

Muller hopes that programs such as his will eventually be used by the government as models for others to follow in implementing voluntary conservation measures.
According to Les Heringer, "Most farmers who live and work on the land enjoy seeing different species of wildlife around them. Whatever I can do to make them a part of the farming operation I will certainly do." On the M&T Chico Ranch in Butte County, which is managed by Heringer, some of those species include the spring-run Chinook salmon, a candidate for listing under the Endangered Species Act, wood ducks, sand hill cranes, ospreys, owls, yellow-billed cuckoos, Swainson’s hawks, deer, several species of turtles, and even a bald eagle, which is a federally listed endangered species.

The M&T, located just west of the town of Chico, is an 8,000 acre diversified operation, producing beans, sunflowers, wheat, prunes, almonds, walnuts, safflower, and rice. Included on this tract of land are 1,100 acres of riparian forest along the Sacramento River, 200 acres of wood duck nesting habitat, and 200 acres of wild areas along the ranch’s creeks and sloughs.

Heringer has been involved in major fish screen and ladder projects to help protect the spring-run Chinook salmon; a species that he says is likely to be listed as endangered in the near future. The M&T diverts water from Butte Creek and pumps water from the Sacramento River, waterways that are also used in the migration of the salmon. With Heringer’s active involvement a more “fish-friendly” ladder and screen were constructed at the Butte Creek Diversion site, and a new, screened pumping plant was put in on the Sacramento River. As Heringer explains, “we are now able to pump and divert water without fear of harming the fish, and without fear of the farming operation being negatively impacted by the ESA.”

Heringer maintains, ‘The old saying, ‘if you build it they will come’ certainly holds true with conservation efforts,” so he’s been busy doing just that. Other projects on the M&T include a wood duck nesting box project, which is comprised of 40 nesting boxes along 200 acres of Edgar Slough and Little Chico Creek. Heringer’s son, Scott, has also been actively involved in this project, helping to build, hang, and monitor boxes. Heringer has been able to pass his appreciation for wildlife and the outdoors down to his children, a heritage that he hopes will continue through future generations. Heringer has put up several owl-nesting boxes and plants feed plots of millet, to leave unharvested for the birds during the winter and to provide nesting cover in the spring. He also conducts egg rescues in the wheat fields collecting duck and pheasant eggs from nests before the equipment reaches them. The eggs are taken to a hatchery north of Marysville where they are incubated, hatched, and cared for until they are released back on the ranch. Oak trees are also planted along the farm’s waterways to provide habitat for

Wildlife and Agriculture Both Winners on Diversified North Valley Ranch

“With the proper incentives much more could be done.”

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wildlife. He maintains the riparian areas near the Sacramento River, which has seen a growing population of wild turkeys. “We provide a patrolman during certain times of the year to minimize hunting pressures in these areas,” says Heringer.

“In an effort to increase upland game bird numbers on the ranch to what they once were, we have hired two retired Fish and Game biologists to assist us,” says Heringer. He’s also laid fallow 200 acres of row crop ground, planted a combination for feed and nesting cover, and added water for insect production and bird watering. He says they’ve also tried not to flood their harvested rice fields for rice straw disposal until later in the fall or winter, in order to provide more cover and feed sources for upland game birds.

Heringer would like to see the government provide a “safe harbor” to farmers on conserved acres, in case an endangered species “shows up.” Much of the habitat conservation and species protection occurs naturally on the ranch. For example, sand hill cranes winter on the M&T in the wheat and harvested rice and bean fields. Other bird species, such as the bald eagle and ospreys, take advantage of the large tracts of riparian areas on the ranch. According to Heringer, “with the proper incentives much more could be done. If this is what the world wants, we can do it, but we have a hard time doing it on our own in today’s competitive climate... there’s only so much you can do out of your own pocket.”

Heringer realizes the government does have different programs to assist with wildlife enhancement programs, but “the problem with most of these programs is that they require a multi-year (10) commitment from the farmer. Most farmers are not sure what crops they are going to plant from one year to the next.” Heringer says, “The agreement term is way too long. More farmers or ranchers would be a lot more interested in assistance if the term was a lot shorter.”

Heringer states “it is common knowledge in our area that there are a lot more species that depend on private farmland than the refuges for their existence. More short-term financial assistance and programs need to be offered to growers to make their land as attractive as possible for different species.” He suggests the government could pay growers along the Sacramento River attractive annual lease payments “to maintain riparian habitat instead of burdening taxpayers with expensive land acquisitions and removal of private land from the county tax rolls.”

Some incentives that could be effective include providing money to flood fields for waterfowl in the winter or build fish ladders and screens such as those now found on Butte Creek and the Sacramento River. Federal mandates, according to Heringer, are more punitive than incentive-based, creating the feeling of “someone holding a gun to your head and telling you to do something. Farmers just don’t respond positively to that.” He believes that voluntary efforts with incentives are the “best way to go.” Or, as Heringer puts it, “One neighbor does it, then his neighbor gets interested... you just have to find the right farmer to get the ball rolling.”

“Most farmers who live and work on the land enjoy seeing different species of wildlife around them. Whatever I can do to make them a part of the farming operation I will certainly do.”
John Ohm’s family has been farming since 1918 on a Red Bluff ranch where Ohm’s father was born and raised. The Ohms’ operation includes cattle, alfalfa, row crops, and irrigated pasture as well as large sections of riparian areas along the Sacramento River. According to Ohm, the property is home to many species of wildlife, including pheasants, turkeys, quail, ducks, mountain lions, deer, and coyotes.

The Ohms practice a method of farming that is becoming increasingly popular in California as an alternative to the traditional “clean” farming. Fence lines and field edges are allowed to remain covered with vegetation rather than sprayed or mowed. Ohm explains, “we try to maintain as much cover as we can” for quail, pheasant, and the other wildlife species found on the property. In addition to providing cover, the irrigated pasture on the ranch is filled with clover, a favorite of the geese that live there. The deer enjoy the alfalfa fields and will come up to feed in the evenings. Ohm has also begun an irrigation water recycling program, and has developed reservoirs to catch run-off.

Eventually, the federally listed endangered elderberry beetle was found on the riparian property, “and it just got too costly to farm,” so he sold it to California Fish and Game.

Ohm is especially proud of the family of geese that reside on his ranch. Several years ago there was only a pair, then it increased to seven, and now there are at least 20. Ohm says, “You can have all the windows shut in the winter and still hear them.” While hundreds of geese migrate through the ranch, this particular family comes back faithfully, year after year. For Ohm, it’s a matter of “personal gratification” to see the wildlife flourishing on his property, and he reports that wildlife populations are increasing.

