



Learning and Sharing Ranchers loving the land and using it

by Tracy Schohr, director of rangeland conservation, California Cattlemen's Association.

The longtime thought that opposites attract exemplifies the relationship of George Whitten and Julie Sullivan (pictured at right) of Blue Range Ranch, Saguache, Colo. Sullivan was a city girl, who spent her summers at the beach with dreams of being a dryad – tree spirit. Whitten was a ranch kid, who played in the dirt and helped out on his family's sheep ranch.

The stark opposites in this relationship are very similar to the more than 300 attendees at the 6th annual California Rangeland Conservation Coalition (Rangeland Coalition) Summit held in Modesto Jan. 19. The diverse attendees ranged from local environmental leaders, to national conservation organization lobbyist and agency bureaucrats to California's finest land stewards from across the state – ranchers.

Attendees from up and down the state gathered with a common vision – to learn more about California's ranching legacy and the conservation values it provides to society. Historically, there was striking opposition amongst attendees, but this event continues to bridge the gap amongst diverse rangeland stakeholders annually.

Bridging the gap on loving the land and using it was highlighted

by Sullivan, the event's keynote speaker, who shared with attendees the relationship between her and her husband. She gave hope to a group of open-minded, yet still skeptical attendees.

Sullivan shared with the group an example that she protested the Vietnam War and her husband wanted to enlist. Apparent opposites, yet both had a willingness to make their relationship prosper – similar to Rangeland Coalition partners.

Being open to learn, grow and change was one lesson Sullivan shared with the group.

“For all our supposed delight in adventure, we humans tend to cling to what we know, and to the paradigms that affirm who we already are and what we already believe to be true. The murky mess of opposition holds no appeal. It challenges us at our core. We'll ignore, dismiss or destroy it before we let it change us,” stated Sullivan.

Research and relationships have lead to the continued support of the Rangeland Coalition and growing attendance at the partnership annual educational and networking event. The energy generated working on positive, cooperative ventures is the motivation behind the voluntary participation in the event by



Julie Sullivan and George Whitten

conservationist and ranchers, and the widespread support amongst agencies staff for the partnerships work.

“I am committed to being here because this partnership is making a difference,” stated Carrie Thompson, Sacramento, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

CCA First Vice President **Tim Koopmann**, who ranches near Sunol, stated, “We have a great story to tell of what ranchers are doing on the ground and this partnership provides a growing forum to share those stories and also for ranchers to learn in the process.”

There is a motivation that brings Rangeland Coalition partners and supporters of ranching to the table.

Yet, it is fundamental to recognize there are still differences amongst partners and we must realize how basic or insurmountable they may be. Sullivan shared just that. After just three days of knowing one another, her and her husband decided to give it a shot.

“We took on the potential of our relationship – the conflicts as well as the joys – with whole hearts,” says Julie. “Okay, So we were also in bed during those conversations. Not all partnerships are helped along by love and lust, as ours was early on. But I believe that true partnership requires the same desire to look beneath the surface of our differences.”

Sullivan continued in her talk, “If we are to find solutions to the many and mind-boggling problems facing ourselves and our planet, we need to go beyond convention not just with grazing, but with our concept and practice of partnership, beyond our conventional notions of how to relate to ecological processes, other species and one another.”

This was a fitting statement, considering the summit theme was, *Beyond Conventional Grazing*.

Sullivan provided insight and inspiration, while the event’s afternoon program showcased new research results on the ecological benefits of managed grazing in the state for vernal pool ecosystems, raptors and species of concern in the San Joaquin Valley.

A foundational goal of the partnership is continuing education of partners and the public of the environmental benefits of managed grazing and the benefits provided by California’s ranching industry. The summit and other activities throughout the year carried out through the partnership are changing the conventional anti-grazing sentiment in the state.

Bill Lyons of Mapes Ranch, Modesto, shared a rancher’s perspective at the summit focusing on his personal experiences and providing guidance to agency and environmentalist. The Mapes Ranch has entered into a conservation easement and has also done enhancement projects on the Central Valley property working with the assistance of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service’s Partners for Fish and Wildlife

Program and other programs.

“We must identify incentives for farmers and ranchers so they can improve habitat without disrupting production operations,” stated Lyons.

In conclusion, Lyons brought it home to a vision that he shares with other ranchers, “I preach to my family that in three or four generations they will think that I made the right decisions on the ranch to protect and enhance wildlife values, while preserving an agricultural production operation.”

Building upon Lyons thoughts, Sullivan shared with attendees the basic question she asks herself, “How do we love the land and use it? Love and utilitarianism seem to be in opposition to one another.”

There is no black-and-white answer to this question, much like the many questions surrounding rangeland management.

