



## OREGON RANCH COMBINES PROGRAMS FOR LONG-TERM SUSTAINABILITY

FACT SHEET FIVE • SPRING 2013

*This fact sheet series highlights innovative ways that family forest and ranch owners are prospering from protecting and enhancing ecosystem services on their land. Ecosystem services are the benefits people receive from nature such as water quality, wildlife habitat, and carbon sequestration.*

**L**andowners who want to restore and improve their land may be unsure of how to navigate the programs that are available to help them reach their goals. A ranch family in southern Oregon has tackled these barriers and successfully combined multiple projects, partners, and funding sources to improve ecological and financial conditions on their land, now and for the future. Their commitment to identifying and combining appropriate programs has helped them achieve myriad ecological outcomes and improved the efficiency of their operations.

### PARTNERS

Jack and Beverly Sparrowk own Drews Valley Ranch, a working cattle ranch in Lake County, Oregon. Their conservation project partners have included the USDA Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS), Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife (ODFW), Oregon Watershed Enhancement Board (OWEB), Lake County Watershed Council, Lake County Soil and Water Conservation District, National Fish and Wildlife Foundation, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Ducks Unlimited, Trust for Public Land, and Oregon Rangeland Trust. Oregon State University Extension in Lake County has also provided advice along the way.

### THE PROGRAM

When the Sparrowks bought their 11,400 acre ranch in 1978, it was overgrazed, with creeks straightened by the Army Corps of Engineers and flooding during high water events. From the beginning, the Sparrowks wanted to restore and enhance wildlife habitat, especially in riparian areas, while keeping it a working ranch. "It was like one day the light bulb went on," Beverly explains, "and we thought, what can we do to make things better?"

They started by inviting local federal and state agencies, conservation organizations on a ranch tour and asking their guests for advice on how to improve conditions. "It was amazing," Beverly remembers. "Everybody wanted to be helpful. Everybody had good ideas about what we could do and how we could do it and who might want to cooperate. It was exciting."



The Sparrowks' first priority was riparian fencing, which they accomplished with NRCS's Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) in the late 1990s. This program uses cost-sharing contracts to implement conservation practices. After planting willows and doing head cut repairs on their own dime, the Sparrowks focused on upland juniper control using EQIP and OWEB funding. ODFW helped with reseeding plant species beneficial to wildlife, primarily mule deer.

The Sparrowks then put the ranch under easement: they partly sold, partly donated the easement to the Trust for Public Land, which transferred it to the Oregon Rangeland Trust. The sale significantly offset their mortgage, which eased not only their finances but also their concern about leaving the ranch to their children with too much debt

attached. The Sparrows also saw an easement as the next step to ensure the benefits of their restoration work in the long run.

Additional EQIP contracts allowed the Sparrows to develop off-stream water systems using solar power, fence more creeks, and move an irrigation ditch farther from the creek to reduce instability. Their latest project will improve fish passage on Drews Creek and is funded by the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation, ODFW, and OWEB. The Sparrows are providing in-kind work as match, and the Lake County Resources Initiative is administering the project

## OUTCOMES

The Sparrows are already seeing noticeable results from their restoration work. First, their investments in both fencing and off-stream watering systems have reduced bank erosion and instability. Juniper removal and reseed-ing have helped increase mule deer forage, and they now see more deer on their land. The transfer of some of their property as an easement also made the working ranch more financially viable.

Another significant outcome has been the example that they are able to provide to other landowners. For instance, despite some local resistance to the idea of conservation easements, they have had other landowners ask questions about how it works. In addition, those who saw the juniper removal from the Sparrows' property have expressed interest in implementing similar projects on their property. The visual evidence of successful practices in combination with a knowledgeable landowner who is willing to share with others can help catalyze conservation activity.

## CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

While many landowners have made good use of cost-share programs, the Sparrows have been highly committed in their efforts to reach out to potential partners to imagine and then implement a multi-pronged conservation plan on their large, complex property. This involved patience when bureaucracies moved slowly, projects were delayed, and paperwork needed to be redone. Persistence also mattered when innovation wasn't welcome, like when the Sparrows' easement plans met with local opposition from some neighbors and local officials.

The Sparrows have also had good partners. Agency personnel were helpful and responsive, provided solid technical assistance, and cooperated well across program

boundaries. Some local agency staff had been in the area for many years, which built local trust. Importantly, multi-ple programs and types of technical assistance available from state and federal agencies helped the Sparrows match their identified conservation needs to the right resource.

## FUTURE PROSPECTS

The Sparrows continue to explore new cost-share and other payment for ecosystem services programs that could help fund conservation improvements on their ranch. At the same time, they work to maintain the economic viability of their ranching business—while innovative and willing to take risks, they also watch the bottom line. "We'll just see what works," Beverly says. "We're always looking for ways to improve what we're doing."



## LEARN MORE

Press release about Sparrowk Easement from Trust for Public Land: <http://www.tpl.org/news/press-releases/11400-acre-klamath-valley-ranch.html>.

For more information about the project and to read the full fact sheet series, go to:

[www.tinyurl.com/SNWEcosystemServices](http://www.tinyurl.com/SNWEcosystemServices), or contact:

**Hannah Gosnell, Oregon State University**  
gosnellh@geo.oregonstate.edu

**Lauren Gwin, Oregon State University Extension**  
lauren.gwin@oregonstate.edu

**Cass Moseley, University of Oregon**  
cmoseley@uoregon.edu

**Alaina Pomeroy, Sustainable Northwest**  
apomeroy@sustainablenorthwest.org

**Max Nielsen-Pincus, University of Oregon**  
maxn@uoregon.edu

*This fact sheet series is part of a multi-state research collaboration involving Oregon State University, University of Oregon, and Sustainable Northwest, with funding from the USDA National Institute for Food and Agriculture, Grant #2009-85211-06102-C0405A. Photo credits: header, p.1, 2—Emily Jane Davis.*