Although Ohm feels positive about incentive programs, he believes that voluntary actions to help wildlife are the way to go. He would like to see more financial incentives offered to farmers to develop conservation practices, especially since commodity prices are so low. He is also optimistic about the idea that voluntary actions like his own and those of other California farmers and ranchers will help preserve endangered species populations and habitat. And as for now, Ohm does “as much as possible without incentives.”

All of the actions Ohm takes to promote wildlife on his property are completely voluntary. He says that, “most people in agriculture...do a lot of voluntary stuff and don’t even think about [it].” And as for his family, “the way we feel about it is that it’s more personal for us.”
Ken Lindauer and his family farm 400 acres of prunes just south of Red Bluff in Tehama County. Part of the farm runs along the Sacramento River, and the Tehama-Colusa canal runs through the middle of the property. The farm is home to abundant wildlife including red tail hawks, ospreys, ducks, turkeys, deer, foxes, possums, raccoons, gray and ground squirrels, elderberry beetles, coyotes, and jackrabbits. Lindauer says that he sometimes sees eagles and bobcats on the farm as well, and several species of birds including doves, quail, robins, blackbirds, goldfinches, and owls make their home in the family’s orchards.

Before irrigated agriculture was developed, Lindauer points out, the land was dry during the long, hot valley summers, and did not support the numbers and variety of wildlife that it does today. The Lindauers have allowed 50 acres of river bottom, which includes a natural slough, to remain wild after having run cattle on it in the past. They want others to enjoy the wildlife on their property as well, and often allow people to fish, camp, and ride horses in this area, which they refer to as “the jungle.”

The family would like the area to remain wild because, as Lindauer puts it, he “likes to have an example of what California was like before people got here.” According to Lindauer, his family’s mission statement for the farm includes the importance of preserving such natural habitat.

Although the Department of Fish and Game and the Nature Conservancy have expressed interest in purchasing the land from the Lindauers, they are reluctant to sell, knowing that “nothing will happen to it” as long as it’s in their hands.

He believes the problem with government agencies is that, “they have all these great ideas and plans [for an area] and when they get it nothing happens.” The farmer is the one who pays the taxes on his property, and he’s the one who’s “interested in what happens to it.”

Lindauer has also put up owl boxes, with plans for more, and has been giving a lot of attention to the canal on his property. The canal has the dual purpose of providing spawning habitat for salmon, and providing irrigation water to farms. Unfortunately, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife’s plans for salmon spawning didn’t materialize in the canal, so they are considering moving the gravel that covers the bottom and putting it back into the river.

However, Lindauer would like to see them use the canal for other species of wildlife in the area, too, so he’s going to suggest instead of exporting the gravel, they use some of it to make banks on the canal. Once banks are established, they can be planted or naturally allowed to seed with willow, elderberry, and native grasses to provide habitat for many species other than just the salmon. “Concrete isn’t real hospitable to wildlife, but gravel banks with vegetation will really benefit them.” Lindauer was happy to see the 1/2 acre pond near his house attract wildlife this year. A pair of Canadian geese wintered there, hatching and raising four goslings. The Lindauers were proud to see the six geese finally fly north, and look forward to their return next season.
COMMITMENT TO CONSERVATION

CENTRAL VALLEY DELTA REGION
The Mapes Ranch, owned by the Lyons family of Stanislaus County, encompasses 10,000 acres of flat grasslands and wetlands nestled against the Stanislaus River. The ranch, a traditional stop for waterfowl along the Pacific Flyway, gained national recognition in early 2001 for its part in saving the Aleutian Canada goose, a federally listed endangered species, from extinction.

On the Mapes Ranch, Chuck Lyons is responsible for the irrigation system and for managing the commercial beef herd. Along with beef, the family farms and leases out the ranch’s land to grow tomatoes, alfalfa, corn, wheat, barely, oats, nectarines, pluots, and other commodities. Many species are found on the property, including migrating waterfowl, river species, upland game birds, birds of prey, rabbits, coyotes, squirrels, skunks, opossums, and numerous songbirds.

The thousands of acres of grain, corn, waterways and ponds found on the ranch are perfect habitat for migrating waterfowl, including the Aleutian goose. Working with Ducks Unlimited and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Lyons plants extra fields of corn and grain. “We grow the corn, then harvest our share and leave the waterfowl’s share on.” They flush ponds to rid them of potentially harmful bacteria, and have established permanent lakes and ponds, complete with islands for safe nesting, to accommodate the geese’s needs. Lyons works to clear waterways of choking brush, and keeps alfalfa fields irrigated at key times to provide habitat. The cattle play a part in preservation by keeping the pasture grass from getting too high. “The geese don’t like tall grass or brush, because they can’t see if there are any predators on the other side,” said Lyons. The conservation efforts by the Lyons’s have not been easy
or inexpensive for the family. “It would have been easier to forget about the geese and focus just on raising cattle,” said Lyons, “but we were taught to respect wildlife. The geese will always be a part of this ranch.”

It’s not easy to farm successfully with thousands of geese wintering on your property. “You’ve got thousands of geese, each about the size of a mallard duck, working their way through a field of grain,” Lyons said. “When they get through eating, there’s not much standing.” The geese enjoy mowing their way through alfalfa, corn, barley, wheat, and oat fields on the ranch. Lyons loses the crops, but the family is surprisingly calm considering the cost of planting grain they reap no profit from. “It comes with living in the country,” they say, “The birds are part of the ranch, like the cattle.”

Lyons incurs most of the costs of the family’s conservation practices. Keeping creeks, drains, sloughs, ponds, lakes, and fields wet in fall and winter months before the rains create a hefty water bill for the ranch. The machinery work and labor associated with keeping the miles of waterways clear, flushing the ponds, maintaining the wetland habitat, and planting fields the Lyons’s won’t get to harvest is costly as well. But Lyons accepts those costs, saying calmly, “it’s worth it just to see them (the geese), that’s how we’re paid back.”

The Aleutian goose was in danger of extinction because in 1750 fur traders introduced arctic foxes to the Aleutian Islands to be “farmed” for the extensive fur trade. The islands were later abandoned, but the foxes multiplied and during the spring nesting season hunted the geese to near extinction. By 1938, the Aleutian goose was thought to be extinct, but in 1963 a few hundred were found on an isolated island, and the federal government took steps to list the bird, and rid several of the Aleutian islands of foxes. The safe northern nesting and southern feeding grounds produced a population of 6,300 by 1990. Russia, Japan and Canada also have played a role in the return of the Aleutian goose, but the winter grounds on the Mapes Ranch and adjacent Faith Ranch, owned by the Gallo family, are the crucial component, according to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. USFWS honored the two families at a ceremony in February 2001.