“But this is the best way, the right way, to think about our world and our place in it? We have to use things to make our way, whether it’s yucca leaves for sandals or elk meat for food. We relate to our world, at least in

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Summit attendees (L to R): U.S. Fish and Wildlife Services’s Carrie Thompson, Sacramento; Natural Resources Conservation Services’s Luana Kiger, Davis; California Department of Fish and Games’s Teri Stewart, Sacramento; and California Farm Bureau Federation’s Noelle Cremers, Sacramento.



Mark Kramer (left) of The Nature Conservancy, Oakland, with CCA member Pete Craig, Davis.



L to R: U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service’s Mary Root, Ventura; Francis Villablanca, Ph.D., with the Biological Sciences Department at California Polytechnic State University, San Luis Obispo; and the California Rangeland Trust’s Nancy Loogman, Sacramento.



CCA members Ryan Nelson and his dad, CCA Past President Mark Nelson, both of Wilton, also attended this year’s summit.

part, by using it, just as a beaver does. We cut, move, gather, arrange, build, destroy, eat,” stated Sullivan.

Like many others in the height of the environmental era in the last century, Sullivan vilified those who used the land, believing the noblest relationship with the land was a spiritual one. In the process she discredited the economic factors of “using” the land.

Today, Sullivan’s views are changed, “Use needn’t damage love, reverence or a sacred awareness of life in all its forms.”

Furthermore, she stated “Like all other beings on the planet, we must use the planet to live on it.”

There is a middle ground which is an important place to find. This is what the Rangeland Coalition has sought to establish over the past five years between environmental advocates, agency regulatory and ranchers.

There was a profound story that Sullivan shared with attendees that should resonate with all ranchers. It has a common theme of opening people’s minds to a new world, that has been shared many times. Yet, too often we may forget just how important it is for the agricultural industry to share our story.

In Sullivan’s case, it was the logging industry specifically, an industry that was easy for her to vilify until she spent a few weeks with them in Washington state.

“It was then that I realized that some of the loggers loved the woods, and loved the skill they had when it came to cutting trees with the least amount of damage to the rest of the forest. They took pride in doing a job well, and she was culpable in whatever impact their work had on the forests she loved.” After all she said, “I used paper and wood.”

Sullivan’s concluding message regarding becoming immersed in the industry she was passionate about: “[It] taught me was how blind I can be to things that are outside my experience. Self-righteousness settles in when I confine myself to experiences, friendships, and reading material that reaffirm what I already believe

to be true, and avoid the people and experiences that shake me from my certainty.”

It is more common than not, that those who criticize ranchers have not talked to a rancher or gone and visited their land to see firsthand how families care for the land and the livestock that they raise. With a growing body of research supporting grazing, a cultural of compassion and a tradition of hard working individuals, those of us



who support ranching must continue to share the our story every chance possible.

MICKELSONS TO HOST WINE COUNTRY HARVEST EVENT TO BENEFIT HEREFORD YOUTH

The Hereford Youth Foundation of America (HYFA), based in Kansas City, Mo., invites Hereford breeders, enthusiasts and supporters to save the date and make plans to attend “The Harvest” fundraiser event at the Kunde Family Estate, located near Sonoma, Aug. 19-21, 2011.

The event will be hosted by the **Jim and Marcia Mickelson family**, Santa Rosa, with all proceeds going to HYFA’s \$5 million capital endowment campaign to benefit scholarships and education for Hereford youth across the nation.

“This is sure to be an unforgettable wine country experience for all who attend,” says Amy Cowan, HYFA director.

The event will start in San Francisco, with tours and sightseeing in and around the Bay Area.

The Kunde Family Estate near Glen Ellen will be the setting for a casual barbecue the following day with entertainment by Williams and Ree – The Indian and The White Guy.

The final day will include a ranch tour of Sonoma Mountain Herefords, Santa Rosa, and local winery tours and tasting, as well as

a sale, featuring some of the breed’s most elite genetics. Col. Eddie and Ruth Sims, owners of National Cattle Services, Inc., Elgin, Okla., have been named as the sale managers.

The event will take place on Kunde’s famous Boot Hill, perched high above the Sonoma Valley on the steps of the Mayacamas Mountains. Boot Hill boasts 360-degree views of Kunde’s 1,850-acre winegrowing estate and will be the perfect setting for the evening’s meal and entertainment.

Many will remember scenes filmed there for the popular television show, *Falcon Crest*, that ran on network television from 1981 to 1990.

The auction will not only feature embryos from the breed’s most prominent donors, flushes and heifer calf pregnancies, but also some one-of-a-kind silent and live auction items, including vacation getaways, a 2012 National Finals Rodeo package, exquisite artwork and more.

Event pricing and travel details will be available next month at www.hereford.org. Or contact Cowan at (816) 842-3757 for more information. If you are interested in being part of the sale, contact Eddie or Ruth Sims at (580) 492-4590.