



Conserving the natural and agricultural legacy of the southern Sierra Nevada and San Joaquin Valley



Heavy equipment carves a new stream channel on bare ground at the James K. Herbert Wetland Prairie Preserve (left, fall 2002, Elizabeth Palmer©). Seasonal rain filled the created channel with water; native grass prevents erosion and provides wildlife habitat (right, spring 2005, Carole Combs©).

## SRT recreates 83-acre wetland prairie

This March, Sequoia Riverlands Trust celebrates the completion of a three-year restoration project creating a seasonal freshwater marsh and valley oak riparian corridor dominated by native species on an 83-acre portion of the 725-acre James K. Herbert Wetland Prairie Preserve. Serving as a demonstration of cost-effective, wildlife-friendly floodplain management, this restored area immediately attracted increased numbers and a greater diversity of water birds, many of which had never been seen on the property before.

Working with funders and experts from the California Department of Fish & Game, Natural Resources Conservation Service, State of California Wildlife Conservation Board, U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, U.S. Bureau of Reclamation's Habitat Restoration Program and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Sequoia Riverlands Trust constructed a network of stream channels, ponds and upland areas similar to what this region may have looked like 150 years ago. Over 120 bird species, such as burrowing owl, Swainson's hawk, golden eagle, ferruginous hawk, killdeer, mallard, ruddy duck and pied-billed grebe now nest or forage at the preserve.

Native grasses, sedges, shrubs and trees now dominate much of the restored area. Some native plants, like saltgrass, clover and dwarf popcornflower, grew from the seed bank within the soil. Sequoia Riverlands Trust planted others, like alkali sacaton (a perennial bunchgrass) and creeping wildrye to augment native vegetation communities, providing wildlife cover and erosion control in the stream channel. This restored area now offers even more habitat for wetland bird species like red-winged blackbird and black-necked stilt, which began nesting at the preserve only after enhancement work commenced.

"The efforts of Sequoia Riverlands Trust provide residents and visitors with a rare opportunity to learn about and enjoy a wide variety of unique wildlife in a habitat quickly disappearing in the San Joaquin Valley," said Scott Clemons, riparian program manager for the State of California Wildlife Conservation Board. "Here, one can learn about owls that live underground, toads that estivate (like hibernation) in the soil and flocks of whimbrels that migrate between Argentina and Alaska each year."

Today, Sequoia Riverlands Trust manages the preserve with a rigorous scientific research program using prescribed fire to improve native plant forage for wildlife and future livestock grazing. Most of the preserve's native plant species depend on natural disturbances, such as fire or floods, to bring about reproduction, growth or flowering. After more than a century without natural fires, Sequoia Riverlands Trust reintroduced this much needed element to help control aggressive non-native plant species, such as Bermuda grass and yellow star thistle at the preserve.

Since restoration is really an ongoing project, over time you will notice more changes as valley oak trees grow providing shade on the prairie; additional birds, mammals and other wildlife make the preserve their home and Sequoia Riverlands Trust installs trails, restrooms, interpretive exhibits and other visitor services. The James K. Herbert Wetland Prairie Preserve gives us the chance to pass on a unique part of our San Joaquin Valley heritage to our children and grandchildren. Your memberships, donations and volunteer efforts help Sequoia Riverlands Trust steward special places like this. Get involved today!

## VISTAS

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**Please join us in welcoming Jill Cherneff,  
John Colbert and Cliff Ronk to Sequoia  
Riverlands Trust's Board of Directors.**

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The Sequoia Riverlands Trust (SRT) is a local, community-based, 501 (c)(3) non-profit conserving the natural and agricultural legacy of the southern Sierra Nevada and San Joaquin Valley. A copy of the latest financial statement and registration filed with the Registry of Charitable Trusts may be obtained by contacting the SRT office. Contributions are deductible to the extent allowed by law.

## New trees at Dry Creek Preserve

Over the past year, more than 100 volunteers, ranging from age three to 80 years, planted almost 400 valley oak, blue oak and California sycamore trees at Sequoia Riverlands Trust's Dry Creek Preserve, a former gravel quarry undergoing intensive restoration. This diverse group of volunteers from throughout Tulare and Fresno counties donated over 300 hours digging holes, rolling aviary wire, hauling mulch and carrying water. Additionally, Wood Industries in Lemon Cove and Intermountain Nursery in Prather donated much needed materials and assistance. Thank you to all of you who dedicated your time to leaving your own legacy at the preserve!

Sequoia Riverlands Trust has been restoring the 152-acre Dry Creek Preserve since acquiring it two years ago from California Portland Cement Company. This project, when completed, will provide a future public preserve where the community can enjoy natural river environments and learn how retired gravel mines can again provide wildlife habitat, scenic beauty and an opportunity for community stewardship. Once accomplished, this project will provide the first example of an ecologically-based aggregate mine reclamation in Tulare County.

### Valley oak

Lobed oak, Listens.  
In the dark. Of the dream.  
An eagle, rests.  
Leaves of wisdom.

-W.A. Kaneversky

*Author's notes: "Lobed oak" is in reference to the valley oak's latin name Quercus lobata, due to the lobed structure of the leaves. The "dream" is life, thus "dark...dream" is night. The wisdom of listening results in the restful grandeur of the valley oak.*

### Board bio: Cliff Ronk

In December 2005, Cliff joined the Board of Sequoia Riverlands Trust. Previously an Advisor to SRT, Cliff brings a broad base of experience in land acquisition and development to the organization. He believes the land trust has a unique opportunity right now to influence politicians and builders about the value of our natural heritage in the San Joaquin Valley. "By finding the means and methods of incorporating this heritage into development projects, we can optimize conservation of the natural landscape," said Cliff.