(Source of some quotes: Modesto Bee, Feb. 18, 2001, “Aleutian Comeback” by Richard Estrada)
Catherine and John Baranek have been part of the Pierson district of the Sacramento River Delta for 30 years, but John’s family has actually been there since 1902. Their son is the fourth generation to farm on their property near Courtland in Sacramento County. The Baraneks grow wine grapes, and in 1992 Catherine and other members of the Delta community formed a land trust called the North Delta Conservancy. Through this trust, Baranek has been able to grow wildlife along with her grapes. She establishes and maintains wood duck nesting boxes, seasonal wetlands, and wild duck egg rescues.

Her goal is to “try to educate landowners about conservation methods and help them with various types of farming techniques” that will enhance wildlife and habitat without hurting their farming operations.

Baranek reports that the trust has installed 200 wood duck nesting boxes, and through this program over 900 ducklings have hatched this year. The trust also provides boxes, built by the local sportsman’s club, to other growers around the delta. In addition to this program, Baranek is involved in wild duck egg rescues, in which equipment operators are instructed to stop their equipment when they see a hen fly up in front of them. Eggs that are found are collected and taken to Baranek, who hatches and cares for them until they are banded and released. She recalls that the trust released 150 birds the first year of the program. This year Baranek expects to release over 800 ducks. Band records show birds join the flyway. “It’s a very successful program,” she remarks, providing “immediate payback to the environment.”

Baranek is also involved in an effort to establish more seasonal wetlands in the area. She explains that they use “very flexible contracts” that allow farmers to create wetland habitat on their property without entering into contracts with government agencies, an idea that frightens most farmers. Farmers are asked to lease their property for at least five years, but they are free at any time to take part of their land back and put it into agricultural production if they need to. Through this program, Baranek has been able to create a total of 165 acres of seasonal wetlands. It works to “help farmers do conservation methods...that are more compatible with wildlife,” she says, without having to deal with excessive government regulation and red tape.

Blackberry removal and native grass plantings are also endorsed and promoted by Baranek, who explains that blackberries harbor predator species, while native grasses tend to provide crucial nesting cover and feed for upland game birds. Baranek also uses buffer strips between her vineyards and waterways to help clean irrigation water before it makes its way back into the delta’s waterways. The buffers consist of ditches and tree lines, and according to Baranek, “it’s very effective.”

“Funding is our biggest challenge. Since we are all volunteers-no paid staff—it is difficult to convince funding organizations to invest in our efforts.”

“[Proving] that we can do this without the federal government’s help or the state government’s help” is what motivates Baranek in her conservation efforts. Voluntary measures are “a lot more cost-effective and time-efficient” than mandated or regulated efforts, she says, and they provide an alternative to “not only costly but also restrictive” government programs. But best of all, says Baranek, “it makes for a much nicer farming environment.”

**Wildlife beneficiaries:** Wood ducks

**Conservation practices:** Nesting boxes, seasonal wetlands, egg rescues, buffer strips, nesting cover

**VOLUNTARY MEASURES ARE "A LOT MORE COST-EFFECTIVE AND TIME-EFFICIENT" THAN MANDATED OR REGULATED EFFORTS.**
Brothers, Randy and Brad Lange farm 6500 acres of vineyards in San Joaquin County. According to Randy Lange, the “wine vision” for this family owned and operated farm is “bio-sustainable farming.”

To Lange, bio-sustainable farming means typical management practices include planting native trees; controlling star-thistle with a benign herbicide that only kills that specific weed; allowing native grasses to grow in fence rows; planting quail brush; and reclaiming slough areas that are devoid of trees and brush. They have installed 70-80 owl boxes, and planted cover crops in vineyard rows to encourage beneficial insects. They control disease and insect pests by applying chemicals only to a specific area, and at a very low rate. Lange explains they only apply chemicals when there’s an urgent need, not at traditional times, by saying, “we’re not calendar applicators.”

Lange has worked with several government agencies, including CalEPA, the US-EPA, the California Department of Food and Agriculture, and the USDA. The reduced application rates of chemicals have been made possible by developing superior cover crops and new machinery innovations. He has also run into the Endangered Species Act (ESA) on his farm, with the fairy shrimp found on his property. “Initially the experience wasn’t very positive. We were ordered to cease and desist…which was partly due to ignorance on our part, but partly due to [the agency’s] failure to get the word out.” However, Lange says, “when the Act is used in what it’s designed to do, I support it 100%.” He just doesn’t agree with the ESA being abused by using it to stop unpopular practices regardless of their impact on a species. He expresses frustration in the complexity of agencies involved with the ESA. “It’s tough to figure out where the rules and regulations lie, who has them, who to believe, who to go to, and who to work with.”

Lange also believes voluntary practices work far better than government mandates. “Voluntary is a better way to go, because we do a better job than we do with regulations.” This is due to greater interest on the part of a farmer who comes up with conservation practices on his own, contrasted with a farmer who is made to use certain practices, whether they seem to work on his property or not. “We’re not trying to dodge a bullet,” by using conservation practices, “it’s a mindset.”

But, Lange warns, “a mindset change doesn’t happen overnight. You have to show farmers why they should change and how they can change, so they will want to themselves.” He believes education works far better than mandates.

Lange says they use conservation practices because “it’s the right thing to do, and we’re trying to find a better way to farm.” He says the public is more aware these days as well, so it’s important to show them the positive efforts involved in farming. That’s a challenge, because “special interest groups tend to beat the drum with a lot of rhetoric.” Undaunted, Lange sticks to his farm’s goals, which include “staying in business, finding a better way to do business, and improving the environment.”

Randy Lange, San Joaquin County
Winegrape grower

Wildlife beneficiaries:
Quail and owls

Conservation practices:
Promoting native trees and grasses, controlling noxious weeds, planting quail brush, reclaiming slough areas, owl boxes, cover crops, targeting of pesticide use
Harley Graese, a district manager for the California Waterfowl Association (CWA), worked for the now defunct Tri-Valley Growers, a tomato processing cooperative near Thornton in San Joaquin County, until his retirement in 1996. During the time that he worked there, he was involved in starting a wood duck nesting box project on the 160 acres of Tri-Valley Growers’ land. Now that he has retired, he has devoted more time and energy to the enterprise. It currently includes over 60 wood duck boxes, ponds and abundant habitat along the Mokelumne River.

Since the project started in 1988 the ducks have been banded and monitored, and Graese reports that often the hens come back to nest in the same boxes or in the same areas each year. Last year Graese counted 460 hatchlings, commenting that many of the nests are even “occupied twice” each year.

Many local farmers and landowners like to monitor and maintain their own nesting box projects. Graese says that “from Lodi to Thornton we have 600 nesting boxes” established and maintained by CWA. He remarks, “We’re having a very good turnout on volunteers.”

