

## Stewardship Profiles in California Agriculture Public Land Management

### THREE CREEKS RANCH

Chet Vogt is the owner and operator of the 5,300 acre Three Creeks Ranch based out of Elk Creek in Glenn County, CA. When Mr. Vogt purchased the ranch in 1992, it was in deplorable condition due to several years of drought, bankruptcy and absentee ownership. A degree in agricultural economics from the University of California, Davis, combined with an intensive course from the Fairfield-based and environmentally friendly Ranching for Profit School, allowed Mr. Vogt to form a holistic approach to cattle grazing that healed the land and saw it flourish. Highly managed grazing allowed for the return of perennial plants that help retain water and increase subsurface moisture leading to the restoration of springs that were dry when he purchased the land.

### BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT BEAR CREEK UNIT

In 1999, the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) acquired the Bear Creek Unit which is located in the interior coast range of Northern California. The 12,000 acre parcel had been grazed in the past, but this practice stopped when the BLM acquired the land. Invasive weeds such as starthistle, medusahead, and barbed goatgrass took over the native forages preferred by the bountiful wildlife. The area was known for its abundant native wildflowers but invasive species were creating an incredibly thick buildup of thatch that prevented wildflowers from germinating. For the BLM and local environmental group, Tuleyome, the land was becoming less friendly and less accessible to the public and a new management plan was needed. Mr. Vogt had noticed the declining health of the land and was interested in reinstating grazing on the property to control the invasive species and improve the health of the property. The resulting pilot prescribed grazing project is being closely studied and is a unique partnership between the ranching and environmental communities.



### ACHIEVEMENTS

- Mr. Vogt received the 2008 Leopold Conservation Award
- Mr. Vogt collaborated with environmentalists, recreationalists, and the government to implement prescribed grazing that improved the health of the land
- Mr. Vogt's managed grazing of the Bear Creek Unit has doubled the wildflower composition in four years
- Mr. Vogt's managed grazing of the Bear Creek Unit has decreased medusahead by 47%

PHOTOS COURTESY OF CA CATTLEMEN'S ASSOCIATION

**“Grazing management is an art. We are dealing out here with fragile renewable resources, resources that need to be managed. Everything ties together. Each thing is one piece of the puzzle.”**

**- Chet Vogt**

## TULEYOME

Founded in 2002, Tuleyome is a volunteer advocacy-oriented, nonprofit organization that is focused on protecting both the wild and agricultural heritages of the Inner Coastal Range and the Western Sacramento Valley for current and future generations. The Tuleyome conservation group was highly skeptical of the potential prescribed grazing on the Bear Creek Unit, but a first-hand visit to Mr. Vogt's Three Creeks Ranch demonstrated his personal commitment to the environment and allowed Tuleyome to view managed grazing as a way to restore native vegetation without the use of herbicides.

## PROJECT DETAILS

### MANAGED GRAZING ON THREE CREEKS RANCH

Mr. Vogt has created 32 fenced paddocks on his property and rotates his cattle between them such that no area is grazed for more than fifteen days out of the year. This concentrated grazing practice supports native grasses, increases the water retention of the soil, and leads to healthier cattle. In addition to the fenced grazing paddocks, Mr. Vogt has fenced off riparian corridors and livestock ponds for special management. These areas receive only short-duration grazing that allows the native plants to thrive creating habitat for many animals such as the tricolored blackbirds, box turtles, California quail, and black-tail deer. Mr. Vogt's intensive management has controlled invasive weeds, extended the duration of base stream flow, and increased habitat for neotropical migratory birds and other wildlife. Three Creeks Ranch's commitment to environmental sustainability earned the respect of the BLM and Tuleyome allowing for the creation of a prescribed grazing program on the Bear Creek Unit.

### PRESCRIBED GRAZING ON THE BEAR CREEK UNIT

Grazing has been reintroduced on roughly 6,000 acres of the Bear Creek unit to improve the biodiversity, control invasive species, and increase the overall health of the property. The prescribed grazing program was the result of collaboration between numerous state and local government and environmental agencies (see Project Partners). This pilot project began in 2005 and divided the grazeable area into 10 units which are grazed twice on average for a 14 day period during the 6-month grazing season. A livestock herder with minimal vehicles along with single strand electrified fencing is used to control the grazing of the roughly 500 cattle. Gates allow unrestricted visitor access on trails that cross fenced units. A monitoring program consists of residual dry matter monitoring in the fall, species composition monitoring at 13 locations in the spring, and biannual photo monitoring at 80 locations on the parcel. This pilot project seeks to provide scientific quantification of the effects of prescribed grazing. A documented increase in wildflower composition from 3 percent to 6 percent over four years has been attributed to grazing reducing the medusa-head thatch by 47%.

### PARTNERSHIPS AND COMMUNITY OUTREACH

Mr. Vogt has formed unlikely partnerships between the cattle ranching community and environmental advocates. Three Creeks Ranch serves as a model of sustainable, environmentally minded ranching and the prescribed grazing of the Bear Creek Unit shows what collaboration and cooperation can look like. Mr. Vogt often hosts workshops and field trips that educate fellow ranchers, regulators, and environmental scientists. Mr. Vogt serves as the California Cattlemen's Rangeland Improvement Committee Chairman and volunteer's time with the California Rangeland Conservation Coalition.



**“Chet is a quintessential western rancher –stout, serious, and rugged. Yet, he is also a leader of new ways to manage the land, and his efforts have inspired me and many others concerned with natural resource management in the western United States.”**

**- Dr. Steve Zack  
Wildlife Conservation Society**

## PROJECT PARTNERS

California Department of  
Fish and Game

California Department of  
Forestry

California Farm Bureau  
Federation

California Waterfowl Association

Natural Resource  
Conservation Service

Point Reyes Bird Observatory

Ranching For Profit

Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation

Sand County Foundation

Sustainable Conservation

Tuleyome

U.S Department of the Interior  
Bureau of Land Management

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

University of California  
Cooperative Extension