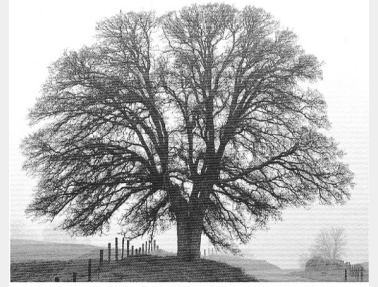


THE FOOTHILL ADVOCATE

April 2014

Vol. 17 No. 4

SIERRA·FOOTHILL



· CONSERVANCY ·

Highlights

SLB News



Rattlesnakes



Mariposa Teens



Conservation Easements

Sierra Lands Beef

Spring is here and with the recent rainfall the foothills are finally turning green again, bringing fresh grass for livestock and beautiful wildflower displays! We are gearing up for another year of beef sales and finishing up our grazing programs for the year on the preserves. Thank you to all of our loyal customers who have been purchasing beef from us all year. We really appreciate the business! Current beef supplies are low, but limited supplies are available on the SLB website and at our office in Prather if you call ahead to check for availability.

It's definitely the season to consider filling up your freezer with Sierra Lands Beef for the coming year! We will soon have 2014 product available for purchase at www.sierralandsbeef.com. Because of drought and other factors, we have had to change the structure of our beef sales model for 2014. We are just kicking off our pre-order sales with quarter, half and whole amounts available for purchase on the website. These are the only amounts that will be available for purchase this year as we have had to consolidate our efforts into selling larger quantities. However, we will be passing on significant discounts to the buyer especially for the product processed in white wrap butcher paper. All of the beef will be sold on a pre-order basis before the animals are processed this year; deposits will be paid at the time of purchase with the remaining balance due on delivery. Vacuum sealed product is also available for pre-order although it is slightly more expensive due to processing costs. We are shooting for a mid to end of June delivery on a first come first served basis, as some of the cattle will require some extra time to finish this year because of the later grass season. Visit our website (www.sierralandsbeef.com) for pre-order pricing information and check your mailbox for our SLB newsletter to be mailed this month. Contact Billy Freeman at billy@sierrafoothill.org for any questions.

SLB cattle have been used in a planned grazing program on several of the preserves this year. Fortunately the combination of moderate



Billy Freeman

photo by Rosanna Ruiz

stocking rates and the ability to graze in several areas that were previously underutilized has been extremely beneficial. Thankfully, we have been able to provide ample nutrition for the SLB herd and seasonal cattle without extensive supplementation or pasture overutilization. Although grass is growing rapidly on the McKenzie Preserve, most of the property has been rested this year and will only see a light amount of use late this spring. Short term grazing objectives for the core part of the preserve include promoting re-colonization of native plant species such as perennial bunchgrasses and annual



Photo by Kristen Boysen

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forbs as well as managing for specific wildlife habitat. On the Fine Gold Creek Preserve, cattle have recently been brought back for a short time to graze on the east side of the creek while the west side of the creek has been rested. The cattle are impacting the dominant, rapidly growing Ripgut Brome species as a means of decreasing its competitive advantage over other annual grasses and native plants. We are hopeful that the timely grazing of these areas along with adequate rest will be instrumental in changing the grass species composition and increasing biodiversity on the preserve.

Thanks again for your continued support of local, grassfed beef that benefits local land conservation!

Billy Freeman

What is a Conservation Easement?

Though most of our members are familiar with the land SFC owns, such as the McKenzie Preserve or the Black Mountain Preserve, these properties represent only about one third of the total land SFC has conserved. The other 66% is protected as conservation easements. Conservation easements are effective, long-term land conservation tools by which local landowners partner with SFC to conserve the natural resources of their land. SFC currently holds 25 easements throughout Fresno, Madera, eastern Merced and Mariposa counties.

A conservation easement is a voluntary agreement that allows a landowner to limit the type or amount of development on their property while retaining private ownership of the land. Sierra Foothill Conservancy accepts the easement with the understanding that we must enforce the terms of the easement in perpetuity. People grant conservation easements because they want to conserve the natural resources of their property and prevent unwanted development, while still retaining ownership. Many of our partnering landowners have lived and worked on their land their entire lives or for multiple generations, and are very knowledgeable about the land and how best to work with it 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. Whether donated or purchased, the value of a conservation easement typically falls between 40-60% of the fair market retail value of the land.

Sierra Foothill Conservancy monitors the property, generally once a year, to assure that the terms of the easement are being upheld. SFC holds 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 no public access to SFC's conservation easements as they are still privately owned. SFC also works with landowners to develop sustainable grazing and management plans that benefit the habitat by reducing invasive grasses and increasing native plants.