Since the CWA started the wood duck nesting program, Graese reports that they’ve had over 100,000 hatchlings in one year alone. “You have to give the farmers credit because they’re the ones who let us on their farms to maintain the projects,” says Graese, “they’re very cooperative; more and more are letting us do this,” which is significant due to hard times falling on many of the farms since Tri-Valley’s bankruptcy. Graese continues to maintain part of the project, cleaning and preparing the boxes for nesting, keeping records, banding ducks, and monitoring predators, but as he ages he’s been turning over many boxes to another manager. He is motivated to help wildlife because, as he explains, “I was an avid hunter for years, and I just thought it was time to give something back.”
SAN JOAQUIN VALLEY REGION
The Wingsetter Ranch in Stanislaus County is a 150-acre private wildlife preserve owned and managed by Mickey Saso, who is dedicated to creating habitat for the wildlife he so admires. The acreage started as messy bottomland, partially farmed and partially left wild, bordering the San Joaquin River. It sported some old valley oak and willow trees, lots of dry sandbars and scrub, and sloughs choked with tangled brush. It was a haven to some desperate critters, but the neglected land couldn't support a variety of wildlife. When Saso spotted the land, though, he looked past its current condition and saw only the possibilities it held.

Saso's grandfather and cousins have long been involved in farming almonds and grapes in Stanislaus County. The area around the bottomland is fertile and supports some farming operations, but Saso's attention was brought to a problem with the drainage and tail water from the local farmers who used the drains. With Saso's enthusiasm for wildlife, he realized the bottomland could serve the dual purpose of filtering the returning river water, and creating prime habitat for wildlife. In short order, Saso purchased the property and the work began.

Now the property is a sparkling chain of lakes, ponds and sloughs that wind through the acreage, with lush growth of native plants and habitat around the water, and a few welcoming wildlife food plots of barley and safflower. It starts at a mile-long lake where diverted runoff and tail water from 2500 acres of farmland flows into the property. The water first goes through a large silt trap where lush smartweed helps to filter the water and provides forage for waterfowl. Then it flows into a sparkling lake with a few islands in the middle and provides a nesting place that's safe from land-dwelling predators for geese and other waterfowl.

From the main lake, the water meanders through a chain of smaller ponds with silt traps and through sloughs that Saso cleaned out and improved with native grasses and willows. Between the lakes and ponds are wildlife food plots of safflower and barley, and stands of ancient oak, now thriving thanks to Saso's efforts. The safflower provides habitat and cover for migrating dove, and the barley helps to stabilize the banks of a new pond. In the fall, Saso mows the barley and plants grasses so waterfowl can forage through the cut grain and nest in native grasses near the food supply. The oaks provide prime habitat for wood ducks. With the help of Dr. Ed Channing, who works with the federal government to band wood ducks and doves, Saso established 25-30 nesting boxes, with plans for 50-100 more. Some of the ponds are open with grasses and fields around their edges, while others are dense with shrubs, willows and oak around the edges and small islands in the middle. The water in the sloughs is shallower, and the area around them has thick willows and shrubs, which is attractive habitat for quail. The diversity of habitat attracts and supports a variety of wildlife and migrating waterfowl year-round.

The ponds are connected with a system of concrete pipes donated by the City of Modesto. The large pipes weigh several tons, which is necessary, Saso says, “because the floods will wipe them out otherwise.” Saso has suffered damage and setbacks due to floods, especially the...
disastrous flood of 1997, but “the floods are natural and also help invigorate the land,” so Saso expects the floods and understands the dual nature of the elements.

Establishing the habitat was costly, but since it provides a community service, Saso found ready support from government agencies, Ducks Unlimited, California Waterfowl Association and several other groups in the community to contribute to his investment. In particular, the local USDA-NRCS provided funding for the projects on the property through the Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program.

The ponds and lake are the more expensive part of the property. Once the pond sites are dug and leveled, a layer of diatomaceous earth and bentonite clay is added. The earth filters the water, and the clay seals it so the ponds hold the water diverted to them. Saso gets the mixture from a winery that uses it in wine filtration. Then the pipes with gates are installed so Saso can divert the water wherever it is needed. NRCS donates native wild seeds that are planted in the area so when water is added, lush habitat springs from what once was a barren sand bar.

The area attracts a variety of wildlife, especially bird populations that include egrets, herons, pelicans, bald eagles, kite hawks, osprey, king fishers, red-tailed hawks, several species of geese, diver ducks, mud hens, cacklers, mallards, wood ducks, pintails, shovel-beaks, shore birds, quail, dove, pheasant, and countless others. The 340-acre West Hilmar Wildlife Refuge is located just across the river from Saso’s land, and the egrets that utilize the rookery there often come across the river to feed in the feed plots Saso has established. Saso also sees beaver, river otters, cottontails, coyotes, squirrels, and other land animals on the property.

The success of the property as a wildlife preserve is unquestionable, and Saso displays a proud smile when he first shows visitors the murky, muddy-colored water that enters the preserve, and then shows them the crystal clear water running through the last gate and into the river. The fact that this project is a private effort where many local people cooperate to improve habitat for wildlife is an important aspect of this ranch. Local government agencies have been pleased to note the increase of private efforts like Saso’s in Stanislaus County, and are eager to support such endeavors. Saso says, “The Wingsetter Ranch is an excellent example of private people working together to find private solutions for agriculture while providing enormous benefits to wildlife.”

Saso credits the Stanislaus County Natural Resources Conservation Service, under the direction of Michael McElhiney, as well as the USDA for their roles in the success of the project.
Joseph Gallo Farms, located in central Merced County, is one of the largest dairy operations in the US with around 30,000 cows, 15,000 of which are milkers. Joseph Gallo Farms (JGF) is a family-owned company, and has 5 dairies along with 15,000 acres of corn, grain, and irrigated pastureland. Most of the milk from the dairy operation goes to make cheese.

Randy Riviere is the director of JGF’s Department of Environmental and Government Affairs, and he develops and oversees the dairy’s conservation farming practices. Conservation is important to the family, says Riviere. “The Gallo family has always had an environmental ethic.” He says the dairy’s conservation practices fall under two categories, “compliance and compatibility.” Compliance activities “ensure that all dairy functions comply with regulatory requirements set forth by various public agencies.” These practices include making sure wastewater doesn’t get into streams, improving wastewater holding facilities, incorporating new lagoons, and continuing the “nitrogen balance” by fertilizing fields with manure, feeding the harvested hay to the cattle, and fertilizing the fields again.

