

T H E N E W S L E T T E R F O R T H E COASTAL RANCHES CONSERVANCY

FALL 2014

CONSERVATION GRAZING PROJECT AT ARROYO HONDO PRESERVE

Working with the Land Trust for Santa Barbara County, Coastal Ranches Conservancy is helping to implement a key element in the restoration of the 782 acre Arroyo Hondo Preserve. Construction of 3600 feet of perimeter and cross fence and the placement of livestock water troughs has begun. This will allow the western side of Arroyo Hondo Canyon to once again be grazed by livestock after 20 years of lying fallow. The goal of this grazing project will be to reduce wildfire fuels and restore native plants. Much of the Preserve has already been restored with thousands of native plants and shrubs planted by volunteers and staff since the Land Trust acquired the Preserve from the Hollister and Chamberlain families in 2001. The western side of the Canyon is the largest area that remains un-restored. The native vegetation on this slope is largely absent due to dense growth of the invasive non-natives such as black mustard. The build-up of accumulated dry plant matter from the annual die-off of these plants represents a major fire hazard for the Preserve and our neighbors. This area of the Preserve has already burned once in recent history, during the Gaviota Fire of 2004.

The Coastal Ranches Conservancy has already raised \$30,000 to fund Phase One of the project but another \$20,000 is needed to complete the Phase Two work which includes pasture fencing and water troughs.

A research and monitoring effort will also be included to assess restoration results. The idea of using grazing for conservation purposes is not a new one. Conservation grazing is considered by many scientists a useful technique but one that needs to be fine-tuned for the unique vegetation and micro-climate of each particular site. It is a promising conservation practice and we hope that this research will help to demonstrate the benefits and establish the technique as a reliable grazing practice.

THE GOAL OF THIS GRAZING PROJECT WILL BE TO REDUCE WILDFIRE FUELS AND RESTORE NATIVE PLANTS.

To meet the challenge of devising a successful conservation grazing program, the Land Trust sought the help of Dr. Marc Horney, professor in Rangeland Resources Management at Cal Poly, San Luis Obispo. Dr. Horney recognized

the opportunity to implement the conservation grazing practice and



Arroyo Hondo Preserve Manager John Warner surveys the project site

has agreed to oversee what will be a multiyear experiment. By varying the timing, duration, and intensity of the grazing, Dr. Horney hopes to be able to create better conditions for native plants to move into areas where they do not now grow. According to Dr. Horney, "This will require several years to reduce the number of mustard plants, which shade out any natives that attempt to come up. We will need to take into account the timing of the growth of each of the various native species we want to restore so that we can try to give them the conditions they need to get re-established." Dr. Horney and his students are currently working out an initial grazing plan for the site. Over time, this plan will be adapted to annual changes in rainfall and the experimental results. ●

YOUR DONATIONS ARE STILL NEEDED

To close the funding gap and allow the important Phase Two work to begin on this project, your donations are still needed. **Please send us a check or go to our website to make a donation** there to support this ground-breaking project:

www.coastalranchesconservancy.org

Send your check to: **1482 East valley Road, Suite 135, Santa Barbara, CA 93108.**

Coastal Ranches Conservancy is a 501c3 non-profit organization and your donations are tax-deductible to the full extent of the law.

Oak Tree Program Puts Down Roots

With funding from Coastal Ranches Conservancy, more than 100 native Coast Live Oak trees will be planted on the Hollister Ranch by the HR Cooperative, which runs the Ranch's cattle operations. The oak tree plantings are a natural next step in a 15 year-old program of improving the Hollister Ranch's rangelands and watersheds. Past projects partially funded by Coastal Ranches Conservancy donors have included planting of native grasses in previously farmed pastures and the



A four year old oak tree. Once it reaches 6 ft. tall, the browse cage will be removed.

installation of cattle water troughs. The troughs keep the cattle spread out so they can make better use of the available forage and they also keep them from relying too heavily on the creeks as a water source.

