

Producer Stories

Van Vleck Ranch
Sattley/Plymouth , California

2010

From Upper Feather River Watershed Farmers and Ranchers

Lewis Van Vleck runs a cow/calf operation that moves from his home place in Amador County and returns to Sierra Valley in mid May depending on the season. He attributes some of the success of his operation to the fact that his family owns both winter and summer pasture. It is well known that for operations that call Sierra Valley home, most of the cattle leave the harsh winters and go below to winter pasture in the Central Valley. The loss of grazing land to development has been rapid in years past and to have a secured place to go gives any operator a sense of confidence. It can be a real scramble to find winter pasture and therefore this operation can be called truly "sustainable". He uses a rotational grazing system that



puts the cattle away from the main stem of the Feather River in early season. As the water slows and subs underground, he moves cattle into several fields that have water season long. The Van Vleck ranch participated in the Prop. 50 Water Quality project by allowing seasonal sampling to determine

some water quality parameters' in Sierra Valley for 3 grazing seasons. This original ranch property has been owned by the Van Vleck family since 1948. It was purchased from Isolona Pasquetti who ran a dairy herd. In the early 1970's the Van Vlecks purchased additional acreage from Baptiste Pasquetti, added to the original 1100 acres that make us the total that he manages today. Lewis Van Vleck runs this ranch on behalf of a family corporation, and intends to keep ranching as this is he believes his true calling.

By using cost - share funds Lewis has added multiple fences that allow him to better manage his cattle to utilize feed during its peak palatable season. He has also reinforced the banks of some of his delivery system so that tail water can not get back into the main stem of the Feather River and he can actually utilize the water again before he sends the water down stream to his neighbors. Over the course of the last several years Lewis has replaced 5 irrigation structures so that he can better use the adjudicated water he receives from the Sierra Valley Mutual Water Company. This water flows down a hand dug ditch that provides water to more than 20 family owned ranches in Sierra Valley.



Management Highlights

- ◆ Addition of multiple fences to improve cattle management
- ◆ Reinforcement of banks of delivery system for better utilization of tailwater
- ◆ Replacement of 5 irrigation structures to improve use of adjudicated water from Sierra Valley Mutual Water Company
- ◆ Participation in on-ranch monitoring programs



RANCHING.....A TRUE CALLING

Lewis states the most important thing that all Sierra Valley ranches benefit from is the ditch cleaning activities. He believes that because of reduced flows related to a reduced snow pack there are no longer good flushes of water that naturally clean these ditches of silt, decomposed granite and fallen limbs and branches. This cleaning is important to flows that provide habitat for wildlife and drinking water for livestock.



During the 2009 grazing season Lewis agreed to additional monitoring utilizing support from the Sierra County Fire Safe and Watershed Council, NRCS and The Upper Feather River Watershed Group. The results have provided some interesting findings of which make the team feel very positive about furthering this study. "The results have provided me with the impetus to do more and find out what is really going on out there" commented Van Vleck. He has agreed to take on another season of monitoring in 2010 and hopes to further the investigative work that will ultimately prove that his operation is benefiting the area for both livestock and wildlife.

RANCH GOALS

"I want to Survive in the Ranching Business. The size of this ranch is just enough for a single hand and really can not provide enough income for more than myself". So on occasion



Lewis calls a neighbor to help when his ingenuity does not provide the extra set of hands necessary to do a project. "Over the course of the last few years I have taken the time to fill out and manage the paper work to get support from several programs through the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), and it has made a difference here". Implementations of both the EQIP (Environmental Quality Improvement Project) and WIP (Wildlife Improvement Project) programs have provided supplemental funds that have made sense in Sierra Valley.



The Van Vleck property straddles the Middle Fork of the Feather River in the southern portion of the valley. The ranch usually runs about 250 head of cattle on 1700 acres. This land has been in his family for more than 60 years. Lewis is currently investigating additional opportunities for some limited Ag Tourism in Sierra Valley.



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