Conservation easements are increasing in popularity as land owners learn about this valuable tool to address the pressures of development and preserve the open spaces they treasure.

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

Bridget Fithian and Kristen Boysen



This Madera CE was donated to SFC in 2000.



The Northern Pacific Rattlesnake

Frightening, alluring, dangerous, mysterious, and misunderstood are ways in which the Northern Pacific rattlesnake (*Crotalus oreganus oreganus*) tends to be perceived. Despite their often negative public perception, they are an important component of the environment and are a significant predator of the Sierra Nevada foothill ecosystems in which they reside. In fact, rattlesnakes can have very dense populations within the foothill communities, and if you have done a fair amount of hiking in the area during the spring, summer, or fall, it is likely that you have been in very close proximity to them and never even knew they were there.

Photo by Rick Hedrick

Ecologically, the Northern Pacific rattlesnake is very important as they represent one of the only ambush predators of small mammals in the region. As an ambush predator, rattlesnakes typically sit and wait for their prey to come to them rather than actively pursuing their prey. What usually occurs during a predation event is an oblivious prey item walks within striking distance of a rattlesnake, the snake will then strike, and if it successfully makes contact will bite down, inject venom, and release the prey. They release their prey as it lowers the snake's risk of being injured by the struggling animal while the venom takes effect. The snake will then seek out the deceased animal by following the scent trails left behind from it fleeing after envenomation. The most common prey species of the Northern Pacific rattlesnake is the California ground squirrel (*Otospermophilus beecheyi*). Rattlesnakes will typically hunt the pups as they are smaller and have yet to develop immunity to the rattlesnake's venom in the ways in which the adults have. Through their predatory activity, rattlesnakes are a key factor in the regulation of rodent populations in the communities in which they reside.

In a single year, an individual rattlesnake only needs to consume a handful of meals to maintain their energy needs. Compared to a similar sized predatory mammal, it takes rattlesnakes a significantly longer amount of time to digest each prey item, during which time their activity and energy requirements may drop. Thus, following a feeding event, a rattlesnake does not need to expose itself to predators (e.g. hawks, coyotes, and bobcats), and can instead remain underground, surfacing only as a means to regulate their body temperature. Remaining underground is actually a very important aspect of a rattlesnake's natural history, as it is where they retreat to during winter hibernation, cold nights or days, extreme heat, and when giving birth. Interestingly, as opposed to most reptiles, rattlesnakes do not lay eggs and instead the eggs remain within the mother, and are born as fully developed little rattlesnakes.

Despite being one of the main predators of small mammals in our area, rattlesnakes do not represent a significant threat to humans as long as they are left alone and hikers ensure that they do not accidentally step on them. Rattlesnakes are more inclined to leave people alone and typically behave such that they go unnoticed rather than exposing themselves to passing hikers. If you are lucky enough to be hiking through the foothills and come upon a rattlesnake, simply keep your distance, admire the beauty of such a fascinating creature, and keep in mind the important roles rattlesnakes play within their environment.



Photo by Rick Hedrick

Malachi Whitford

Mariposa Teens Explore the Foothills

In Mariposa, SFC has joined forces with two other local nonprofits, Balanced Rock and Ethos Youth Center, for the OUTside Mariposa program. This collaborative effort was formed to engage youth in outdoor settings and promote stewardship and community. This year, SFC has led six hikes with teens from the Mariposa area—including a hike on the newly formed Stockton Creek Preserve and several hikes on local conservation easements. Each hike had a specific theme, ranging from trail building to photography, in order to provide a variety of outlets for youth to connect with nature.

"I love attending the OUTside Mariposa events because not only do I get the opportunity to make excellent photographs, but I also enjoy the company of the great people of the Sierra Foothill Conservancy," said Mariposa High Senior Hannah Schiff. "They always provide me with information about the species and plants I find on these hikes."

A grant through the Stewardship Council's Foundation for Youth Investment funded the program. We purchased iPods in order to use iNaturalist, other citizen science apps, and to use as cameras. After every hike, the participants return to Ethos, edit and post pictures on a variety of social media outlets such as Facebook and Instagram. Check out the SFC facebook page for more photos by these local youth.

SNAP Americorps member—Mary Snyder

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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.

SIERRA FOOTHILL CONSERVANCY's
- **ANNUAL BENEFIT DINNER** -
CELEBRATES INSPIRING FUTURE LAND STEWARDS



BEAL RANCH - MAY 17, 2014

\$75 per person, \$550 for table of eight

Cocktails 4:30 — Dinner 6:00 p.m.

Call 559-855-3473 or go to www.sierrafoothill.org for reservations.

RSVP BY MAY 7

At the dinner, we are honoring several individuals who made conservation especially meaningful this year and the youth who make learning an adventure as we strive for a better future.



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Medical Group

