



Guardians of the Range

California Rangeland Conservation Coalition

"... Adding habitat is good—for species endangered or otherwise."

- Coke Hallowell

Photos courtesy of
Coke Hallowell and
USDA-NRCS.

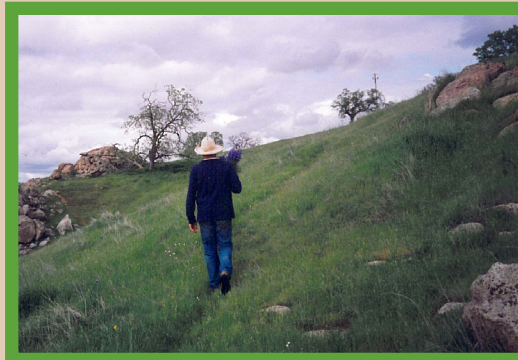
Partners

- USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service
- California Conservation Corps (CCC)
- InterMountain Native Plant Nursery
- San Joaquin River Parkway

Protected Ranch Adds Habitat Diversity

Hallowell Ranch, Madera County

Coke and James Hallowell purchased their 700-acre ranch in eastern Madera County in 1986. There were four bidders: the other three were developers. Needless to say, two decades have done nothing to lessen development pressures in the scenic rolling oak woodland-savannah foothills. The Hallowells property, however, will not be snagged in that net. Ten years ago they put a conservation easement on the property with the



James Hallowell strolls across the ranch with a bouquet of lupine in hand.

San Joaquin River Parkway, an organization that Coke has been involved with since its inception. Knowing that it will stay undeveloped has been part of the reason the Hallowells have been working hard to add to its biodiversity.



Coke Hallowell and her husband James bid against three developers to buy their ranch in 1986. They have placed a conservation easement on the ranch through the San Joaquin River Parkway, where Coke is Chairman of the Board of Directors. Coke says that the land is so beautiful that, "It was revolting to think of it being anything else."

Since 2000 the Hallowells have launched an ambitious project along a tributary of the San Joaquin River that stretches across their ranch, populating a half mile of riparian area with a rich mix of species to add vegetative layers lending habitat diversity. The plantings include three species of willow, cottonwood, oaks, sycamore, purple needlegrass, deer grass, blue wild rye, California wild rose and elderberry. "I remember carrying the flat of elderberry," says Coke. "Someone told me, 'That's a commitment'." But she replies, "It's all a commitment...and besides adding habitat is good—for species endangered or otherwise."



Until 2006 the Hallowells ran 60 cow-calf pairs on their ranch. Now they lease their land to another rancher who grazes the fenced riparian area seasonally.

Any new species will join a long list of resident and visiting critters that have come to the ranch: Tiger salamanders, great horned owls, bobcats, rattlesnake, coyotes, and even an occasional mountain lion or eagle. Although the beavers and grasshoppers teamed up to slow the progress of their riparian work, Coke puts it in perspective and delights in telling stories of her family glimpsing bobcats with new kittens or watching rattlesnakes (from a safe distance) engage in a territorial “dance.”

The Hallowells worked with the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) to fence the area to control livestock access; add a pump and piping to provide a watering trough away from the stream, to irrigate the new plantings; and to plant the grasses, shrubs, and trees. The InterMountain Native Plant Nursery helped with advice and plantings. The California Conservation Corp (CCC) and two local high schools pitched in with people power on several occasions. Coke remembers one teen proudly saying he was going to bring his girlfriend out to see their work. She smiles. “I reminded him he might also want to show it to his children and grandchildren.”

The Hallowells have hosted university biologists on their ranch who are studying tiger salamander larvae. Other visitors who appreciate the habitat on the ranch include the local chapter of the Audubon Society who keep an eye out for hawks, kestrel, eagles and an expanding population of songbirds. It’s the songbirds according to Dennis Dudley, Range Conservationist with NRCS, who are the key beneficiaries of the new riparian



A half mile of creekside has been planted to willow, cottonwood, oaks, sycamore, purple needlegrass, deer grass, blue wild rye, California wild rose and elderberry. The project will be duplicated along an additional half acre of streamside, increasing habitat richness for songbirds and other wildlife.

plantings... but Coke Hallowell may beg to differ with that: “I’m really thrilled with how good everything looks,” she says. “It was slow getting started but it’s really getting big now... I want to do more.”

And so they are. The Hallowells have just begun their second contract with NRCS and will use the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) to duplicate their riparian work on an additional half acre of streamside.



“At one time the riparian woodland in this area was probably far more vegetated than it is today,” says Rob Roy, District Conservationist with NRCS in Madera. “This project is a step to return the land to a more natural state

and at the same time to allow it to be part of a profitable venture on working land.”

The easement allows the Hallowells (now their leasees) to graze their land as they have since they bought it. Typically the Hallowells ran 60 cow-calf pairs on the property. A year and a half ago they sold the cattle and now lease their land to another rancher. The fenced riparian area is grazed in the winter months, preventing overgrowth while the perennials are in a dormant state. Can the cattle and wildlife coexist? Coke seems puzzled by the question. “They always have,” she says.

The Hallowell Ranch bears the imprints of many enterprises by many, many previous generations: grinding rocks left by the Yokut Indians, a small cemetery from settlers in the 1850s, railroad tracks left by a logging enterprise a century ago. Now, it’s home to a working ranch, wildlife, and the Hallowells. What it will never be, however, is developed. “We did it for the conservation of wildlife,” says Coke. “And the land is so beautiful,” she adds. “It was revolting to think of it being anything else.”



Ray LaClerque, owner of the InterMountain Native Plant Nursery in Auberry, helped with advice and plantings.

This story is courtesy of the California Rangeland Conservation Coalition. To learn more about what other ranchers are doing throughout the state or about this cooperative partnership visit

www.carangeland.org

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