

Press Release



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ROOM TO ROAM - PARTNERSHIP PERMANENTLY PROTECTS HISTORIC BLUE RIDGE-BERRYESSA RANCH

Napa, CA: The California Rangeland Trust is pleased to announce the permanent conservation of the 1,275-acre Running Deer Ranch, owned by John and Judy Ahmann in Napa County. The Rangeland Trust worked with the California Department of Conservation, U.S. Department of Agriculture's Farm and Ranch Lands Protection Program (FRPP), and the Napa Land Trust to place an agricultural conservation easement on the property, ensuring that it will remain a natural, working landscape in perpetuity.

Running Deer Ranch is one of the oldest continuously operating cattle ranches in the state, and was a part of the Las Putas Rancho that the Berryessa Brothers acquired in 1843.

"The conservation of the Running Deer Ranch is a success for the Ahmann family, our partners and for open space protection in the Bay Area," said Nita Vail, California Rangeland Trust Chief Executive Officer.

"Our mission is to protect rangelands and ranching culture," said Vail, "but intact ranchlands contribute so much to the Bay Area economy and quality of life." According to the Bay Area Open Space Council, there are 1.3 million acres of private ranchlands still remaining in the Bay Area that play a critical role in supporting local food production, tourist-enticing vistas, and "ecological services" like migration corridors and wildlife habitat.

"As we watched development edge closer to the ranch, we knew we had to do something to protect the natural resources and history of this land," said Judy Ahmann. "From the Native Americans to the vast land grants to the American pioneers- they all had a place here. We feel we have done the best we can to maintain the part of the Blue Ridge Berryessa area under our care."

Running Deer Ranch is located about 22 miles north of the city of Napa, and extends from the gentle gradient of the Berryessa Valley to the steep slopes of Blue Ridge. It is a critical "connector" property, one that helps keep the wilderness values of the region whole and unfragmented. The ranch showcases many of the areas' distinctive ecosystems – grassland, oak savannah, hardwood forest and chamise chaparral. For over 150 years the ranch's cattle operation has shared habitat with bald eagle, foothill yellow-legged frog, golden eagle, blue oak and interior live oak.

The Ahmann family has owned the property since 1986, and managed it for both high quality cattle and to improve the ecological processes of the landscape by promoting grassland and forest health. They generously provided a half mile of their private land to help connect a 100 mile hiking trail that runs

through the Blue Ridge Berryessa Natural Area.

“The average private landowner does not have the resources to ensure their land remains in agriculture, open and healthy forever. Since we began the effort of this easement project, there has been fragmentation of property on our borders to build ranchettes,” said John Ahmann. “Without this conservation easement, our land would eventually go the way of development and this natural place and its history would be gone.”

“It is gratifying to work with people as dedicated to agriculture as the Ahmann family, and we congratulate them and the other partners involved in the creation of this easement,” California Department of Conservation Director Bridgett Luther said. “Shielding the Running Deer Ranch from future development is an excellent example of our department’s mission -- managing California’s working lands.”

The Running Deer Ranch, located within the Blue Ridge Berryessa Natural Area (BRBNA), is a good example of regional collaboration where the Rangeland Trust is partnering, through the BRBNA Conservation Partnership, with local land trusts and government agencies to coordinate additional conservation activities in the region.

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The California Rangeland Trust, a 501(c)(3) public benefit corporation, was founded in 1998 to conserve the open space, natural habitat and stewardship provided by California's ranches. To date, the organization has protected over 200,000 acres of productive grazing lands throughout California. For more information, please visit www.rangelandtrust.org.

Begun in 1996, the Department of Conservation’s California Farmland Conservancy Program has provided more than \$68 million in funding to permanently shield about 46,000 acres of the state’s best and most vulnerable agricultural land from development. Landowners and trusts are encouraged to contact the Division of Land Resource Protection for information about the program and potential funding. The state also offers programs that provide financial incentives to keep land in agricultural use for periods of 10 and 20 years. For details, visit www.conservation.ca.gov/dlrp.