



Finding common ground for ranching and conservation

Background and Overview

The San Benito Working Landscapes Group (SBWLG) is a voluntary partnership among agencies, non-governmental organizations, and ranchers, which seeks to preserve and enhance the open, working landscapes of San Benito County and adjacent areas. In recognition of the vital role that ranchers play in caring for San Benito County's unique and valuable rangelands, the SBWLG connects land owners and managers to tools, events, and opportunities to support the economic viability of family ranches, and the stewardship of natural and cultural resources. The SBWLG also connects willing landowners and conservation partners for on-the-ground range management or wildlife habitat improvement projects.

The methods used by the Working Landscapes Group to achieve these goals include meetings, community events, on-line and person-to-person information-sharing, and development of a Landowners' Toolbox for San Benito County. Tools for interested landowners include: technical assistance, habitat improvement grants or cost-share programs, permit coordination, and financial and/or marketing tools to improve the economic viability of San Benito ranching and farming operations. Every aspect of the Landowners' Toolbox project is voluntary.

Partners include: Local ranchers and farmers, USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service, San Benito Agricultural Land Trust, San Benito Resource Conservation District, Bureau of Land Management, San Benito Firesafe Council, UC Cooperative Extension, Central Coast Rangeland Coalition, San Benito County Weed Management Area, Paicines Ranch, California Rangeland Trust, Rancher-to-Rancher Project, Pinnacles National Park, US Fish & Wildlife Service Partners for Wildlife Program, The Nature Conservancy, Pinnacles Partnership, and others.

Funding: Pinnacles Partnership, a non-profit organization, was awarded a small grant in 2012 by the Rose Foundation's California Wildlands Grassroots Fund to contract a project coordinator (Karminder Brown) and a "community connector" (Lisa Smith) to coordinate the activities and communications of the SBWLG. Subsequent funding has been received from Pinnacles National Park, the Loma Prieta Resource Conservation District, and private donations.

For more information or to sign up for e-mail updates, please contact:
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Selected Accomplishments:

- Successfully competed for technical assistance from the Rivers, Trails and Conservation Assistance Program to create the Landowner's Toolbox for San Benito County (2012)
- Conducted interviews with 13 south San Benito ranching families, to gain a better understanding of perspectives, values, successes and challenges, and to gather input for the Landowners' Toolbox (2012-13). Interview summary document available by request.
- Convened local stakeholder meeting to present and discuss responses and themes from rancher interviews (Mar 2013).
- Connected a dozen south County ranch owners to opportunity for free well-water sampling (2013) and free non-lead ammunition (on-going)
- Assisted in planning annual Continuing Education Seminar for Ranchers in Hollister, to address topics identified by local ranchers and conservation partners (2012-2015)
- Connected Tres Pinos landowner to volunteer labor for on-farm riparian habitat project
- Helped facilitate grant applications to fund California Rangeland Trust conservation easements on two ranches in south San Benito County (2014, 2015)
- Co-sponsored oak tree shelter BBQ/workshop (2014)
- Connected landowners to conservation funding and technical assistance from the USDA-NRCS and USFWS Partners for Wildlife Program (2014-2016)
- Completed draft Rancher's Toolbox – a list of resources to provide quick access to information related to ranching and conservation (Dec 2014)
- Created San Benito Ranchers conversation group on www.FarmsReach.com (2014)
- Connected local teachers to hands-on science opportunity for students at riparian restoration project on a San Benito County ranch (2015, 2016)
- Helped facilitate public-private tire clean-up on a San Benito County ranch (2015)

Ongoing Activities:

- Provide e-mail updates to landowners/managers and other partners on available tools, resources, events, and opportunities related to the protection and enhancement of working landscapes in San Benito County and adjacent areas
- Convene twice annual roundtable meeting of Working Landscape Group partners
- Document and share local success stories related to ranching and conservation
- Connect willing landowners and agencies/organizations around specific opportunities for sharing technical and financial resources to complete on-the-ground projects (e.g. invasive weed management, habitat improvements, conservation easements, etc.)



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