

A CONSERVATION AND RESTORATION PLAN

For

THE HOLLISTER RANCH

Prepared April/May 2006

By the Hollister Ranch Conservancy Advisory Board

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CONSERVATION AND RESTORATION PLAN

THE HOLLISTER RANCH

PLAN SUMMARY

- The Ranch founding documents charge the Owners with being good stewards of the environment.
- The Ranch is under pressure from a number of areas:
 - Higher real estate prices mean increased demand for bigger houses and more intensive development, including private agriculture projects.
 - Some of this demand will be for mis-guided projects in conflict with Ranch values.
 - Pressure from outside on the Ranch's Ag. Preserve status is increasing
- Fragmentation of habitat both on the Ranch and off the Ranch in the 150,000 acres of surrounding private ranches is the biggest threat to our biodiversity.
- We must manage the Ranch as a single landscape, not as 136 individual parcels.
- The ecological services provided by the cattle operation are invaluable because it manages the land as a single ecological landscape. We must do more as owners to support the work done by the HR Cattle Co-op.
- Education of the owners is key in developing responsible, informed behavior that minimizes our impact on our surroundings.
- Monitoring of a select number of environmental indicators should begin, or be reinstated, and must continue for many years to be useful in judging our conservation success.
- Control of noxious, invasive species and toxic materials on the Ranch by the HROA should become a routine part of our overall management program.
- A permanent environmental management function should be established on the Ranch and steps should be taken to give the HR Conservancy some independent standing and protect it from capricious decisions of future HROA Boards.
- There are several excellent restoration projects which could be done and funding is available. Before these are pursued, a strategy for minimizing risk (to the owners) and developing the strong support of the affected owners should be a pre-requisite.

CONSERVATION AND RESTORATION PLAN

For

THE HOLLISTER RANCH

April/May, 2006

DEFINITIONS

Ranch: an establishment for the raising or grazing of cattle and other animals in herds and the associated buildings, personnel, and lands.

Plan: a scheme, method, or design for the achievement of some goal

Conservation: the preservation of natural resources

Restoration: the act of restoring a thing to its prior condition

PREAMBLE

The Hollister Ranch Owners Association recognizes that good stewardship of the land provides multiple benefits to its owners, among them:

- Protecting the property values largely created by the Ranch's natural resources and their beauty.
- Preserving the natural atmosphere which we feel when we enter and experience the place.
- Evidencing our worthiness to manage this historic cattle ranch for optimum environmental health.
- Providing the spiritual satisfaction we enjoy when we are here

PURPOSE AND PLAN GOALS

In January of 2006, the Hollister Ranch Owners Association asked the Conservancy Advisory Committee to "Develop a comprehensive plan for conservation and restoration of the Ranch's natural environment as soon as possible and return to the Board no later than June 30, 2006". While realizing this was a tall task for an all-volunteer effort, the Conservancy proceeded to designate a sub-committee to prepare a draft Plan. That sub-committee initially consisted of Larry and Joanne Williamson, Nancy Ward, Kathy Sawyer, Kim Kimbell, and Doug Campbell, acting as chairperson. Additional valuable support was provided by many people both on and off the HR Conservancy. Special thanks to Phil Boise, John McCarty, David Hill, and Sue Field for helping us get the philosophy straight. This document is the result of that combined effort.

In proposing this Plan, we don't seek to turn back the clock to some idealized, pre-historic past. We believe we are attempting to fulfill the guiding principles upon which

this current incarnation of the Ranch was founded. We refer the reader to the Ranch CC&Rs which state, in part:

“The purpose of this Declaration is to perpetuate, with respect to that portion of the Hollister ranch to which it applies, the rich variety of this rugged coastal and pastoral environment for the benefit of all who acquire property therein.

... in a manner which ensures the full enjoyment of the historical traditions and natural advantages of the area for all who acquire property therein and yet which... ...serve the interests of those who become such owners by fostering a beneficial land use which retains the unique beauty of the land and creates an atmosphere enriching the spirit of its participants.

It must be assumed that all who become owners of property subject to this Declaration are motivated by the character of the natural environment in which it is located, and accept, for and among themselves, the principle that the development and use of the property must preserve this character for present and future enjoyment of all the owners.”

The entire text of the CC&R preamble may be found in the Appendix

We accept the Ranch as we find it today with its plants and animals largely what they were when Europeans first settled here, its scenic beauty and biodiversity relatively unmarred by human development.

Our purpose in preparing this Plan has been three-fold. First, we seek to educate the Owners about the current state of the Ranch environment and the issues they should be aware of as they utilize and help manage the Ranch. Second, we seek to inform the Ranch management of current or up-coming issues that could result in harm to the Ranch environment or of opportunities to restore harm that has been done in the past. And finally, we want to identify recommendations for needed decisions to the HROA Board and others. It is not our role to decide at this time which of these recommendations to act on; that is the role of the Board and of the Owners.

SUSTAINABLE AGRICULTURE

Sustainable agriculture integrates environmental health, economic stability, and social and cultural stability. Sustainability rests on the principle that we must meet the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.

Due to time constraints, we were not able to consider or make recommendations regarding the conservation or restoration of the Ranch’s scenic values or historical values. We leave these for another time and another group effort.

Once this Plan is finalized and approved, the Conservancy is in a position, with the help of the HR Cattle Co-op, HROA staff, and volunteer owners, to begin to implement the Plan and to ensure that the Ranch’s wildlife and natural character are preserved as well or better than they have been in the past.

APPROACH

This draft Plan was prepared utilizing a number of sources of information. The best source was the people who have been intimately involved with managing the Ranch and its natural resources over many years. These “old hands” have had a chance to participate directly in discussions about the issues and by reviewing the early drafts of this document. Their ideas were particularly useful in deciding how to frame the issues and with what level of specificity to discuss the issues.

