

Producer Stories

Bill Copren
Sattley, California

2010

From Upper Feather River Watershed Farmers and Ranchers

Bill was raised in Sierraville, CA along with 4 sisters by his parents Georgene and “Pinky” Copren. Turns out that a lifelong personal interest in history has served him well, Bill likes to remind you that the Swiss – Italian history in Sierra Valley came long after the families such as the Church, Turner, McElroy, Hamlin, Humphrey, Webber, Adams, Strang and Hale who have colorful history here in northern California back to 1849 when the Copren ancestors arrived in what is now Sierra County. Each of the Copren children attended both the Sierraville Elementary school and Loyalton High School. Bill holds an undergraduate degree and masters in History from University Nevada, Reno.

The Copren family owns 700 acres of timberland near Sattley, has ownership of another 280 acres of land which are made up of his “home place” in Sattley, and the 210 acres he purchased that brought him face-to-face with the “cattle business”. He had long ago vowed to never own a cow, but this promise has not precluded him from becoming connected to the cattle business. Bill, an avid fisherman, now retired from a 30 year career as the Sierra County Assessor, leases his 210 acres to Tony Maddalena. Their working relationship has become a beneficial situation for Bill, Tony and the land itself. Just having a management plan has resulted in an increased productivity of land that used to have a carrying capacity of only 75 head of cattle.



Management Highlights

- ◆ Implementing a management plan has increased forage productivity and the carrying capacity of the four pasture rotation system
- ◆ Established conservation easement with Pacific Forest Trust
- ◆ Four pasture rotation system
 - ⇒ Increased native plants, birds habitats, forage for calves & cattle
- ◆ Installed solar powered pumping system that feeds two troughs. Provides clean water for the four fields



The situation that actually brought Mr. Copren into the cattle business was a keen interest in the land itself. This property has a long Sierra Valley history, it was the site of the Sierra County Fair in the 1890's and was a thoroughbred horse racetrack and became called the “racetrack field” by past owners and neighbors. You can see remnants of this activity in historical aerial photos. This piece of land became available for sale by a friend and neighbor but had some conceptual restrictions already placed upon it as a part of the sale. Bill was

willing to participate in the actual conservation easement negotiations which sold the development rights and kept this piece in agricultural production in perpetuity. The easement with Pacific Forest Trust protects several very rare plants but allows for seasonal grazing. Staff of PFT make an annual trip to Sierra Valley to monitor this and several other properties that are under contract.

University of California Cooperative Extension (<http://ucanr.org/waterquality>)

Upper Feather River Watershed Group (<http://www.ufrwg.org>)

Partial Funding: SWRCB Prop. 50 Project

A keen interest in the land itself



Again Bill's interest in history led him to some aerial photos that depicted a flow of water above his land that had been redirected long ago. By using the photos and digging up his adjudicated water rights off of Webber Creek, Bill was able to make a case for putting

this flow back in its original ditch. This action alone has really changed his ability to increase the production of grass on the 210 acres. By working with the lessee, NRCS and UC Extension, Bill has made available a four pasture rotation system that has increased native plants, habitat for song birds in addition to forage for heifers in the spring and mother cows with calves that mainly use this acreage in the fall.

Bill Copren is a representative to many organizations for the Sierra Valley Mutual Water Company. This company's adjudicated water rights, a historic flow that comes from 10 miles to the south of Sierra Valley in a hand dug ditch, provide water to more than 20 different ranches on the west side of the valley.

FUTURE GOALS

All land owners in Sierra Valley have become acutely aware of the issues around water and some are actively addressing questions, discussions and issues that will affect the ranching business long into the future. Bill Copren hopes to leave the 210 acres to his daughters. His goal is to keep the land is good working condition, in the hands of his family and pass on the importance of the history of Sierra Valley to his grand children who just may love this place as he does.



Center post of the property, with cross fencing visible. Note the difference in grass length in different quadrants. This is due to rotational grazing that Mr. Copren is practicing. Rotational grazing provides grass to grow longer, providing sufficient feed for cattle and longer time for land to rehabilitate.



Plumas Ivesia — Conservation easement requires them to protect

"All land owners in Sierra Valley have become acutely aware of the issues around water and some are actively addressing questions, discussions and issues that will affect the ranching business long into the future."