

# THE NEWSLETTER FOR THE COASTAL RANCHES CONSERVANCY

SUMMER 2007

## CRC Seed Money Grows More Native Grasses

A low-cost experiment, funded by the CRC, has grown into a much larger project to restore native grasses on previously cultivated fields on the Hollister Ranch. In 2004, the CRC granted the Hollister Ranch Cattle Co-op \$5000 to seed native grasses on 13 acres of an old hay field on Panochas Flats. Ground like this, which had been farmed for many years, is typically considered the most difficult for native grass restoration. John McCarty, the Co-op manager, made sure the test plot was grazed hard before seed was drilled into the soil. John then continued to use cattle to graze off the fast growing annuals in the spring of 2005 and 2006, giving the slower growing, native perennials a chance to get established. By late summer of 2006, it was clear that the effort had been a success and the natives were taking hold. Little green bunches of Purple Needle Grass could be seen scattered among the long-dead stalks of rip-gut brome and wild oats in late September, when the Ranch is about as brown as it can get.



Panochas Flats

the pilot project CRC funded. "There was enough new native grass showing in Panochas to prove that we kind of knew what we were doing" said John.

In the fall of 2006, the HR Cattle Co-op also conducted two other small experiments with the CRC funds. A "hot spot" where nothing seemed to grow was seeded with native grasses and covered with native grass straw and then subjected to "poop and stomp" by the mother herd. By putting large

numbers of cattle over the area for a short period of time, the soil surface gets broken up and the seeds get pushed around and fertilized at the same time. Despite the severe drought, there has been some success and small seedlings are showing on what had been nearly bare soil even in this dry year. Sue Benech-Field, the new CRC Science Advisor, continues to monitor all the restoration sites with photographs and by counting native perennial

grasses within several transects located in both treatment and control areas.

So that little bit of seed money from the CRC, combined with careful observation and the willingness to experiment, has been leveraged into a project that will begin to restore native grasses on all of the old hay fields on the Ranch, this time with the help of NRCS money from the Farm Bill. Planting begins this fall, before the rains come.

### 60 More Acres to be Restored

In 2006, John McCarty and the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) were working on a range improvement plan for the Hollister Ranch that included restoring native grasses on another 60 acres of old hay fields. John believes that a key element of getting additional funding from NRCS was the success of

### California Native Grass Association Inspects Native Grass Success

The California Native Grass Association and Cal-Pac Society of Rangeland Managers had their annual meeting in Santa Barbara in May and one of their field trips came to the Hollister Ranch to see the native grass restoration efforts, funded by CRC. This conference attracts the pre-eminent professionals in the field and they were impressed with the restoration efforts as well as the wild native grass populations of the Gaviota Coast.

**A special thanks to the following  
CRC donors for their  
extraordinary support:**

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## Steelhead Project Needs Your Help



A day's catch from the lower Santa Ynez River, 1930's

A team of Masters Degree students from the UCSB Donald Bren School of Environmental Science and Management will be working on a Group Project on the Hollister Ranch over the next year. They are studying the possibility of restoring steelhead habitat on a local creek, which would involve removal of migration barriers caused by road crossings and other obstacles. Southern Steelhead is one of the most endangered species in our region with nearly all steelhead spawning streams on the South Coast blocked by road or railroad crossings. Recent steelhead restoration efforts on the Santa Ynez River have resulted in increased spawning success there and these young fish could be swimming around Point Conception looking for new habitat in the coming years.

The CRC has made a commitment to provide \$5000 in financial assistance to the Bren School project so students can gather data over the summer. A number of pledges to support this project have already been received and we want to encourage you to contribute. You may designate your gift specifically for steelhead restoration, if you wish.



Santa Ynez River Mouth, 1942

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## CRC Helps Gaviota State Park Control Invasives

As part of our mission to support our neighbors, the Coastal Ranches Conservancy has been working closely with Gaviota State Park and the Friends of the Channel Coast State Parks Foundation to develop a project to begin controlling invasive plants in Gaviota State Park. Phase One of this project, the removal of invasive plant species, has



Castor Beans in Gaviota State Park

been funded by the CRC Trustees in the amount of \$10,000 and is expected to be completed in 2007. A second phase to begin restoring native plants is pending. This is the largest project for CRC in 2007. The Channel Coast State Parks Foundation is acting as an intermediary, at no cost, since they have more experience working with the State Park's system.

Gaviota State Park has long had a problem with non-native, invasive

plants invading both riparian areas along Gaviota Creek and upland areas along the railroad. Infestations of Castor Bean, Peruvian Pepper Tree, and Cape Ivy not only degrade the habitat they occupy, they provide a source for new infestations to be spread more widely in the State Park or into the surrounding private cattle ranches. If allowed

to spread, the future cost of control can be extremely high, so it is important to stop these invaders early.