Other relevant documents were also reviewed and elements and ideas from these incorporated into this Plan. These included the HROA CC&Rs, the Conservancy Advisory Committee Charter, the Tenera Report for the Ranch on managed access issues, and the Hollister Ranch Botanical Resources Report. (The Botanical Resources Report, completed in 1998, actually has a more extensive discussion of conservations issues than can be found in this document, and is a highly recommended source.) In addition, the many planning documents that have been prepared by public and private agencies seeking to protect the Gaviota Coast have been quickly reviewed for ideas and to make certain we were on the right track. In addition, some readings in modern range management science and conservation planning were undertaken to familiarize the authors with these important subjects. In spite of all of this effort, this document remains, at best, a summation of the many, often disparate views, of Ranch owners who are not experts in planning or conservation.

So, this is not a strictly science-based document, nor is it intended to be. It is our best take on where the Ranch stands at this moment. There is much additional work that could be done to make certain we are on the right track in our recommendations. Given the limited time and resources we have available to us, we recognize that we will never have all the answers. We think we know enough, however, to have identified some of the important threats and opportunities on the Ranch.

BACKGROUND

The Hollister Ranch is first and foremost, an historic, working cattle ranch. Once part of the original Spanish land grant Rancho Nuestra Senora del Refugio with 26,529 acres that stretched from Cojo Canyon to Refugio Canyon, it has carried cattle for over 200 years. At 14,500 acres, the Hollister Ranch is one of three very large ranches in the area that remain contiguous and largely undeveloped.

Hollister Ranch	14,500 acres
San Julian Ranch	13,000
Bixby Ranch (Cojo and Jalama Ranches)	<u>26,200</u>
Total	53,700 acres

The Hollister Ranch was subdivided in the early 1970’s into 136 lots of a 100 acre minimum size so, besides being a cattle ranch, it is also a place to live and recreate for the owners. It is located on the Gaviota coast of California where northern and southern

bioregions overlap, resulting in a high diversity of plant and animal species. In pre-history, there were two significant Chumash villages on the Ranch. The Spanish first granted the land as a concession in 1791. In the 1860's, the Hollister and Diblee families acquired the land that we now call the Hollister Ranch. Today, it remains relatively unchanged and with significant wildland habitat. It supports healthy populations of large predators, including mountain lion and an occasional black bear, and is home to over 95 Federal or State listed species of concern. We believe it is possible to have a healthy natural environment, a cattle operation, low-density residential use, and recreation on the Ranch. We can live harmoniously with nature, the question is how.

RANCH BUILD-OUT POTENTIAL

Of the 136 original parcels, three of these are owned in common by the Owners to provide open space, employee housing, and headquarters for the cattle operations and homeowners association. The remaining 133 parcels can theoretically be developed. The County of Santa Barbara will currently permit a main residence, a guest house of no more than 800 square feet, and an “agricultural employee” residence, if its need can be justified with an agricultural operation that is determined by the County to be economically viable. There are of course, specific issues with every parcel that could preclude full development, including the owner’s desires, difficult access, and limited water supply for agriculture. As of April, 2006, the Ranch has approximately the following development potential:

Category	Existing*	Potential	Approx. Percent of Build-Out
Main Residences	84	133	63%
Guest House	36	133	27%
Ag. Employee House	15	133	11%
TOTAL	135	399	34%

*9 parcels are considered fully “built-out”; 5 parcels have 2 main residences;

While only a rough measurement, the above chart indicates the Ranch is less than half “built-out”. This potential for more development and at a larger scale than seen before on the Ranch is one of the reasons it is so important to identify what we have done right thus far in protecting the Ranch’s natural environment and what might threaten it in the future.

RANCH MANAGEMENT ISSUES

THE LAND

Any discussion of the Ranch management issues has to begin with the landscape. Entering the Ranch, one is always struck with the beauty of the rolling hills and coastal bluffs, the contrast between the bright green or brown grasslands and the blue ocean. Part

of the beauty lies in the scale of the place, part in the lack of development. Few houses are visible and the freeway insanity is quickly left behind.

But if you look a little harder as you come into the Ranch, you may notice the difference between the vegetation you passed along the Highway 101 corridor or as you traversed Gaviota State Park and what you now see on the Ranch. Outside the Ranch, the dominate plants are invasive exotics like black mustard and toxic castor bean that are so overgrown that you can't walk through them. The recently burned area is overgrown with non-native morning glory vine (bindweed). On the Ranch, while we still have all of these exotic plants, they are largely kept under control by the careful management of our cattle operation. Our landscape looks different, healthier, because it is more grass-based with better nutrient and water cycles, and this is because of our cattle operation. Our rangeland plants have basically co-evolved with domestic cattle over the past 200 years. Admittedly, these are not all of the same plants that were here in the Pleistocene when they were grazed by the now-extinct mega-fauna which included elk, horse, pronghorn, camel, bison, mammoth, and ground sloth. Instead, along with a variety of native grasses, we now have large stands of Old World grasses which dominate the coastal terrace. These are mostly annuals, not predominately perennial, like the natives.

The Ranch should be managed from an "Ecological Landscape" perspective meaning the integrity of the whole 14,500 acres needs to be visualized as a single functioning unit. The greatest threat to the integrity of the landscape, and the habitat it represents, will come from human activities that fragment the landscape. These include things like roads, dwellings, and private agriculture projects. Even a small amount of development in the wrong place can make large amounts of habitat un-usable. It is important to keep corridors of access open for wildlife to reach food, shelter, and fresh water sources and the beach common areas, for example. This is holistic management, we need to think and operate on landscape scale and manage the Ranch as the single, interconnected ecosystem it is.

The two additional basic conservation issues on the Ranch (or nearly anywhere) are invasive species and toxic pollution of soil, air, or water. Our recommendations make an attempt to address these issues, to the extent practicable.

RANGELAND HEALTH

As this Plan makes clear, we believe the continued operation of the Ranch as a cattle ranch is crucially important to preserving a healthy and diverse environment. Owner understanding and appreciation of the important services the cattle operations provide will translate into strong and lasting support for the Cattle Co-op. Cattle shape nearly every landscape on the Ranch, they promote good mineral and water cycles, they reduce fuels for wildfire protection, and they help control invasive, non-native plants which would take over our grasslands without constant control by grazing. We have earlier compared the look of the land at Gaviota State Park, which is not grazed, to that of the Ranch, as an example of why our cattle operation is so important.