Riviere admits compatibility is the fun and interesting area for him, as it challenges the environmental manager with balancing the dairy’s need for operations to be cost-effective, and making sure management practices benefit wildlife. This is particularly important since much of the farmland is located adjacent to one of the more important remnant wildlife habitat regions in California, the Grasslands Ecological Area, which includes more than 160,000 acres of national wildlife refuges, state wildlife areas and private wildlife habitats. The Grasslands Ecological Area is the largest contiguous block of wetlands remaining in the Central Valley. Riviere says compatibility practices include “planting wildlife compatible crops like cereal grains, corn, alfalfa, and irrigated pasture.” Once these fields are planted, they are managed with wildlife in mind. “We work to reduce pesticide use, and we pay attention to the chronology of planting and harvesting.” For instance, grain fields planted near the wildlife refuge are planted late to ensure short grasses for waterfowl to safely forage.
fowl to safely forage. If the grain is to be cut for silage during the nesting season, it is planted far away from the wetlands. They plan to use flushing bars on harvesting equipment for any silage operations conducted during the nesting season. Irrigated pastures are grazed with wildlife in mind, rotating the cattle to keep the grass short enough to provide safe foraging habitat, but long enough to provide feed.

JGF has partnered with many different agencies and groups to help establish habitat restoration projects of wetlands and riparian areas. They include the US Fish and Wildlife Service, Ducks Unlimited, the Natural Resources Conservation Service and the California Department of Fish and Game. The habitat restoration projects are aimed at integrating farming operations with the Grasslands landscape. Wetlands have been restored on marginal farm ground, and JGF encourages their use to provide flood control and habitat for waterfowl and other species. Many of these projects are cost-share programs, though JGF’s other conservation practices are viewed as normal management of the dairy, and JGF absorbs their cost.

JGF also has a unique partnership with US Fish and Wildlife Service on Joseph Gallo Bear Creek Ranch, which consists of over 2,000 acres of farmland and wetland habitat. On this ranch, wildlife compatible cropping patterns such as cereal grain, com alfalfa and irrigated pasture are integrated with wetland and riparian habitats and protected in perpetuity by a conservation easement.

Riviere maintains that JGF dairy operations are valuable as an open-space buffer against increased urban encroachment near the Grassland Ecological Area. Forming the Bear Creek Ranch “agricultural easement” was an important step in the land protection strategies considered in the San Joaquin Valley, and serves as a blueprint for other easements currently under consideration.

Riviere is proud to be part of an organization that is progressive in wildlife-friendly farming techniques. “The Gallo family is committed to considering wildlife needs along with the requirements of a profitable operation.”

Mike Gallo, the CEO of JGF, provides an added perspective to the ranch’s commitment to the environment: “I grew up on this landscape and feel that it is very important to make sure it’s still here for future generations. Of course, I’m a business man as well, and I think it’s simply good business to do our best to work with the environment, not against it.”
COMMITMENT TO CONSERVATION

SIERRA REGION
Larry Hyder owns and manages several stands of Christmas trees and timber land in El Dorado County. He also operates a catch and release fly fishing program. His property is home to many species of wildlife including deer, bears, mountain lions, foxes, coyotes, raccoons, rabbits, turkeys, and trout. Hyder has worked extensively on stream improvement on his home property as well as several other streams on separate lands. He says that it’s “fun to show our place as an example of what can be done.” He adds, “We have a motto that we’ve always had and always will have as long as the good Lord gives us the opportunity to manage these things: ‘leave it better than you found it.’”

This motto carries through to Hyder’s everyday management practices. He does prescribed burns to help clean out and revive the land. He explains that these burns allow for the old, woody vegetation to be cleaned out encouraging new, tender vegetation and wildflowers to grow in. They also serve to burn out old, diseased stumps. This keeps disease and fungus from spreading, as well as providing new burrows for frogs, lizards, and snakes. He also says that as leaves, needles, and soil eventually fill up the holes left by the burned out stumps, “the finest growing medium in the world” is created. The fires, of course, also help recycle nutrients back into the soil. According to Hyder, “Prescribed burning is the key...it’s one of the most important things for wildlife.”

Another thing that Hyder is heavily involved in is maintaining and creating stream habitat for fish. He comments on the fact that fish need to have deep pools to stay cool, as well as the more shallow gravel bars to spawn. He continuously cleans the trash and debris from his streams and hauls in gravel to make sure that there are enough pools and spawning beds for the fish, especially after large storms and floods, which can cause considerable damage to the streams. He is motivated to do these things because, he says, “We love the land - we love the land and the streams and everything that lives here.”
Hyder is disappointed that “the world does not understand how people fall in love with the land.” When people who are unfamiliar with his efforts to help wildlife question his motivations, he says, “that hurts me more than anything.” He adds that, “people have no idea what [ranchers] go through...what they do in their everyday lives...to protect wildlife.” Wildlife populations in his area have been increasing “unbelievably,” says Hyder. This is no doubt due in large part to the efforts of Hyder and others to build and maintain wildlife habitat. He enjoys having other people come enjoy the wildlife on his property, and each year a group of physically challenged kids come out and spends the day fishing on his ranch.

He explains that his motto includes people as well. He wants to leave things better for his children, for his neighbors, and for anyone else who is touched by his efforts. Says Hyder, “It’s a philosophy—it’s a way of life.”

Hyder is concerned that often, well meaning restrictions can get in the way of people’s efforts to help wildlife by causing unnecessary headaches, waiting periods, and paperwork. Says Hyder, “Regulations are a curse to the people who genuinely want to help.” He thinks that voluntary actions are the best way to approach helping wildlife. “People don’t want to be told what to do...that’s the key to it— you have to do it because you want to do it.”

Hyder fears that he may sound “old fashioned” when he talks about his desire to learn about God’s creation and “why it was so beautiful and why it was so good.” Hyder simply wants to keep this process going as he continues in his efforts to protect and promote wildlife.

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Stan Hunewill is continuing a ranching tradition started by his great-grandfather in 1861. The ranch is located near Bridgeport in Mono County, and since the 1930s has been a dude ranch as well as an outside cattle operation. Running the dude ranch has given Hunewill a little more insight into the “environmentalists’ thinking,”

Holistic Resource Management
Is Key on Cattle Ranch

For the last several years, the Hunewills have practiced what is known as HRM, or “Holistic Resource Management,” a philosophy and program that deals with grazing and land management practices. They are excited about the success of HRM on their ranch, and Hunewill says, “it’s gratifying to see it really work on the land…it does make a difference.” Using the HRM model, the Hunewills have put up fencing that allows them to selectively graze their cattle. They use their cows to keep the riparian areas along the East Walker River and Robinson Creek healthy while at the same time they are able to keep them away from duck habitat during nesting season. According to Hunewill, “you can graze a lot of these areas if you manage it properly.”

Hunewill has also re-established a 4-acre stock pond, where many species of trout are raised. In addition, many species of birds use the pond and area around it as nesting habitat. For several years he has allowed UC Extension and other governmental agencies to conduct studies on his land, with the goal of improving water quality. Many of the studies have shown water quality in that watershed is not significantly affected by grazing operations. Instead, the water quality was impaired in higher elevations, above all the cattle land in that area. He is working with the agencies to find ways to improve the poor water quality he receives, so he can pass cleaner water downstream.

