

THE FOOTHILL ADVOCATE

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SIERRA • FOOTHILL



• CONSERVANCY •

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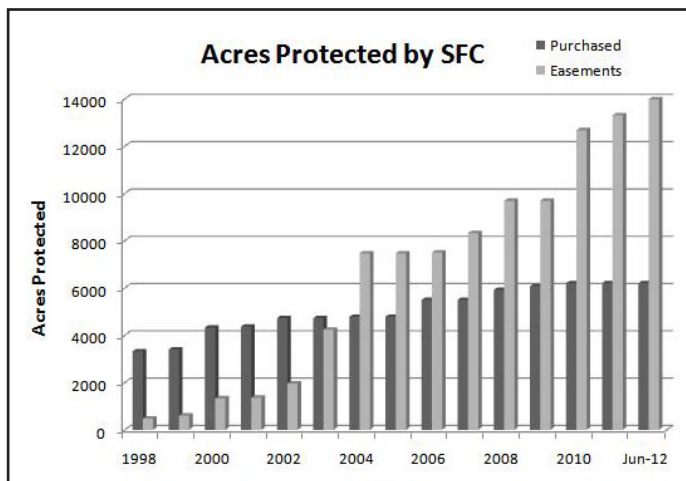
Conservation Easements Protect Land

Though most of our members are familiar with the land Sierra Foothill Conservancy owns, such as the Mc-Kenzie Preserve or the Black Mountain Preserve, these properties represent only about one third of the total land SFC has conserved. The other two thirds are protected as conservation easements, which are effective, long-term land conservation tools local landowners use in order to conserve their land and its natural resources. SFC currently holds 25 easements throughout Fresno, Madera, eastern Merced and Mariposa counties, ranging in size from 3,000 acres to less than 100 acres.

A conservation easement is a voluntary agreement which allows landowners to limit the type or amount of development on their property while retaining private ownership of the land. SFC accepts the easement with the understanding that we must enforce the terms of the easement in perpetuity. Many of our partnering landowners have lived on their land their entire lives, and their families have worked the land for generations. Because of these years of experience, they are very knowledgeable about the land and how best to work with and protect it. By granting a conservation easement, a landowner can assure that the property will be permanently protected, regardless of who owns the land in the future. Easements are often donated to SFC, though we also work with funding agencies and write grants to acquire funds to purchase exceptionally important easements. Whether donated or purchased, the value of a conservation easement typically falls between 40-60% of the fair market retail value of the land.

To be eligible as a conservation easement with SFC and for a federal income tax deduction, the easement must be “perpetual,” meaning it must last forever. SFC monitors the property, generally once a year, to assure that the terms of the easement are being upheld. We hold a stewardship fund for each property, which will provide funds to monitor the properties forever.

SFC works with each landowner to create an easement unique to the property and the landowner’s goals. Though a few landowners generously allow SFC to host hikes and classes on their property, there is generally no public access to SFC’s conservation easements, as they are still privately owned. We also work with landowners to develop sustainable grazing and management plans that benefit the habitat by reducing invasive grasses and increasing the abundance of native plants.



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SFC Office: 559-855-3473
Mariposa Office: 209-742-5556
E-mail: sfc@sierrafoothill.org
Fax: 559-855-3474
SFC Home Page:
www.sierrafoothill.org

Editor: Sallie Mook
Articles on natural history, photos and letters to the editor are welcome. Send them to 30922 Auberry Rd. Auberry, CA, or call 559-855-2908.

Officers:

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Heidi Riedle, vice president
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Cowbirds are bad actors

Early this summer we noticed several brown-headed cowbirds among the quail, doves and finches visiting our birdseed tray. They are medium sized birds, about six inches long. The male has shiny black plumage except for a brown head; the female is described as mouse-gray. They were not a welcome sight. Cowbirds are bad actors which are referred to as the “mafia” of the bird kingdom.

Before the ecosystem of the New World was changed by the European invasion, cowbirds made their living following the herds of bison and other large animals, feeding on the insects on and around the herds. This made stopping to build a nest and care for their chicks inconvenient. They solved the problem by laying their eggs in the nests of various songbirds, leaving the work of raising the young to the unsuspecting foster parents. The cowbird chicks hatch quickly and often push the songbird eggs or babies out of the nest, and the foster parents don’t seem to notice that they are feeding aliens.

Today cowbirds are common in our foothills, which provide ideal ecosystems for their lifestyles. They feed in grazing areas, where cattle and horses take the place of bison, and as in our case, in bird feeders. They can find plenty of suitable host nests nearby. As many as 220 species of host birds have been identified. However, cowbirds do not use the cavity nests of birds such as bluebirds, woodpeckers, swifts, purple martins, nuthatches, chickadees and wrens.

Much effort has been made by the Department of Agriculture, Bureau of Land Management and other agencies to keep down the population of cowbirds, including trapping adult cowbirds and removing their eggs from nests. In some cases this has been effective in raising the success of threatened songbirds. However, according to Audubon studies, other factors like loss of habitat for the endangered birds are equally important.

Sallie Mook

SFC has a new office!

In early July, SFC moved our main office location from the Miller Black Mountain Preserve to the Sierra Unified School District Office. Anyone who has driven up to our office on Black Mountain knows what a haul it is! In the sixteen years since our inception, our staff has grown to eight plus two incredible AmeriCorps volunteers. We have outgrown the office space and need to be in a location with easier access and greater community visibility.