While we are not range scientists, we have read enough to learn that proper grazing practices are **not** harmful to native plants and animals but can be beneficial and can actually be used to restore native grasses. The timing and amount of grazing pressure can mimic the grazing patterns of the now-extinct native grazers that used to be here.

THE WATER

While we love the land, we may love the Ranch water even more. The creeks, the beach, and the surf are a big part of why many of us are on the Ranch. Our salt water has a different smell than anywhere to the south of us. It might be that cold California Current that sweeps down from the North Pacific or it might be the lack of people-dirt washing out of our streams.

Because we live in a semi-arid, maritime environment, our sources of fresh water assume a special significance. Our streams are often ephemeral, drying up in the summer and roaring in the wet winters. They are important for our wild neighbors who depend on them for shelter, drinking water, nesting habitat, and as corridors to travel unseen through the Ranch. Of the species of special concern found on the Ranch, 4 plants and 12 animals depend on riparian habitat. Surface and ground water withdrawals for agriculture and domestic use have affected much of California's riparian habitat elsewhere in the State. This has the potential to be a problem on the Ranch as well. Do we have enough water for everybody?

There has been controversy over whether cattle damage our riparian zones. Some have called for exclusion of cattle entirely from our streams, others point out that cattle can be accommodated without damage if they are not allowed to linger. Some say that grazing in riparian habitat is actually essential to the health of the habitat as cattle remove the weedy undergrowth. Range managers in San Luis Obispo County who once totally removed grazers from their riparian corridors now have reintroduced controlled grazing within them to improve native vegetation conditions. We believe the answer to this question depends on how the cattle operation is managed and the site-specific conditions. We remain hopeful that field monitoring and research will demonstrate that enlightened grazing management actually benefits riparian zones.

We have one threatened species of shorebird which nests on our beach, the Snowy Plover. Because our beaches are relatively narrow and swept by higher tides, they don't offer a lot of good nesting habitat for these birds. However, we apparently do have a half dozen nesting Plovers each year in wider sandy areas near freshwater. Our beaches are important migratory and over-wintering areas for these Plovers and hundreds are seen each winter foraging and sheltering here. Beach parking and access has been a hot topic on the Ranch, but it may be possible to increase protection of these birds by minor adjustments of these driving privileges. Uncontrolled dogs on the beach can do as much harm or more than vehicles and this problem may need to be addressed also. The Conservancy currently posts signs to remind people to stay on the wet sand to avoid

disturbing these very sensitive nesting birds during their long nesting season from April to September.

The Ranch's one "officially protected" habitat is our Shoreline Preserve, a 2.2 mile stretch of rocky intertidal habitat which includes a wetland and the coastal bluff face. A designated portion of this preserve has provided countless school children a chance to see relatively pristine tidepool life through the Conservancy's managed access program. Another portion has been set aside for scientific research. As more people make the Ranch their home, will our tidepools suffer as they have elsewhere in California?

GOALS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

We recognize that our goals and recommendations are ambitious and may never be achieved. We decided to publish them all and let others decide which would get attention and have resources devoted to them. We do try to list them in some general order of importance, the first being most critical.

1. Support the cattle operation; keep the **ranch** in Hollister Ranch.

The HROA Board and Staff needs to embrace the protection of our environment and the Cattle Co-op's needs in all Ranch decisions. These two goals are not in conflict; how and where roads, fencing, and houses are built affects not only our wildlife but also the cattle operation. We must do everything we can to minimize the fragmentation of our landscape that inevitably occurs as parcels are developed, as this has the largest impact on plant and animal habitat and our cattle operation. The cattle operation is our most valuable tool for managing the land as it allows us to manage the Ranch as a whole landscape, not as individual "ranchettes". The design review process needs to be expanded to formally consider whether a proposed project reflects the needs of the cattle operation. This includes minimizing fenced areas, maintaining proper "flow" of grazing animals, and locating structures in a way to minimize impacts. This change may require new rules and guidelines but it is beyond the scope of this document to decide what those should be.

2. Place emphasis on encouraging owners to stay in the Williamson Act Agriculture Preserve and to abide by the County agriculture committee uniform rules.

Preserving the Ranch's status as a "ranch" and not some kind of housing development is important, as we note above. The County ag. preserve rules, while apparently subject to broad interpretation, require all non-agricultural uses of a Ranch parcel to not exceed 2 acres in extent, to remain in the ag. preserve program. If we can keep the footprint of development on any given parcel to a minimum, it benefits the natural environment and the cattle operation. We note that the County currently has no active enforcement of the ag. preserve rules and that many parcels on the Ranch appear to be in violation of these rules. We expect this to remain a controversial issue given the difficulties many parcels would have in complying, given the difficult geology and limited building sites of many currently un-developed parcels.

3. Establish a program to monitor environmental and rangeland health.

We are very fortunate to have a Cattle Co-op manager (John McCarty) who really cares about the Ranch and grazes his cows in a way that is best for the land rather than a way that results in the most profit. But, as John readily admits, he isn't going to live forever and the next manager might have different priorities. Besides, if we can visually and scientifically "prove" that our cattle are not harming the land, it gives us something to really brag about and helps the owners understand the benefits of the HR Co-op. Monitoring can be expensive, time consuming, and must be done over many years to be reliable. We recommend three possible monitoring methods that would be appropriate. First, a photo monitoring program which would establish a photo record of the vegetation changes at key locations. Second, perform a regular measurement of the sediment or turbidity in stream runoff during the wet season. This provides an in-direct measurement of soil disturbance and is simple and quick. Finally, we could count and record the benthic macro-invertebrates (insect larva living in the stream bottom) in our streams, as this provides a good indication of watershed and stream health. We do not support testing for or monitoring *E. coli* in our water as we consider this to be an irrelevant indicator.

MEASURING RANGELAND HEALTH

The literature recommends a number of methods of measuring rangeland health. It is not practical for any ranch to measure all of the possible factors to determine rangeland health but we provide this list to give the reader some idea of how much is potentially affected by livestock grazing methods.