Hunewill has worked with many governmental agencies including the California Department of Forestry, The Natural Resources Conservation Service, and California Fish and Game. He has found

“FEW PEOPLE KNOW THE LAND AS WELL AS THE PEOPLE WHO’VE LIVED ON IT FOR SEVERAL GENERATIONS... WHO’VE SEEN WHAT WORKS AND WHAT DOESN’T.”
in working with government agencies, “the local people are reasonable, but they have mandates from higher up,” and often those mandates prove unreasonable. “We need to talk face-to-face with the high-up people [in the agencies], so we can figure out if they have a hidden agenda, or if they really care about the land.” However, he has a strong desire to work with them, “because that's the only way the land benefits.” He thinks that more ranchers would join forces with conservation agencies “if the higher-ups would meet with us and show real sincerity in dealing with the land.”

Hunewill is concerned with regulations and government mandates. He believes that “there's a trend with federal mandates...[the government says] ‘you're not a good manager and we'll help you do it right’...that kind of irritates a lot of folks.” He understands that “few people know the land as well as the people who've lived on it for several generations...who've seen what works and what doesn’t.” But Hunewill says that it's equally important to

Hunewill thinks that more ranchers would join forces with conservation agencies “if the higher-ups would meet with us and show real sincerity in dealing with the land.”

“to work with the [government] agencies on a win-win basis, but when you're working with the government, that's not always easy because you're not on a level playing field.” However, Hunewill’s main concern is caring for wildlife and the land. He knows that “there’s nothing to be gained by being an antagonist.”

One of the questions the Hunewills ask themselves before making management decisions is, “is it socially, economically, and environmentally sound?” This attitude guides them in their management practices and Hunewill says, “We like to see everything living harmoniously and prosperously,” and he’s careful to explain that that’s not just a “warm fuzzy feeling.” He says that it requires constant monitoring and the assumption that you’re not always right.

What it comes down to for Hunewill and his family is simply the fact that “we feel lucky to get to live here,” and their family will continue to care for wildlife and the land as they have since their great-grandfather started it in 1861.
Craig Ferrari purchased several acres north of Auburn in Nevada County 18 years ago, and uses it to grow retail, wholesale, and choose and cut Christmas trees; although he confesses that his first love is wildlife. After buying the property, the first thing he did was build a small, one-acre pond right in the center of it, explaining, “as they say, you build it, they will come.” He’s also involved in several other projects to attract wildlife to his farm.

Working with the California Waterfowl Association and Cornell University, Ferrari has installed 120 nesting boxes on his small farm for gray squirrels, bats, wood ducks, barn and screech owls, western bluebirds, and sparrow hawks. He says that one out of every ten Christmas trees has a songbird nest in it, and 500 wood ducks and 120 Canadian geese are raised on the farm each year. Some of the other species of wildlife on the property include quail, turkeys, deer, coyotes, bobcats, and cougars.

On his farm, says Ferrari, “everything’s been designed around wildlife.”

In addition to these efforts, Ferrari creates brush piles to provide cover for birds, and maintains wetland, nesting, and brood areas. He also plants clover in his tree plots to help control erosion and recycle nitrogen back into the soil. All of these efforts are voluntary, and Ferrari and his wife, Leslie, supply all of the labor and resources to make it happen.

Although expensive, he reports that “it’s been worth it,” although “it doesn’t happen overnight.” He has worked with several government programs to help establish conservation practices, and especially likes the Wetland Restoration Project programs, but is disappointed that “the good programs are being phased out.”

Ferrari is also involved in a 320-acre project near Woodland, where he and the landowner, working closely with several government agencies, would like to turn the farm into a permanent wildlife refuge. But, according to Ferrari, they are often hesitant to take action and risk losing the right to farm the property in the future. For example, Ferrari would like to flood an area to create a pond for wildlife, but he is afraid to keep it flooded for over five years. After five years, the government will take away the right to farm it again, saying that the area would then be considered a permanent wetland. A concerned Ferrari comments, “that’s not something I agree with when we’re working to improve things and [the government] comes in and dictates that, ‘you can’t farm this anymore.’” Says Ferrari, “They shouldn’t be able to dictate how you run your farm.”
CENTRAL COAST REGION
Wildlife is an important part of the landscape, and is of huge concern to the management on a 38,000-acre ranch in Santa Barbara County. The ranch was bought in 1952 by the Flood family, who live in San Francisco. They hired Ed Holt to work on the ranch 25 years ago, and Holt has been the manager of the cow-calf, vineyard and winery operations for the past 16 years. Holt believes in the importance of managing for wildlife and the whole ecosystem, as well as the commodities represented on the ranch, and says his voluntary conservation practices are "about heritage and education."

In this semi-arid coastal climate, where the ranch averages 15 inches of rainfall per year, grazing practices play a huge role in the health of the environment. Holt says, "We graze with a goal of 30% residue," so almost one-third of the growth remains when cattle are moved off the pasture. This goal can be high for the area, but it fits nicely with Holt’s drought strategy, where he thins herds in dry years to match the slower plant growth, making his operation sustainable and consistent in quality through changes in weather patterns. "We’re committed to no overgrazing," says Holt. "Many ranchers think the ideal method [of grazing] is the wagon wheel," where sections are grazed in a constant rotation, but "we look at it as a larger system."

Holt uses rotational grazing, but in a more unconventional pattern. He looks at each pasture as a unique ecosystem; some require grazing every few months, others are more sensitive and require years of rest before cattle are needed again. Holt’s rotation is characterized by short periods of grazing and long periods of rest, staggered to meet the diverse needs of each unique grazing area. Holt also manages the cattle herd to match the cycles of the land, changing calving times to January and February. That causes the time when pastures are most abundant to coincide when the cattle’s feed requirements are the greatest.

Holt’s conservation practices aren’t all about economics, though. "We’re also involved in setting aside pristine areas of the ranch, including riparian habitat.” Holt identifies and fences off many sensitive areas near water sources, and is developing a written management plan for each location. “You don’t want to just fence it off and never touch it again,” he says. “That’s not managing it, that’s just letting it go.” These areas benefit from careful, site-specific management, and are "softly" grazed for a short time every three, four, or sometimes five years. Holt is also careful to fence many areas around the two creeks that run through the property, so he can keep the cattle out in the spring, when riparian species are the most susceptible. Holt comments, “When we rebuild springs and do other work, we’re sensitive to the environment." Holt takes note of other species living and propagating in specific areas, and manages around their most sensitive times. "At certain times of the year we avoid certain areas" for the benefit of wildlife.