Shade is one of the other main reasons cattle hang out in creek beds so the oak trees will be planted near the cattle troughs to provide shade for the cattle where no shade now exists. A majority of the sensitive species found on the Gaviota Coast are dependent on creek water and riparian habitat so there will be valuable conservation benefits from this project.

The Oak Tree Project will also make oak seedlings available next year for Ranch owners to plant themselves. While young oaks need small amounts of supplemental water during the dry season, after the first 3 to 4 years they will not need any additional irrigation. Mature oaks are fire-adapted, with their thick bark protecting them from flames, and they re-sprout quickly after a fire. Unlike eucalyptus

or pine trees, oaks burn "cool" in a wildfire and do not feed the flames.

Coast Live Oaks are considered a keystone species along the Gaviota Coast since so many plants and animals rely on them for food and shelter. Over 30 species of local birds are dependent on oaks, as well as deer, black bear, and many smaller mammals. Oaks help recycle nutrients from deep in the soil and their long tap root enables them to reach ground water and survive long droughts. The current drought has shown the vulnerability as many non-native landscape trees which are dying due to a lack of water. ●

CRC Celebrates 10 Year Anniversary

Coastal Ranches Conservancy recently celebrated its 10 year anniversary with record-breaking donations from our supporters. This allowed us to fund all of our 2013 projects and have some money left over to apply to our 2014 priorities. Recently, CRC has hired a part-time staff person, Therese Lord, to help with all of the day-to-day chores of operating a small non-profit. If you have any questions, please contact Therese at:

info@coastalranchesconservancy.org.

One hundred percent of your donations go to our local projects. All of Coastal Ranches Conservancy's overhead and administrative costs are covered by contributions from our Board.

Thank you for your continued support, Adam Rhodes, President

THANK YOU TO OUR MANY OUTSTANDING SUPPORTERS *(a partial listing)*

Ron Pulice Trust

Gloria W. Bryant
in memory of Ernie Bryant

Sam and Peggy Grossman

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Turtles and Cattle Learn to Get Along

What is a turtle going to do in a drought, especially if his home pond also provides an important water source for a herd of cattle? That is a question answered by one of CRC's successful 2014 projects. Working with the land owners, a plan was developed to build a cattle watering trough in a nearby pasture and fence the cattle out of the turtle pond. The pond is the only permanent water in this particular canyon and is an important refuge for a population of native Pond Turtles and Red-Legged Frogs. Now the cattle can drink from a water trough and not get their feet muddy and the turtles seem to be pretty happy too. Several baby turtles have been seen at the pond this year, even with the drought conditions making life difficult. Now that the fence is in, native vegetation is quickly re-establishing itself around the pond edge. ●



The turtle pond with newly completed fence

Conservancy Continues Support For Sustainable Cattle

CRC once again provided strong support for the HR Cooperative in its efforts to achieve a sustainable cattle operation. The continuing drought conditions made grazing tough again this year on the Central Coast. Although conditions on the Hollister Ranch were better than many of the inland ranches, herd size had to be drastically reduced to preserve range conditions until the rainy season. Coastal Ranches Conservancy's financial support was focused in three areas:

- **Control of invasive species**, including noxious weeds and feral pigs
- **Support for the oak tree project**, which will provide shade near cattle troughs
- **Riparian projects**, to improve stream conditions and protect vulnerable water sources



This financial support serves a two-fold purpose. First, it makes a real difference in what the Co-op can accomplish on the ground each year by rewarding good stewardship activities. Second, it improves our knowledge and understanding of what it takes to make cattle ranching sustainable economically, socially, and environmentally. This knowledge can then be shared with others trying to achieve the same goal. To learn more about the Hollister Ranch Cooperative, visit www.hrcooperativebeef.com. ●

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COASTAL RANCHES CONSERVANCY

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**SUPPORTING NATURE CONSERVATION, RESTORATION, AND EDUCATION
ON THE GAVIOTA COAST**

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