1. Species composition- a higher number of different species (plant and animal) and a higher percentage of native species is usually indicative of rangeland health.
2. Bare ground- bare ground can be an indicator of over-grazing and provides an opportunity for invasive, non-native plants to get established.
3. Root depth- deeper roots provide better mineral and nutrient cycling and help prevent erosion. Native grasses are largely perennials with deep root systems.
4. Condition of Riparian Systems- biodiversity, water quality
5. Presence and Abundance of Species and Communities of Special Concern
6. Soil and stream bank erosion
7. Groundwater Changes
8. Stream Flow and Timing
9. Soil Compaction and Bio-activity

4. Identify and map habitats of “special concern” so potential impacts to these can be identified, and prevented or minimized during the design review process. Some 47 “representative botanical areas of note” have already been identified and mapped by the Botanical Resources Study (see appendices). Additional study, particularly of the habitat needs of listed animal species, may find more areas that deserve protection or special review prior to development that might affect them. Any proposed development on the Ranch should then be screened by Staff to see if there is any potential impact on these sensitive areas. These potential impacts should become part of the overall design review process.
5. Consider whether the Ranch should continue to push the County to allow Residential Agricultural Unit (RAU) housing as an alternative to Ag. Employee housing. One of the biggest threats to the Ranch habitat is private agriculture projects done simply to qualify for Ag. Employee housing. The withdrawal and fragmentation of additional land from wildlife habitat and grazing, the potential for increased groundwater depletion, the possible contamination of soil and water with fertilizers or pesticides are all potential problems from cultivated, private ag. development. However, only 15 ag. employee houses have been built on the Ranch in the past 30 years due to the stringent requirements placed upon owners who wish to build ag. employee homes. If RAU’s were permitted as an alternative, it is likely this would result in far more third homes ultimately being constructed on parcels. We recognize this is a difficult issue that requires much further study and deliberation.
6. Establish an on-going effort to review existing private fencing on the Ranch with the goal of removing fencing that is no longer necessary and appropriate. Fences can increase fragmentation and owners should be encouraged to remove them if they are no longer needed.
7. The Ranch should play a larger leadership role in helping preserve the surrounding lands as private cattle ranches. The wild and ranch lands surrounding the Ranch contribute to the Ranch’s species diversity and abundance and help offset the on-going fragmentation of Ranch habitat as people develop and occupy their parcels. This provides real benefits to the Ranch owners who enjoy the wildlife that utilize the entire region.

FRAGMENTATION

A well accepted concept in biology is the “species-area curve”. This states that within each habitat, ecosystem, or ecological landscape there is an optimal patch size which encompasses all community members. Generally speaking, the larger the uninterrupted area, the larger number of species. An integrated, co-dependant group of habitats is termed an **Ecosystem** and an integrated group of ecosystems is known as a **Landscape**. On the Ranch we enjoy an uncommon mix of terrestrial, riparian and marine ecosystems that are all interconnected. Carving up habitats, ecosystems and landscapes into smaller pieces is called “fragmentation”. Fragmentation at any

scale can reduce the health and function of the landscape. Many things can cause habitat fragmentation. Virtually any development on the Ranch shrinks the available habitat/ecosystem/landscape and divides it into smaller pieces. A fragmented habitat/ecosystem/landscape can cause pressure on individual species from predators, crowding, inability to adjust to change such as drought, flood, etc. The smaller populations found in the smaller habitat/ecosystem/ landscape patches are also more vulnerable to extinction. Species with large territories are often affected first by fragmentation.

Not all habitats and ecosystems are equally sensitive. Habitats containing critical resources such as nesting sites, water sources, or food sources for vulnerable species, are more important. If these areas can be protected, then the impacts of fragmentation are lessened. Another way to reduce the impact of development is to provide “buffer zones” around critical habitat. An example of this concept is the 100 foot-wide buffer zone the County requires on either side of any creek on the Ranch. The abundance of species found on the Hollister Ranch is to some extent a result of it being surrounded by 150,000 acres of additional protected private lands. Our habitat area extends well beyond our property lines. If the day comes when the Ranch is surrounded by development, we can anticipate that the number of species and their abundance on the Ranch would be reduced.

8. Control the introduction and spread of non-native and invasive species of plants and animals and reduce the occurrence of selected existing, harmful non-natives.
 - a. Prohibit the introduction of certain landscape plants that could go wild and remove problem plants, if they appear, quickly, before they have a chance to get established. Consider requiring native plants and/or non-invasive exotics for all new landscaping.
 - b. Consider requiring certified weed-free hay and straw on the Ranch.
 - c. Consider a cooperative weed removal program with Union Pacific and/or Gaviota State Park, since these are sources of weed introduction on to the Ranch.
 - d. Consider making invasive plant removal a routine part of Ranch maintenance rather than a “special task” that requires the Conservancy’s involvement. Invasive plants are a huge problem on adjacent lands that are not grazed responsibly, like Gaviota State Park. The cattle operation is already doing a good job of controlling some of these problem plants but, once introduced, it can take many years to remove them. Special efforts will continue to be necessary to keep the Giant Reed (*Arundo*) from getting a hold as its stalks will wash up on the beach every winter.
 - e. Establish a program to keep feral pig and ground squirrel populations under control. Feral pigs are very destructive as they literally consume small wild creatures and can disturb habitat as well as owner landscaping. Ground squirrels can carry bubonic plague and do structural damage to

roads, for example. While it is not practical or desirable to eliminate them entirely, their populations must be controlled.

INVASIVE PLANT MANAGEMENT

It was in 1978, John McCarty's first year as the Cattle Co-op Manager, that he discovered outbreaks of the non-native artichoke thistle in Alegria and Agua Caliente canyons. This tough plant has a tap root up to 6 feet deep, any part of which can re-sprout if you just cut off its top, and produces thousands of seeds which are spread by wind and by catching in animal fur. It has taken 30 years of grazing pressure, of the right amount and at the right time, to nearly eliminate these two outbreaks. And this was accomplished with just a small amount of Roundup herbicide and without work crews digging up plants. The "local knowledge" made it work. Watching carefully to see what came up each year, when to bring the cows on and when to move them off, that was the key, despite the fact that cows don't even like to eat artichoke thistle because of their spiny leaves!