Holt also takes his habitat-friendly practices into the vineyards he manages. "We’ve used Integrated Pest Management in the vineyards since 1982," which, he says, was before many people knew what IPM was. In addition to releasing beneficial insects, Holt maintains cover crops in the rows. That has been...
interesting for Holt, who says, "we’ve gone through a whole cycle," of different cover crops, and "we’ve found the best are native species." The native species fertilize the ground, reduce erosion, and act as an insectary for beneficial insects. Holt is careful to be "very soft" on chemical usage, especially with regard to the amount and type of chemical applied. He uses specialized equipment that incorporates weather information into precision management practices. He uses data in disease modeling, and develops a high level of tolerance for pests and mildew. He also uses drip irrigation as a management tool, and to conserve water. Holt says, "We’re spending less money and growing better quality fruit" using these practices, and they benefit the wildlife, too. Holt maintains "wildlife corridors" within the vineyard, through the middle and around all the edges. These areas contain thriving native species and Holt leaves them undisturbed throughout the year. Holt is not sure how he will manage these areas the best, since he won’t bring cattle inside the vineyards to graze the corridors. Instead, he will probably burn pieces of the corridor sporadically to encourage growth and keep invasion of non-native species to a minimum.

While all of Holt’s conservation practices benefit wildlife on the ranch, he admits, "economics is a motivation" for his habits. The nature of his attitude about conservation practices often conflicts with his view of government involvement. Holt sees conservation as an ingrained attitude about the management of the land, where decisions are made conscious of the effects they will have a hundred years down the road. It involves constant education and change, improving awareness all the time. Government, by nature, is oriented towards a shorter time frame, as different administrations cycle through, and different values are placed at the forefront. He sees government employees as having a "god-like" approach, where their way is the right way, period. He says truly positive involvement by the government “would be more like a partnership.” He also says, "Farmers and ranchers can believe in something strongly enough to pass it on to generation after generation," while the values of agencies are more cyclical. "They [the agencies] want instant results, and that’s just not realistic.” Holt sees that when the attitude towards private ownership is negative, “the very thing they want to do,” which is promote long-term conservation practices, “is what they’re destroying.”

Holt is frustrated by blanket environmental statements, which he says are unrealistic. “Each canyon, creek, and acre is a unique site that needs to be managed in a specific way. I know this property,” says Holt. And he sees its management needs as varied. He knows conservation involves continual change, and farmers and ranchers understand that.

That’s not to say all of Holt’s experiences with government involvement have been bad. “I’ve had good luck with federal and state agencies,” he says. “They have been very helpful.” Holt has worked with the US Forest Service, the California Water Resources Control Board, and Cal-EPA. Holt’s views are borne of his immense love of the land and the wildlife he encourages. He believes stewardship is part of the heritage of being a farmer or rancher that’s passed on through generations. He says with every conservation practice, he needs to ask, “How do we make this part of the heritage of the ranch?” “I’m a farmer,” Holt says, “but I’m also a manager of a wildlife habitat, and I’m trying to do a good job of it.”

HOLT SEES GOVERNMENT EMPLOYEES AS HAVING A “GOD-LIKE” APPROACH, WHERE THEIR WAY IS THE RIGHT WAY, PERIOD.

HE SAYS TRULY POSITIVE INVOLVEMENT BY THE GOVERNMENT “WOULD BE MORE LIKE A PARTNERSHIP.”
For Ken Doty, farming his 915 acres of citrus and avocados in Santa Barbara County is a family affair. His grandfather established the farm, and his father is still involved in it. Doty’s daughter is a student at a college with one of the state’s highest rated agriculture programs and is excited about her future in agriculture as well. Doty’s family enjoys the wildlife that frequents their farm, which include bear, mountain lions, deer, and many smaller species. Doty even describes himself as a “redneck bird watcher,” identifying red tailed hawks, red shouldered hawks, Cooper’s hawks, sharp shinned hawks, kestrel, white-tailed kites, northern harriers, countless songbirds, quail and dove on his property.

Doty says, “Some conservation practices are just smart farming.” He uses repellants and wire cages around young trees to discourage deer instead of chasing them off the property, cutting back of pre-emergent herbicides, and growing cover crops between rows to cut down on erosion, while encouraging beneficial insects and increased wildlife habitat. He also utilizes de-silting basins for his runoff, and happily recounts the numerous waterfowl that frequent the areas.

“If I can’t enjoy the wildlife, what’s the use of farming?” Doty asks. He’s committed to conservation on his property, though he admits it’s not always easy. “We’ve had to re-learn and re-think practices and timing on our operation, which has caused a lot of heavier machinery use and the resulting rescheduling nightmares.” Doty does all of his conservation without the help of outside agencies, but he’s “tired of coming to the table. We’re always the target, and we never get anything back.” He is frustrated with superior attitudes and the belief that environmental groups could and should “call all the shots” on his private land and operation. However, Doty has shown private, voluntary efforts can be very successful. “We’ve just accepted the costs as part of the package.”

Doty is good-natured about his wildlife-friendly farming practices, and says “our job as farmers and stewards of the land, is to do as much as we can to pass the land on to the next generation in as good or better condition than we found it in.”
Rick Shade is a custom grove manager in Santa Barbara County. He currently manages 20 acres of citrus groves, and 280 acres of avocado groves. This property is home to more than just fruit, though, boasting populations of hawks, vultures, coyotes, squirrel, countless songbirds, and numerous creek species of fowl, amphibians, and fish, including steelhead.

On this ranch, conservation is the key. Shade uses cover cropping to encourage beneficial insects and maintain soil quality and health, no-till farming to improve air quality and habitat, and is involved in canopy management for conservation.

The creek running through the ranch is of special importance to Shade. “We manage runoff and we use no pre-emergent chemicals,” which contributes to the health of the watershed. In fact, Shade has worked with the Resource Conservation District (RCD) and “a slew of other agencies from federal to county to local” to develop a habitat improvement and creek restoration plan. It will be a cost-share venture with the RCD initiated by Shade and the landowners he manages for. He believes it will benefit the species found in the creek, improve the watershed, and also be beneficial for the farm he manages.

Shade believes voluntary conservation practices are the most beneficial to wildlife. “Most farmers want to [use conservation practices], but mandates end up discouraging them by throwing up a wall.” He points out that farmers are independent and work well with flexible programs, where they can use their knowledge of their specific land and the wildlife that inhabits it to develop a site-specific conservation plan. But overall, most farmers are motivated to use conservation practices on their own. Shade says the motivation behind his conservation efforts is “we just want to be good neighbors.”
Kevin Merrill oversees about 1200 acres of premium wine grape vineyards for the Mesa Vineyard Management Company in Santa Barbara County, which manages a total of 10,000 acres of vineyards in three coastal counties. Wildlife abounds on the land he manages, including squirrels, gophers, rabbits, bobcats, coyotes, hawks, deer, badgers, many insects, countless predator and song birds, spade-footed toads, and the federally listed endangered Tiger Salamander.