*If allowed to spread, the future cost of control can be extremely high...*

funds can be raised to continue this project into the future, as this battle will need to be fought over a number of years to be successful.

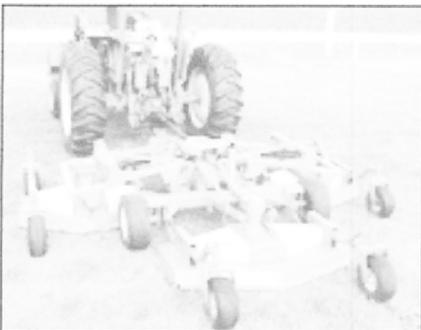
To stretch our donor's dollars, the project will make use of Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) or California Division of Forestry (CDF) crews. It is hoped that additional



## GIS Mapping Project Complete

Geographic Information Systems (GIS) provide a method to store and retrieve all kinds of geographical information and are now considered essential land-use planning tools. GIS can lead to a better understanding of the land by mapping various kinds of information in new ways. Funding from CRC has allowed the development of a GIS database for the Hollister Ranch and several surrounding ranches. For example, maps integrating property lines, cow pastures, and watersheds have been used in developing new off-stream water sources for cattle and in developing a comprehensive Rangeland Plan for the Hollister Ranch. Other maps have provided an overview of the region's natural resources and have been used to explain the importance of cattle ranching and maintaining the Williamson Act in meetings with officials in Sacramento. The Hollister Ranch Conservancy has taken ownership of the new GIS database from CRC and is now looking at adding additional "layers" of data including soils, geology, unique plant communities, etc. This collection of GIS data will help protect the un-broken habitat of the Point Conception region and assist public and private owners in their management of these lands.

## Batwing Mower Attacks Invasive Plants



Batwing Mower

CRC has decided to fund the purchase of a batwing mower by the Hollister Ranch Co-op for use by the Co-op and the Gaviota State Park. A batwing mower (see photo) is a mower pulled by a tractor which has an exceptionally wide reach to either side, allowing the mower to mow areas along the roadside not within reach of a regular mower. Since roadsides are often

where infestations of invasive plants begin, the mower is expected to be a big help in weed control and preventing the introduction of new, aggressive weed species. The mower will be one of several tools used for weed eradication and control in the CRC-funded Gaviota State Park project, referred to above. The grant for the batwing mower is in the amount of \$6000.

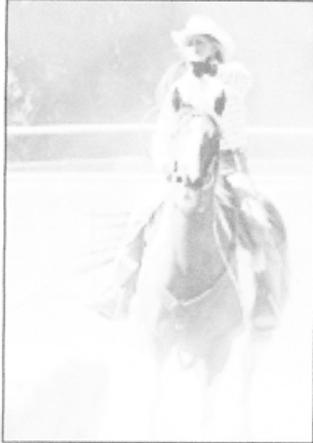
## Coastal Ranches Conservancy Appoints New Science Advisor

We are proud to announce the appointment of Sue Benech-Field as the science advisor for CRC. Sue is a professional field biologist interested

in functional ecological landscapes. Although her academic and professional concentration was marine oriented, she has had continuing education in rangeland management techniques. Sue lives on the Hollister Ranch, is a member of the HR Cattle Co-op Board

and, for the past 15 years, she and her horses have helped the HR Co-op with the daily operations, including gather-

ing, sorting, doctoring, and branding. During her time riding for the brand, she has made an effort to constantly enhance the Co-op's knowledge of



Sue Benech and Pecho at work

the local flora, fauna, and ecological function of the Gaviota Coast. She has written numerous articles on the effects of land fragmentation and the importance of grazing in maintaining large, unified landscapes. Sue has been instrumental in helping CRC direct our limited funds to where they will do the most good. By taking her advice, we now have a track record of funding successful projects; a track record we want to maintain.

## Keep Coastal Ranches Conservancy Healthy

**CRC** doesn't have any paid staff; we depend on the efforts of a few committed volunteers to get the work done and keep things running. Fund raising is never easy and we greatly appreciate your willingness to respond to our requests with contributions. Please continue to support the efforts of CRC with a donation today. If you would like to earmark your donation for a specific project or area of interest, please let us know and we will accommodate you. Remember, CRC is a 501c3 non-profit organization and your donations are tax deductible to the full extent allowed by law.\*

**\*Note: By this statement, CRC does not intend to provide tax advice. CRC's tax ID # is 68-0554135.**

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