9. Facilitate managed access that benefits the Ranch
 - a. Use cooperative, targeted scientific research to develop information that helps us to manage the Ranch more intelligently. We may be able to get help in our environmental monitoring efforts and restoration projects from colleges and universities in the region. We will have to reach out to them, however; we should not expect them to approach us given the past history. Current procedures for authorizing entry to the Ranch for scientific work are cumbersome and time consuming and act as a deterrent to access. These must be streamlined for access to occur on any reasonable basis. Scientific research that allows us to do a better job of managing the Ranch or bolsters our reputation for good stewardship will likely be more acceptable to Ranch owners. The Conservancy proposes to re-design and simplify the process of granting access to researchers.
 - b. Invite "strategic" groups to the Ranch to showcase our stewardship efforts. If we receive credit for our good works, then the Ranch image is enhanced, clearing the way for more good works; a positive feedback system, more or less. We can reach out to key groups whether they be conservation organizations or decision-makers and build or strengthen alliances. It may be desirable to pre-approve Ranch access for certain groups that we want to get closer to.
 - c. Continue to expand our educational managed access programs similar to the tide pool program conducted in the Shoreline Preserve. Efforts are underway by another Conservancy sub-committee to do this.
10. Build alliances with public agencies and private organizations off the Ranch.

If we want to really be successful with our conservation and restoration programs and enjoy the political benefits thus derived, we need to become a “player”. There are a large number of local environmental organizations that influence public opinion and an equally large number of regulatory agencies that could serve as funding sources for restoration projects. Regardless of whether we need to make a road repair on an Arizona crossing or remove a steelhead migration obstacle, we will need a streambed alteration permit from the Dept. of Fish and Game. This will be a lot easier to get if we have developed good relationships with the parties that will review and grant the permit. We want them on our side. Again, coordination and continuity of staff will make this easier to do.

11. Strengthen ties with UCSB

UCSB is a natural ally in our position that our land is better protected in private hands than public. The application by the Conservancy this year to the Bren School for a Group Project was a good start and taught us how important preparation and continuity are to success. Had we started the process about 6 months earlier and had more give and take with the faculty sponsors in defining the project, we likely would have been selected. Once again, this is tough to do with volunteers and a staff person can do a lot of this better.

12. Educate the owners about the Ranch and how to protect it.

- a. Prepare regular articles in the Hollister Hawk on the Ranch natural history and how owners can reduce their impacts on wildlife and the environment. These can also be posted to the Conservancy website.
- b. Consider a special Conservancy publication, perhaps 8 pages in full color, which is published once or twice a year and would provide more in-depth coverage of Ranch conservation issues and natural history. This would be tailored for a wider distribution and would serve as a public relations device, for owner education, and could be added to the Conservancy website.
- c. Establish a lending library of publications and films that relate to the Ranch.
- d. Create opportunities for owners to participate in conservation and restoration projects, through “watershed councils”, habitat restoration projects as volunteers (beach cleanup, *Arundo* eradication, old fence removal, annual counts of birds, etc.).
- e. Invite speakers to make presentations to owners and/or bring films to the Ranch on relevant topics.

13. Consider developing policies or guidelines on the use of toxic substances on the Ranch by owners and HROA maintenance to prevent water and soil pollution.
 - a. Pesticide and herbicide use is controversial and information about the safety of products is often biased and difficult to find. A policy could resolve conflict and take into account the true impacts of the chemicals.
 - b. Storage and disposal of fuels, oils, household chemicals, antibiotics (in septic systems), and pet waste can result in spills and soil and water pollution and have dramatic impacts on local plants and animals.
14. Improve road designs and maintenance practices over time to reduce erosion and enhance the water cycle. Work actively to change County road policies which promote paving of roads for emergency access. Paved roads are detrimental to wildlife and cattle and should be avoided whenever possible..
15. Establish a permanent environmental management function on the Ranch with full or part-time staffing.
 - a. To work with the owners in eliminating the perceived threats from regulators that stifle efforts by the Conservancy. We must address the fears that allowing access to researchers will result in negative repercussions to owners. Careful staff work in developing access agreements can resolve many of these fears.
 - b. To administer and coordinate volunteer hosts and docents for the various managed access programs. This task is becoming larger as we increase our managed access programs.
 - c. To consult with the Design Committee about proposed development and help assess its impact on biological resources.
 - d. To keep accurate records and to handle the many routine duties now handled by “burned-out” volunteers.
 - e. To maintain and update the Conservancy website
 - f. To oversee the natural history exhibits (in Hollister House and elsewhere) and lending library.
 - g. To develop relationships with outside agencies and groups that can help the Ranch either politically or as a source of funds for conservation and restoration projects. We learned with the Bren School project that it is necessary to begin working with funding sources well ahead of the proposal due date so that alliances can be formed and un-written rules

observed. This kind of continuity is virtually impossible to achieve with volunteers; you need a staff person to do it.

RESTORATION

Restoration of modified, natural habitat appears to be more controversial than simple conservation on the Ranch. Since most restoration projects will take place on private property, the direct involvement and support of the land owners is a pre-requisite. We anticipate that some of the projects listed will only take place if the affected owners are strongly motivated and come together in a cooperative manner to achieve a common goal.

RESTORATION ON THE RANCH- CASE STUDIES

Watershed Protection Project

The Watershed Stewardship and Rangeland Enhancement Program was established by the HROA in 2002. The primary purpose was to develop watering troughs for cattle on the hillsides so they would not loiter in the creeks and wetlands. A secondary purpose was to provide water to fight wildfires. As of this writing, some 17 new watering points have been installed all across the Ranch and another 10 or so are planned. Over 6000 acres of pasture have benefited from this program because cattle can now better utilize the grass available up on the ridges instead of hanging out in the canyon bottoms.