We are excited about our new location at the School District Office in Prather at 29143 Auberry Road. One of our goals for this year is to increase the number of volunteers in SFC’s office who can help with administration related tasks and project support.

Please mark your calendars for our open house event where you can meet members of our Board, Staff and Advisors. The event will take place on Friday, October 19th from 5pm to 7pm. We will have some light refreshments and coffee, followed by a short presentation at 6:30 to talk about some of our current projects and plans for the upcoming year. This should be a fun event and a nice way to connect with SFC members in our community. We hope to see you all there!

SFC fall events, classes and hikes

Hikes and classes are open to the public; reservations are required. Classes are \$10 for members, \$20 for members' families, \$5 for student members, \$15 for non-members or \$30 for their families. There is a suggested \$5 donation for hikes for non-members. To register for classes, go to www.sierrafoothill.org and follow the Hikes & Classes link, or you may call Rosanna at 559-855-3473 for Fresno county events or Ray at 209-742-5556 for Mariposa. Bring lunch and water; hiking shoes or boots are a good idea for both classes and hikes.

Annual Member Barbeque at McKenzie Preserve: Sunday, October 7, 2012. Gates will open at 9:00, lunch will be served at about 2:00. Bring the family, hike the Discovery Trail or up on the mountain. Cost is \$10. Sign up at www.sierrafoothill.org or call 559-855-3473.

Harvest Arts Festival: Saturday and Sunday October 13 & 14. SFC will have a booth at this fun community event with local crafts, good food and live music at the Intermountain Nursery on Auberry Road east of Prather. Call 855-3113 for more information.

Saturday October 20: GPS Navigation and Geocaching. Amy Voorhhees will lead this class on using your GPS to follow waypoints and mark locations, fol-

lowed by a geocaching adventure looking for hidden treasure. 8 a.m. to 2 p.m.

Hikes for 2012:

Saturday November 24: Table Mt. Discovery Trail
Sunday, December 16: Table Mt. Table Top

2013 McKenzie Open Preserve Days

The preserve will be open for family hikes or picnics, to walk on the Discovery Trail or to the top of the table, or just to enjoy the flowers. No reservations are needed.

Saturday January 12, Saturday February 9, Saturday March 9, and Saturday April 13.

2012 Mariposa Class

Saturday, October 13: Birding Clark's Valley.

Join Len McKenzie and Karyn O'Heam for a morning of birding. 8 a.m to 1 p.m.

2012 Mariposa Hikes

Saturday October 20: Family Hike at Striped Rock.
10 a.m. to 2 p.m.

Saturday, October 27: Hike to the top of Striped Rock. 9 a.m. to 2 p.m.

Do you like to hike? Would you like to help others connect with the beauty of the foothills? If you answered yes to these questions, SFC might have the perfect opportunity for you. We are currently inviting members who are interested in becoming hike docents to join us for the incoming season. For more information, please contact Rosanna at (559) 855-3473 or rosanna@sierrafoothill.org

Easements

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Protecting agricultural and range land through conservation easements helps to maintain the viability of a region's land-based economy. The foothill economy depends on the land's being a productive source of income for much of our community. Easements not only protect the habitat and water resources but also the historical connection and way of life for many local ranchers. Conservation easements are becoming a more popular solution to the pressures of land development as people learn about them and as more land trusts develop across the country.

For more information on conservation easements, please contact Bridget Fithian at our Mariposa Office at 209-742-5556.

Sierra Foothill Conservancy remembers Cheryl "Cherry" Dresser Franklin, who passed away this spring at age 92. Cherry was an avid supporter of many local organizations and a charter member of SFC. She had a passion for the outdoors, nature photography, and bird watching. Thank you to the Franklin family and Cherry's friends for their generous gifts in her memory. Cherry's legacy will live on in the scenic lands and important habitat that she has helped to permanently conserve.

Sierra Lands Beef

Sierra Lands Beef has been a great success due to the continued support from SFC members, friends of the organization and the local community. This beef is raised on our preserves, has never been fed antibiotics or hormones, and is finished on grass pasture during the peak of the growing season. Best of all, 100% of the proceeds support Sierra Foothill Conservancy's land conservation program. We just completed processing this year's steers and now have fresh product available for purchase.

As always, SLB is centered on improving the foothill environment and more specifically the grasslands of our preserves. A high density, short duration rotational grazing system is being implemented to benefit both the native grass species and biodiversity of these areas. We will be grazing around the vernal pools on top of Big Table as a tool to promote and manage the ecosystem of this rare habitat. We are looking forward to improving the overall condition and productivity of all our grasslands over the coming years.

SLB has taken many steps in the past few months to market this year's beef, including launching our new website and gaining certification through American Grassfed Association and Animal Welfare Approved programs. We are working with the Fresno State University Meats Lab for the processing of our animals this year. Visitors to www.sierralandsbeef.com can purchase their choice of several variety packs containing 20, 40, and 80 pounds of beef. Also, new Grilling Packs, Family Value Packs, summer sausages, prime rib roasts, whole tri tips and fajita meat are now available. Customers can also build their own package by selecting individual cuts of beef for a personal touch.

Billy Freeman

Don't miss the Sierra Foothill Members BBQ on Sunday October 12!

The grasslands, foothills and forests between Yosemite and Kings Canyon National Parks provide land for farms and ranches, a home for native plants and wildlife, and a source of clean water. The Sierra Foothill Conservancy honors our natural and cultural heritage by protecting these resources and ensuring that present and future generations will continue to experience and enjoy the land in this region.

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