Wildlife beneficiaries:
- Squirrels, gophers, rabbits, bobcats, hawks, deer, badgers, predator and song birds, spade-footed toads, and tiger salamander

Conservation practices:
- 14-acre buffer zone around vernal pool, planting of oak trees to create habitat, use of oak logs, owl boxes, permanent cover crops

Kevin Merrill, Santa Barbara County Vineyard Manager

After developing this plan "we invited Fish and Wildlife out to do a count (of the Tiger Salamander), and they found about 30 from the get go," which was very encouraging. Since then, Merrill has encouraged the county and other agencies to visit the ranch and monitor the population to show his practices help encourage the endangered salamander.

The Tiger Salamander was listed under the Endangered Species Act (ESA) during the development of the management plan for the vernal pool. As a result, the management plan left the landowners with a $100,000 bill, which came out of the profits of the ranch. "We had no opportunity to work with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service [for a cost-share program]." The Tiger Salamander had an emergency listing, so it occurred very fast, and once it was listed it was too late to share the cost with the government.

“The ESA was created to protect a public good, but the landowner has to pay for the protection, and bears the brunt of the costs, while the public doesn’t pay a thing. The landowner should be compensated,” he believes. Still, Merrill thinks most landowners are interested in management practices that benefit wildlife, pointing out they initiated the biological studies and plans for the area themselves, knowing full well such an action invited interference and restrictions from the government. To them, the benefits of preserving sensitive areas outweighed the costs.

“In today’s world many people are environmentally conscious and watch over other people’s property. We need to learn to work together and educate those people about what we’re doing, before we’re hemmed in by the federal government and the Endangered Species Act and we can’t do anything at all.” Merrill believes voluntary conservation practices work better to protect wildlife than federal mandates. “The voluntary practices of farmers are what’s kept the species here all along.” Merrill believes, “Farmers are willing to help and learn,” and with cooperation, everyone, especially the wildlife, will benefit.
Dave Fisher, a high desert cattleman, lives and works on a San Bernardino County ranch that’s been in operation over 150 years. The ranch is located about 25 miles southeast of Barstow and is home to many species of wildlife, including chukkers, three species of quail, two species of dove, red tail hawks, golden eagles, big horn sheep, mule deer, coyotes, foxes, and desert tortoise. Fisher is especially proud of the flourishing population of big horn sheep, which he attributes to his water developments. He also mentions that his ranch is home to the “most viable population” of desert tortoise in California.

Fisher practices responsible grazing management and comments that the plants and grasses on his land are very productive, thrifty, and vigorous where his cattle graze. If plants are not grazed, he says, they become “stagnant and woody.” Wildlife avoids those areas and often grazes right along with the cattle where the plants are green and tender. He has put quite a bit of effort into developing water in the hills and canyons of his ranch. These water sources benefit not only the cattle, but the wildlife populations as well. According to Fisher, “when you develop water you literally develop an ecosystem around it.” He also notes that some species of migratory animals now migrate through his ranch to take advantage of the water supplies.

Wildlife populations are thriving on his property, and, adds Fisher, “It’s almost evident as soon as you cross the boundaries of our ranch.” He is proud of the strong populations of wildlife on his land, but is upset that often government agencies get credit for such successes when it is actually due to the voluntary efforts of farmers and ranchers. Says Fisher, “We live here—this is our life—not only our livelihood but our life.” He adds that voluntary efforts like his are simply “all a part of our operation—it’s a part of our life...a part of us. It’s the way we operate.”

Fisher wonders about government mandates, asking, “Does that mean that the majority of the American people mandate...that someone goes out and tells ranchers and farmers what to do with their land?”

But Fisher will continue in his efforts regardless of fear of regulation, saying, “There’s nothing like seeing wildlife do well because of your effort...because of your activities.” But he is also humble in these efforts, commenting, “This nation is so young—what do we know about the environment anyway? It’s with the grace of God that we’ve got what we’ve got.”
William Tulloch and his wife have operated a cattle ranch in eastern San Diego County for most of their lives, and according to Tulloch, his wife’s family has been in the business for over 100 years. The management of the ranch reflects the Tulloch’s desire to see wildlife prosper there. They believe that most of the ranchers in their area feel the same way—doing what they can to leave wildlife undisturbed. Some of the species on the ranch include bobcats, coyotes, mountain lions, badgers, ground squirrels, possums, deer, quail, doves, roadrunners, and golden eagles. Woodpeckers and starlings nest in the Tulloch’s yard.

Tulloch keeps his windmills running on sections of land that have already been grazed. He says, “I do this mainly for the wildlife,” allowing for a constant supply of water for the animals after the natural springs have dried up. He has many soil conservation projects, and he would like to do more to control the mountain lion population because of their significant effect, especially recently, on the deer population. However, he says that he’s only able to get depredation permits to trap them if one is found killing a calf.

This is frustrating because according to Tulloch, “the deer population has really suffered.”

The most effective conservation tool Tulloch uses has been controlled burns, which discourage non-native annuals and encourage native perennial grasses. The burns cut down on woody overgrowth the wildlife can’t eat and encourages young green shoots, which are a favorite of the deer, particularly. However, lately he’s run into problems with the Air Resources Control Board, which has issued an edict that holds a farmer or rancher responsible and financially liable for air pollution caused by controlled burns. Tulloch is nervous to take on that liability, so he is holding off on controlled burns until the issue is resolved. Currently, he says, the California Department of Forestry is trying to resolve the issue, once they see the benefits of controlled burns. Tulloch is positive about the burns because “burning opens up areas and brings springs back to life, providing a better food source for wildlife.”

Tulloch believes that larger parcels of land like his provide a “refuge” for wildlife. Tulloch enjoys the increased populations of wildlife on his lands. “We enjoy having them around. They’re part of the natural scheme of things.” He believes the government doesn’t give wildlife enough credit. “Wildlife generally have the ability to take care of themselves.” He still believes in using practices that help them, though. “Wildlife will take advantage of any improvements you make on the land,” and that kind of reaction is what encourages him to use conservation practices.

Tulloch is discouraged by the management of public lands, especially in his area, commenting that “the quality of the public lands has deteriorated drastically in the last 40 years or so.” He believes that this is due to the “no-burn policies” and other similar management practices. “Government lands are overgrown with weeds, which take up all available water and choke out feed vegetation.” When the food and water disappear, “the animals go someplace else. But with proper management, good water and a secure food supply, they’ll come back.”

Tulloch is opposed to the use of federal mandates, believing them to be a “crutch” to control private land. He will continue in his voluntary efforts to promote wildlife on his ranch, simply because he likes to see wildlife.
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