COAST LIVE OAK WOODLANDS

Our Coast Live Oaks are the definitive landscape feature of our stream corridors and upland oak woodlands. Many species depend on the acorns and habitat provided by these oaks. While we have good stands of Coast Live Oaks, their natural regeneration is impaired in many areas of California and may be the case on the Ranch, too. Scientists disagree about what causes this impaired regeneration. Over-browsing by feral pigs, cattle, ground squirrels, and deer have all been blamed as well as dryer soil conditions caused by non-native annual grasses that cause early seedling death. In any event, oaks are a beautiful and important part of the Ranch ecological landscape, don't need irrigating after they become established (1-3 years), survive wildfires, and live a long time (250 years or more). Plant oaks, or better yet, nurture the self-established seedlings; it's a good thing.

Panochas Flats Native Grass Restoration Project

In 2004, the Cattle Co-op, with funding from the Coastal Ranches Conservancy, planted about 13 acres at the Panochas Flats (by Rancho Real) with a native grass mix specifically chosen for that previously cultivated field. A "rangeland drill" was used to plant the seeds ¼ to ½ inch deep. The grazing scheme has been to apply heavy grazing pressure during the winter months to keep the broad-leaved annuals down, then switching

to light pressure in the Spring, when the natives emerge. Some natives did germinate in our wet year of 2005 and Sue Field will be surveying again later this year (2006) to determine if there has been significant establishment of native perennial grasses using this method.

RESTORATION POSSIBILITIES

Habitat restoration offers a chance for us to fix past mistakes. In some cases, such as the Southern Steelhead, the Ranch could restore habitat that would make a significant positive impact on the survival of the species in the region. Ranch owners have expressed concern in the past about releasing information to the public that could later be used to restrict the Ranch or individual owner's use of their property. We believe these fears are based upon real things that have happened or could happen and should not be ignored. But there are steps that can be taken to prevent "data gathering" which could result in restrictions on individual parcels as a by-product of managed access, scientific research, or permits for restoration projects. Sufficient staff time to craft access and research agreements can reduce the risks substantially. Use of intermediary organizations like the Coastal Ranches Conservancy also will help.

We need to look for, complete, and celebrate (publicly), some small, successful restoration projects to demonstrate that we can do it and that there is nothing to fear if we handle things correctly. One or two of these will go a long way towards building confidence on both sides of the controversy. Perhaps the HROA Board, the Co-Op, and the Conservancy could work together on some partnership grants with the Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS), for example, which is not required to publish its efforts and is experienced in working with ranchers who require their environmental information remain private.

We propose the following restoration projects as only "possibilities" not as definitive plans. Some are already under way and others exist only as a concept. Some can be done on individual parcels; others require multiple parcel cooperation.

1. Restore stream passage for Southern Steelhead.

At least one creek on the Ranch still has a breeding population of the endangered Southern Steelhead. This creek also has physical obstructions that prevent migrating steelhead from utilizing the upper reaches of the creek for spawning. Removing these obstructions would not only improve steelhead habitat but also result in the natural restoration of a long reach of stream corridor that is currently silted-in. However, this must be weighed against the impacts of moving this silt downstream and out to the beach.

This would be a complicated project to complete, requiring strong support from adjacent landowners and a number of permits. However, there is tremendous support for these types of projects from State and local agencies and a fair amount of grant money is currently available. There is a high probability that funding could be found

for some or even most of the costs of this project without jeopardizing the “privacy” or property rights of adjacent owners.

2. Restore perennial native grasses

We mentioned above the native grass restoration project at Panochas Flats, but what’s so great about native grasses? Natives are generally perennial, meaning they don’t die every year the way annuals do. (Some individuals can live to be hundreds of years old!) They have deeper root systems, which anchor the soil better and allow them to stay green longer and present less of a fire danger, particularly if they are regularly grazed. They also help the soil retain water longer and cycle nutrients better from deeper soil horizons, ultimately creating deeper top soil and healthier soil biota. The Cattle Co-op likes them because they tend to provide higher protein feed over a longer season. So the Ranch can benefit in many ways from pastures where we can re-establish native grasses. The Cattle Co-op has been using controlled grazing techniques which encourage the success of perennials for over ten years, and we are slowly seeing results; even in the more difficult to restore, previously cultivated pastures.

3. Replace existing non-native landscaping with natives

Our visual landscape on the Ranch is not just about oak trees, our eucalyptus groves are in many cases a historic landscape feature. But in a fire-prone landscape do we really want to be surrounded by eucalyptus trees that burn like road-side flares? Over time, we could plant oaks and other natives and gradually replace some of the eucalyptus trees and drastically reduce our fire danger. Oaks survive fire, provide wildlife food and habitat, and contribute to stable stream flows while non-native eucalyptus are toxic to most native, under-story vegetation, capable of relatively rapid encroachment, and are notorious for drying up streams.

4. Address previously approved development which has proven harmful to the environment.

The best example of this type are fenced areas that are no longer used. Lack of grazing has contributed to high fuel build-up in these enclosures and opening them back up will be good for wildlife and make it easier for the Co-op to manage the cows. The Ranch and Co-op are currently working with owners to remove fencing and to move stables and pens farther from creeks, and more of this could be done.

BASELINE DATA AND INFO NEEDS

We have referred above to the many uncertainties as to “best management practices” for the Ranch environment. We will never have all the answers but a modest monitoring program containing elements such as we have proposed, can establish a “baseline” against which to measure future conditions. This will provide some answers over the long-term to help ensure we are meeting our obligations of good stewardship. We

recommend a photo monitoring program to show vegetation changes and a stream water monitoring program that would detect water quality changes. The Ranch may also want to consider, in the future, adding some type of regular census of key indicator plants and animals. This could be as simple as an annual bird count conducted by volunteers or a more complex, science-based study done by an independent researcher.

MANAGEMENT STRUCTURE

Potentially the most important action the Ranch can take in regard to protecting its environment is to institutionalize the environmental management function. Up to the present time, this function has been performed by various combinations of volunteers, the Ranch Manager and staff, and HR Cattle Co-op. A permanent staff function with responsibility to oversee and improve the Ranch's ecological integrity could provide coordination and improve the many individual efforts that are currently underway.

The Ranch currently spends approx. \$300,000 per year on its Stewardship Program, primarily monitoring and lobbying government activities that could affect the Ranch. During the Gaviota Seashore Study, this expense was nearly \$500,000. Some portion of this money could logically be diverted to pay for staff with the expectation that improving and publicizing the Ranch's environmental activities will increase our political standing and power and serve to help make the case that we are better stewards of the land than a public agency.

