The Nature Conservancy
SAVING THE LAST GREAT PLACES ON EARTH

conservation spotlight



Fast Facts

LOCATION: Near Galt in southeast Sacramento County

SIZE: 12,362 acres or 19.3 square miles

PARTNERS: Bureau of Land Management, Folsom Field Office; California Department of Fish & Game; Ducks Unlimited, Inc.; California Department of Water Resources; Sacramento County Department of Regional Parks, Open Space and Recreation; Wildlife Conservation Board.



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In California's Great Central Valley, a conservation easement on Howard Ranch protects oak woodlands, water quality and rare vernal pools. As part of an innovative partnership between conservation and agriculture, Conservancy staff conduct research on the property alongside a productive ranching operation.

Howard Ranch

Ranching and Rare Habitat: Living in Harmony

California's Great Central Valley, a fertile and ancient seabed, sustains a vast and stunning array of flora and fauna. However, subdivisions, commercial development and vineyards threaten the subtle beauty and diversity of the region. In many cases, the numerous ranches and farms scattered across the area are now the last refuge for wildlife.

Howard Ranch takes its name from former owner Charles Howard; also the proud owner of famed racehorse, Seabiscuit. The property, held by Howard's estate for nearly 70 years, harbors rare vernal pools (springtime wetlands), extensive blue oak woodlands and other native species, while much of the land to the west and south has been converted to vineyards. Using a plowing process called "deep ripping," vineyard conversion can destroy vernal pools and reduce water quality by damaging landscapes which naturally filter pollutants.

By the late 1990s, Howard Ranch was one of the few remaining vernal pool habitats in Sacramento County. After being identified by The Nature Conservancy as a vital landscape, and identified by the California State Water Resources Control Board as essential to local water quality, the Conservancy purchased the property in 1999.

Preserving A Legacy

With the land now safe from development, The Nature Conservancy has taken steps to protect the biological values of the property while ensuring the rangeland stays in



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production for the benefit of the local economy. The Conservancy created a conservation easement – a legal document permanently attached to the deed on the property. This easement protects vernal pools and dry grasslands by restricting against subdivision, as well as restricting orchard and vineyard development. The number of cattle allowed on the property is also limited and grazing is permitted only between November and May. In addition to being highly beneficial to the plants and animals on the property, these restrictions are widely considered to be good grazing practices and do not interfere with a profitable ranching operation.

Opportunity To Learn

With the land values protected, The Nature Conservancy re-sold Howard Ranch to a California-based rancher in 2001. A positive working relationship with the new owner allowed The Nature Conservancy to initiate a two-year study to determine the effects of grazing on rare vernal pools. Thousands of grazing animals such as deer and tule elk were once part of the natural systems in the Central Valley where cattle now roam. Conservancy scientists have determined that grazing, as a natural process, can actually be necessary for the survival of vernal pools, as well as the flora and fauna that depend on them.

Results

Howard Ranch is now part of the 40,000-acre Cosumnes River Preserve, established by The Nature Conservancy in 1984. Along with several other working farms on the preserve, the property serves as an example of the compatibility that can exist between agriculture and the natural environment.

How You Can Help

Visit the Cosumnes River Preserve. Explore its natural beauty; call the Visitor Center at [916] 684.2816 or send e-mail to info@cosumnes.org.

Become a member. The success of The Nature Conservancy depends on support from communities and people like you.

Make a special gift. Contribute directly to the success of the Conservancy's California program.

Stay informed. Visit nature.org/california or call [415] 777.0487.

The Cosumnes River Preserve

Howard Ranch, along with several other working farms, is now part of the Cosumnes River Preserve. Established by The Nature Conservancy in 1984, the preserve encompasses 40,000 acres of vital, scenic landscape in southeast Sacramento County. Working closely with seven governmental and non-profit partners, the Conservancy is safeguarding and restoring the preserve's freshwater wetlands and unique valley oaks along Delta streams. The Cosumnes Preserve also serves to demonstrate compatibility between agriculture, recreation and the natural environment. For more information, please contact the Cosumnes River Preserve Visitor Center at [916] 684.2816, or send e-mail to info@cosumnes.org. The Visitor Center is open 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. Saturday and Sunday.

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