



# Guardians of the Range

## California Rangeland Conservation Coalition

*"We know that there are 5 percent of the issues we may never agree on... but why should we spend 100 percent of our time fighting when we have so many mutual goals?"*

*- Judy Ahmann*

Photos courtesy of USDA-NRCS and Andrew Fulks ([www.yolohiker.org](http://www.yolohiker.org)).

## Partners

- USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service
- California Department of Fish & Game
- Tuleyome Society
- UC Cooperative Extension Service
- U.S. Bureau of Reclamation

## Returning the Cattle to Lake Berryessa

### Running Deer Ranch, Napa County

In 1998 when ranchers were told to remove their cattle from a 6-mile strip of northeastern Lake Berryessa shoreline in Napa County, it was done with the intention of doing the best thing for the land.



John and Judy Ahmann have worked with Phill Blake and the local NRCS for over two decades.

Stalled budgets keep habitat improvements on hold. Wildlife such as Aleutian geese were actually leaving overgrown lakeshore lands and devastating nearby private pastures.

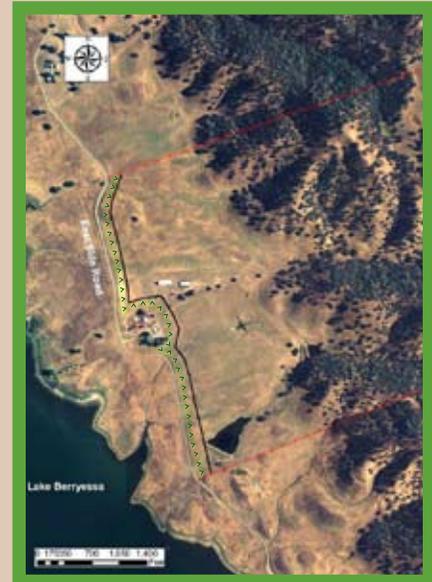
Carefully managed livestock grazing is being considered the best opportunity for stewarding the land, says Phill Blake, Napa District Conservationist with USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service. "If this goes through it will provide a template for other public lands," he says. Blake and his staff, teamed up with Morgan Doran, UC Cooperative Extension Service, to draw up a proposed management plan at the request of the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation (BOR), the federal agency that owns thousands of acres of lakeshore lands.

Napa ranchers John and Judy Ahmann are one of the ranch families who hope to resume ranching under this agreement. The restoration plan calls for managed grazing of the shoreline to control noxious weeds.

Land bordering Lake Berryessa has become over vegetated. Restoration plans called for managed grazing in cooperation with neighboring ranches.

Ten years later, with the well being of the land still serving as the guiding criterion, the cattle may be coming back.

In the intervening decade the lands have grown dense with fire-fueling thatch.



Running Deer Ranch sits at the northeast corner of Lake Berryessa. The green marks indicate where new habitat and fire protection vegetation is being installed.



With help from agencies like NRCS and UCCE ranchers would also restore eroded and declining riparian areas, develop ponds for waterfowl habitat, provide osprey nesting areas, and actively regenerate oaks (which failed to conform to the assumption that removing the cows would bring them back).

In 1998, BOR turned over management of federal east shore lands to the California Department of Fish and Game. Wildlife management plans drawn up at the time assumed that removing livestock grazing, coupled with new habitat development projects, would enhance the habitat. However, declining state budgets led to the recognition that shared public/private land management can provide greater flexibility to benefit the land. Currently the agencies and ranchers are in the process of hammering out the details of the 'grazing rights for habitat enhancement' deal.

The Ahmanns, whose ranch was used as a staging area for Cal Fire to fight the 39,000 acre Rumsey Fire in 2004, are interested in grazing the lakeside land both as feed for their livestock and as fire protection from the adjacent overgrown vegetation. They are also working with NRCS to place a 4,000+-foot strip of habitat and fire protection between their ranch and the Berryessa strip. Working through the NRCS's Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) the Ahmanns plan to restore habitat by planting and mulching native trees and shrubs, and then water the plantings with a micro-irrigation system.

The Ahmanns have owned their Lake Berryessa property, called Running Deer Ranch, since 1985 when they purchased it from a Hollywood actor who had bought the "shoreline property" sight unseen under the mistaken impression that the ranch bordered the Lake and could be subdivided for development. Though they ultimately purchased it for half the actor's original asking price Ahmann says, "it was in terrible shape. We ran no more than 15 cows on 3,000 acres for the first five years until the land could support cattle again. Previous operators had hammered the land hard."



Hikers of the Blue Ridge Berryessa Natural Area will soon have access to over 100 miles of trail, due in part to an easement through a piece of the Ahmanns' Running Deer Ranch.



John Ahmann, an Eagle Scout and outdoor enthusiast, was agreeable to granting an easement to allow hiking in the remote area of the Running Deer Ranch.

Today, the Ahmanns and their on-site managers share Running Deer Ranch with frogs, deer, fox, coyote, bear, cougar, squirrels, geese, ducks, dove, wild turkey, quail, golden eagle and bald eagle—to name a few—all of which find food, water and resting/nesting sites on their land. They lease hunting rights through a private company to manage the number, timing and species of takes.

In 2007, the Ahmanns were approached by the Tuleyome Society who wished to stitch together 100 miles of hiking trail through the Blue Ridge Berryessa Natural Area. It would allow hikers who were willing to tackle the steep remote terrain, spectacular views from 3,000- foot Berryessa Peak. Although most of the trail would be on federal land, a half-mile stretch through Running Deer Ranch was needed to tie together segments of the trail.

Ahmann, an eagle scout himself and an avid supporter of scouting, agreed that it was a gift he and Judy were happy to make to help people enjoy access to the natural vistas and experiences that their land affords.

Judy Ahmann, current President of the California Cattlewomen's Association, says "the California Rangeland Conservation Coalition is directly responsible for bringing together the kind of parties needed to make efforts like ours succeed. She notes that F&G, NRCS, Tuleyome and Cal FIRE are all Coalition signatories. "We know that there are 5 percent of the issues we may never agree on," she says, "but why should we spend 100 percent of our time fighting when we have so many mutual goals?"

Why indeed?

This story is courtesy of the California Rangeland Conservation Coalition. To learn more about what other ranchers are doing throughout the state or about this cooperative partnership visit

[www.carangeland.org](http://www.carangeland.org)

Written by Anita Brown  
Director of Public Affairs  
Natural Resources Conservation Service