Funding of specific projects has in the past been from funds raised by special assessments of the owners, from the Conservancy through sales of publications such as the Wildlife Checklist, the Hollister Ranch History book, and through the art sales conducted in past years. A group of concerned Ranch owners recently established a 501c3 non-profit organization called the Coastal Ranches Conservancy (CRC) which makes it easier to raise funds for Ranch projects since all contributions are tax deductible. The CRC also can help provide "privacy" for owners who wish to participate in projects but are concerned about potential exposure to regulators that could restrict their property rights by acting as an intermediary in seeking permits or grant funding from public agencies. This could be especially important on large, complicated projects such as steelhead restoration.

APPENDICES

The *Botanical Resources of Hollister Ranch* (1998) and the *Checklist to the Wildlife of Hollister Ranch* (2005) are the two best sources of information specific to the Ranch. The Botanical resources study contains maps of the Ranch geology, soils, and vegetation. It also has a map showing "Representative Botanical Areas of Note" which are candidate areas for further protection or review of pending development.

PREVIOUS MANAGEMENT RECOMMENDATIONS- A SUMMARY

From the Botanical Resources Report, we have the following:

1. “Hollister Ranch continues to support a surprising variety of native habitats as well as unusual and interesting native flora.”
2. Chart of the plant species of special interest; some 38 taxa
3. Map of “Representative Botanical Areas of Note”; 47 areas with special importance
4. List of all our Plant Communities
5. List of “Management Opportunities”
 - a. Use Native Plants in Landscaping
 - b. Eradicate Invasive Exotic Plants
 - c. Improve management of sites and corridors
 - d. Improve management of streams and riparian corridors
 - e. Encourage innovative agricultural practices
 - f. Encourage innovative design guidelines
 - g. Designate “Representative Botanical Areas of Note”
 - h. Prepare and Implement Management Plans for Species of Special Interest
 - i. Prepare and Implement Habitat Restoration Plans
 - j. Encourage future research projects

And from the Tenera Report (“Managed Access on Hollister Ranch”) we find:

Hollister Ranch Owners Association Operating Documents

There are 3 operating documents for Hollister Ranch owners:

- Declaration of Conditions, Covenants and Restrictions
- Hollister Ranch Rules
- Design Committee Rules

These documents encourage conscientious stewardship practices for the biological resources on the owner's land and on Hollister Ranch common areas. All 3 documents affirm that one of the primary objectives for the respective rules is the preservation of, variously stated, the natural vegetation, ecological values, natural beauty, and pristine condition of Hollister Ranch in perpetuity for the enjoyment of current and future owners. Each is considered briefly as it pertains to the owner's responsibility for the continued conservation and stewardship of natural resources.

Conditions, Covenants and Restrictions (CC&Rs)

The CC&R declaration establishes that the Hollister Ranch has been beautifully preserved in a relatively natural and unspoiled state since 1866. Its stated purpose is to foster beneficial land use that retains and preserves the unique beauty and natural character into the future and it presents the best management practices to achieve this goal for each individual parcel. The CC&Rs include provisions against removing

vegetation, for replacing damaged vegetation and types of uses allowed in the areas around the boundaries of each parcel. This document recognizes that areas of special ecological interest need preservation, with periodic monitoring and specific management plans.

Hollister Ranch Rules

There are numerous Ranch rules governing guests, vehicles, hunting, livestock, fires and group use policies. These rules are designed to reflect the philosophy of the Ranch, to protect the environment, and to minimize annoyance to others using the Ranch.

Design Committee Rule

The Design Committee administers the environmental controls stated in the CC&Rs. Recognizing that it is to the owners common good to preserve the natural attributes of Hollister Ranch, one goal of the Committee's rules is to provide for the preservation, protection, and enhancement of the natural environment. Within each of the three characteristic types of terrain on the Hollister Ranch (coastal grasslands, coastal hills, and coastal mountain ranges) the primary design concerns are to consider ecological impacts and to protect and enhance native vegetation.

Also from the Tenera Report:

1. Priorities for Future Scientific and Educational Access
 - a. Study to compare marine resources at the Shoreline Preserve to those found in a similar habitat with public access
 - b. Study trampling effects at Shoreline Preserve to gauge carrying capacity and demonstrate sensitivity of resource
 - c. Re-start long-term study at Shoreline Preserve to measure species abundance and diversity
 - d. Create GIS map of Shoreline Preserve
 - e. Develop "Coastal Education Curriculum" for teachers to use before they visit Shoreline Preserve
 - f. Allow students to participate in long-term research project at Preserve
 - g. Quantify all visits to Shoreline Preserve, including those of owners and guests so the impacts can be better determined
2. Priorities for Future Conservancy Activities
 - a. Create repository for scientific information
 - b. Prepare educational materials
 - c. Develop a web site for access to educational materials
 - d. Develop Geographical Information System (GIS) to map sensitive habitat and species presence, etc.
3. Recommendations Concerning Coastal Carrying Capacity
 - a. Human induced impact on rocky shoreline
 - b. Risks associated with increased use
 - c. Access management recommendations

- i. Up to 12 school bus trips per year
- ii. Clearly delineate areas for public education
- iii. Continue using trained biologists as hosts
- iv. Maintain record of all scientific studies with master plot map
- v. Maintain a library with all research results
- vi. Maintain accurate database on visitor use
- vii. Improve the process for granting research access

SOURCE DOCUMENTS

PREAMBLE TO THE RANCH CC&Rs

This Declaration is made this 13th day of September, 1971, by MGIC Equities Corporation, a Delaware Corporation, as owner of a unique California coastal ranch which is known as the Hollister ranch and is more fully described in attached Exhibit "A" and which, since the date of its original grant in 1866, has been beautifully preserved in its natural and unspoiled state. The purpose of this Declaration is to perpetuate, with respect to that portion of the Hollister ranch to which it applies, the rich variety of this rugged coastal and pastoral environment for the benefit of all who acquire property therein.