Cliff Ronk lends a hand planting trees at Dry Creek Preserve.

SRT © 2005

As a Board member, Cliff hopes to help build bridges that give residents high-quality housing, maintain viable agriculture and protect the priceless character and quality of the natural environment. Cliff is the Director of Forward Planning for Centex Homes, where he has also held positions as a Land Development Manager and Land Acquisition Manager. Cliff and his wife, Cathy, live north of Elderwood, where they have farmed citrus for almost 30 years.

## How to restore altered lands: a 10 step guide

Creating new habitat or restoring degraded land involves different strategies depending on the location of the project. What follows below is a simplified version of the steps Sequoia Riverlands Trust used to create a seasonal wetland at the James K. Herbert Wetland Prairie Preserve and restore the gravel quarry at Dry Creek Preserve.

### James K. Herbert Wetland Prairie Preserve

1. Partner with experts from local, state and federal agencies, universities, non-profits and the local community.
2. Use a bulldozer to carve stream channels and ponds, as well as rebuild small hills and mounds (upland habitat).
3. Control erosion by seeding creeping wildrye (*Leymus triticoides*), a fast-growing native grass that spreads through underground shoots.
4. Watch rain fall, filling stream channels and ponds with water.
5. Admire nesting red-winged blackbirds, a wetland indicator species.
6. Plant upland areas with native alkali barley, milkweed and golden bush.
7. Watch the playful activities of burrowing owls as you walk past their dens.
8. Remove non-native plants such as Johnsongrass and milk thistle by hand, by lighting prescribed fire or with an occasional application of mild herbicides.
9. Plant valley and blue oak acorns.
10. Monitor and enjoy an increased variety and abundance of wildlife at the preserve.

### Dry Creek Preserve

1. Design a restoration plan to meet regulatory, biological and aesthetic goals by working with experts from local, state and federal agencies, universities, non-profits and the local community.
2. Remove man-made structures in the stream channel that restrict water flow.
3. Use a bulldozer to reshape gravel and spoils piles so they blend with the surrounding foothills.
4. Plant exposed soils with purple needlegrass (*Nassella pulchra*), California Brome (*Bromus carinatus*), sky lupine (*Lupinus nanus*) and other native grasses and forbs.
5. Watch winter rain and minor flood events redistribute sediment and nutrients in historic braided stream channels.
6. Collect valley and blue oak acorns as well as California sycamore, grass and forb seeds.
7. Marvel at wood duck, great blue heron, bald eagle and bobcat.
8. Invite the community to help plant trees, grown from local seed at nearby nurseries.
9. Remove non-native plants such as star thistle and tamarisk by hand, by lighting prescribed fire or with an occasional application of mild herbicides.
10. Plan for visitor facilities including trails, restrooms and interpretive signs, while enjoying foothills still green in June.

While the location, vegetation and wildlife may be different for each restoration project, you can see Sequoia Riverlands Trust uses some similar strategies across location. Who would guess that a bulldozer would play such an important role or that with a little help, nature can do most of the restoration work? Most importantly, though, it's our partners and volunteers that make these projects successful. Sequoia Riverlands Trust could not have accomplished so much in such a short time without their (and your) help! **Thank you.**



Rob Hansen listens for bird calls at the James K. Herbert Wetland Prairie Preserve.

Carole Combs © 2005



Gorgeous purple lupine flower throughout the Dry Creek Preserve.

SRT © 2005

## Save the date

### Exciting events

**May 19, 7:30 p.m.** Benefit Concert: B.B. King @ Visalia Fox Theatre; tickets available through [www.vallitix.com](http://www.vallitix.com), 1-888-825-5484 or any Vallitix ticket location.

### Explore your backyard

We invite all ages for fun nature walks up to two miles long. Please dress appropriately, wear sturdy shoes and bring water and a friend. Field guides or binoculars optional.

*Donation: \$5 members, \$10 non-members or join that day and attend for free!*

**March 25, 8:30 – 10:30 a.m.**

Discover the vernal pool prairie at the James K. Herbert Wetland Prairie Preserve. Program includes an optional extended tour from 10:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. of the recently restored 'Area C.'

**April 22, 8:30 – 10:30 a.m.**

Learn foothill wildflowers at Blue Oak ranch in Springville.

**May 27, 8:30 – 10:30 a.m.**

Explore Dry Creek's sycamore alluvial woodland at Homer Ranch.

**June 24, 6:30 – 9:00 a.m.**

Learn summer birds at Kaweah Oaks Preserve

### Teacher's corner

**March 31** Applications due for the \$1,000 Lee Wilson Scholarship.

**May 19** Last day for educational tours at Kaweah Oaks Preserve



SRT © 2005

Land Steward Hilary Dustin leads a tour of Homer Ranch.

### Volunteers needed!

Join us for workdays and volunteer training opportunities at Kaweah Oaks, Dry Creek or the James K. Herbert Wetland Prairie Preserve. Email Jane Caputo, [jane@sequoiariverlands.org](mailto:jane@sequoiariverlands.org) to *sign up*.

Please check [www.sequoiariverlands.org](http://www.sequoiariverlands.org) for current information and additional programs or call 559.738.0211.

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