MGIC Equities seeks to develop this property in a manner which ensures the full enjoyment of the historical traditions and natural advantages of the area for all who acquire property therein and yet which encourages diverse individual expression within the environment. MGIC Equities believes this fundamental concept can serve the interests of those who become such owners by fostering a beneficial land use which retains the unique beauty of the land and creates an atmosphere enriching the spirit of its participants.

It must be assumed that all who become owners of property subject to this Declaration are motivated by the character of the natural environment in which it is located, and accept, for and among themselves, the principle that the development and use of the property must preserve this character for present and future enjoyment of all the owners. It is also assumed that those who are entrusted with the administration of this property will discharge their trust in full recognition of that principle and, to the extent consistent therewith, will foster maximum flexibility and freedom of individual expression.

It is to promote the foregoing that this Declaration is made and it is the intention of MGIC Equities that the limitations, conditions, covenants, and restrictions of this Declaration, and of all other declarations supplemental hereto, will be understood and construed in recognition of the foregoing.

HOLLISTER RANCH CONSERVANCY CHARTER

The HROA, therefore, establishes herein the Goals and Guidelines for the activities of the Conservancy Committee.

I. Purpose: To protect and enhance the Ranch environment

II. Goals: The study, management, and conservation of the Ranch environment

Development of a Ranch Conservancy Program providing for controlled access to the Ranch for educational and scientific purpose, as opposed to recreational activities.

To provide the owners of the Ranch the opportunity to learn about the Ranch environment

III. Implementation:

- A. A comprehensive review of the natural environment of the Ranch should be made, resulting in the cataloguing of the flora, fauna, geology, history, and archeology of the Ranch.*
- B. Development of a Program for the management of controlled access for educational or scientific purposes under the policies and guidelines as adopted by HROA Board resolution.*
- C. Development of a program for the enjoyment, enhancement, monitoring, or protection of specific sites found to be interesting, rare, sensitive, or endangered.*
- D. Funding for the Conservancy will come through budgets approved by the HROA Board and donations.*

All activities of the Conservancy are to be FULLY DOCUMENTED since it is essential in order to be effective in helping HROA to retain controlled access to the Ranch for all of the owners.

SPECIES OF SPECIAL CONCERN

This list only represents species that have the potential to occur on the Ranch and we cannot confirm which of these are actually present. But the length of this list is a good indicator of how special and valuable the Ranch habitat is. This list of animals is taken from the newly revised *A Checklist to the Wildlife of Hollister Ranch*, published by the Conservancy.

Key: E-endangered; T-threatened; C- candidate for listing; S- special concern; D-declining

ANIMALS

BIRDS

1. Brown Pelican E

2. White-faced Ibis	C
3. Osprey	S,D
4. White-tailed kite	D
5. Bald Eagle	E
6. Northern Harrier	S,D
7. Coopers Hawk	S,D
8. Swainsons Hawk	T
9. Ferruginous Hawk	S,D
10. Rough-legged Hawk	D
11. Golden Eagle	D
12. Merlin	S
13. Prairie falcon	S
14. Common Moorhen	D
15. Snowy Plover	T,S
16. Mountain Plover	S,C
17. Elegant Tern	C
18. Least Tern	E
19. Black Skimmer	S
20. Marbled Murrelet	T,E
21. Rhinoceros Auklet	S
22. Burrowing Owl	D,S
23. Long-eared Owl	D,S
24. Short-eared Owl	D,S
25. Willow Flycatcher	D,E
26. Loggerhead Shrike	S
27. Bell's Vireo	E
28. Warbling Vireo	D
29. Horned Lark	S
30. Purple Martin	S,D
31. Tree Swallow	D
32. Swainsons Thrush	D
33. Yellow Warbler	D,S
34. Wilson's Warbler	D
35. Yellow-breasted Chat	S,D
36. Rufus-crowned Sparrow	S
37. Sage Sparrow	S
38. Grasshopper Sparrow	S,D
39. Blue Grosbeak	D
40. Tri-colored Blackbird	C,S

FISH

1. Steelhead Trout	E,S
2. Tide-water Goby	E,S

AMPHIBIAN AND REPTILES

1. California Newt	S
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- | | |
|------------------------------|-----|
| 2. Red-legged Frog | T,S |
| 3. Western Pond Turtle | C,S |
| 4. Coast Horned Lizard | S |
| 5. California Legless Lizard | C,S |
| 6. Two-striped Garter Snake | C,S |

MAMMALS

- | | |
|-------------------------|-----|
| 1. Yuma Myotis Bat | C,S |
| 2. Western Red Bat | S |
| 3. Big-eared Bat | S |
| 4. Pallid Bat | S |
| 5. Western Bonneted Bat | S |
| 6. Desert Woodrat | S |
| 7. Ringtail | D |
| 8. American Badger | D,S |
| 9. Sea Otter | T |
| 10. Mountain Lion | D |

PLANTS

This plant list is from the Botanical Resources Report and includes only those species shown that were on the California Native Plant Society (CNPS) Inventory (indicating a “species of special concern”) on the date of the report (1998). No attempt has been made to update this list with current information. Please note that *Gaviota Tarplant*, which is common on our coastal terrace and listed as an endangered species, is not even on this list.

1. *Baccharis plummerae*, Plummer's Baccharis
2. *Erigeron sanctarum*, Saint's Daisy
3. *Senecio aphanactis*, Chaparral Ragwort
4. *Erysimum suffrutescens*, Large-leaved Wallflower
5. *Dudleya palmeri*, Palmer's Dudleya
6. *Arctostaphylos glandulosa* var. *zacaensis*, Zaca Manzanita
7. *Arctostaphylos refugioensis*, Refugio Manzanita
8. *Quercus parvula*, Santa Cruz Island Oak
9. *Eriodictyon capitatum*, Lompoc Yerba Santa
10. *Calochortus catalinae*, Catalina Mariposa Lily
11. *Calochortus weedii* var. *vestus*, Weed's Mariposa lily
12. *Lillium humboldtii* ssp. *ocellatum*, Humboldt Lily
13. *Horkelia cuneata* ssp. *sericea*, Kellogg's Horkelia

-end-