

TULARE COUNTY



COUNTY INFORMATION

Size: 12,533 sq. km (4,863 sq. mi)

Population: 429,006 (2007 U.S. Census)

Location: Southern Sierra/Central Valley

Official Website: www.co.tulare.ca.us

CONSERVATION STORY

River Ridge Ranch and WildPlaces Bring Ecological Education to Tulare County

Long known for its cattle industry, Tulare County has only recently begun to be recognized as a hotbed of development and rural sprawl. Environmentalist Gary Brydolf explained: “Over ninety percent of the Sierra Nevada foothills are privately owned. Much of it hasn’t been developed on, but that is going to change very soon.”

Gary and his wife Barbara Brydolf are professional biologists who specialize in field work. After learning that developers were planning to build hundreds of homes along the Tule River, they bought the Negus Ranch in June 2000, re-naming it River Ridge Ranch. The property is 722 acres and sits on in an important riparian corridor runs through it along the North Fork of the Tule River. Furthermore, the ranch borders the 323,000 Giant

Sequoia National Monument.

By working with the Sequoia Riverlands Trust, Wildlife Conservation Board, the Packard Foundation, National Fish & Wildlife Foundation, and other partners and donors, the Brydolds were able to place a conservation easement on the ranch at purchase and market the development rights to mitigate part of the purchase cost. This meant that part of the property would be protected in perpetuity, and part of it would remain a working cattle ranch.

The Brydolds view River Ridge Ranch as an example and model for others. “We made the ranch sustainable,” Gary says. “The ranch is entirely solar powered, well, all except for the back-up generator. The outhouses don’t flush. That is because we don’t want to dump waste onto the ranch or its surroundings. We have all the waste transported and sanitized.”



“Also, as a ranch we rotate our cattle so that they don’t overgraze. It is more profitable for ranchers to overgraze, because it brings them more profit in the short run. However, we are not doing this for the short-run.”

River Ridge Ranch is a participant in the Department of Agriculture’s programs for improving wildlife habitat, reducing erosion and runoff and enhancing water quality. It has also won the region’s Waste Reduction Award Program in 2002.

Gary and his wife don’t want to keep the ranch to themselves. In fact, that couldn’t be farther from the case. With the help of non-profit environmental group called WildPlaces the ranch becomes another source of opportunity for citizens of Tulare County – it becomes a classroom.

Through the “River Ridge Ranch Habitat Recovery and Rangeland Restoration and Demonstration Project” Gary and his wife Barbara regularly host a variety of classes on the ranch including a program called “Trout in the Classroom.” They give students the chance to raise trout from eggs, bring them to River Ridge and release them into the Tule River under the watchful eye of the Kaweah Flyfishers.

“When they come back they always seem to know just which fish was theirs,” Gary says. While at the ranch, students walk the self-guided nature trail, study aquatic wildlife, learn to cast flies, and even print their own t-shirts.

Another group that visits River Ridge is Tulare County ProYouth/Heart. This after-school enrichment program brings elementary school children to the ranch from the inner cities throughout the county. WildPlaces and staff members Mehmet McMillan and Ian



Springer also help to supervise day trips from local high schools on the ranch.

In addition, each year they open the ranch to junior hunters from Fish and Game's Wild Bird Heritage Program. Hunting is limited to quail and wild turkey through an agreement with Wilderness Unlimited, and numerous threatened and endangered species are under strict protection.

Unfortunately, these good works aren't extremely profitable. In fact, the ranch typically loses money on its public education offerings. So they subsidize these programs with others that are more profitable: musical events, weddings, and day camps. Currently, they are "saving their pennies" to convert their old blacksmith shop into an all-weather classroom to be named River Barn.

Gary and Barbara's vision for the future is one where education continues to be the focus of the ranch. Also, they think they're on to something.

"I think this kind of destination, where a family can go to camp, to learn, to just be in a place that can teach so many lessons, is the new kind of place to be. I think people are getting tired of Disneyland and wherever. You just can't re-create places like this."

You can find out more about River Ridge Ranch by visiting its website www.river-ridge.net. They encourage families to visit and if they enjoy their time they are encouraged to stay involved with the ranch.

WildPlaces' mission is "to preserve, support, and protect California's natural and rural places and the people of these landscapes through volunteer driven habitat restoration, natural and cultural education, and career development." To find out more about WildPlaces and their environmental education programs for students and community volunteering events in Springville, CA, visit www.wildplaces.net.

ORGANIZATIONS

Tule River Parkway Association

Contact Name: Cathy Capone

Address: 806 West Westfield Avenue, Porterville, CA 93257

Phone: 559 361-9164

Email: trpa@gobot.com

County of Activity: Tulare

Issue Focus: botanical, land use, water supply, watershed quality, wildlife and habitat

Group Type: advocacy, monitoring/restoration, coalition, educational outreach

Public Events: river cleanup, native plant restoration, docent lead river walks, tree pruning workshops, oak tree mapping

Volunteer Opportunities: help with above events, river walk docent training

Accepts Donations: Yes

Description: The Tule River Parkway Association is dedicated to the restoration and development for public use of the Tule River Riparian Corridor.

Sequoia Natural History Association

Contact Name: Dayna Higgins

Address 47050 Generals Hwy #10, Three Rivers, CA 93271

Phone 559-565-3759

Email snha@sequoiahistory.org

Website www.sequoiahistory.org

County of Activity: Tulare, Kern, Fresno, Kings

Issues Focus: Education of all values in Sequoia and Kings Canyon National Parks, Lake Kaweah and Devils Postpile National Monument

Group Type:

Volunteer Opportunities: Yes

Accept Donations: Yes

Public Events: Sign up for our free email newsletter to be updated on events and opportunities.

Description: Sequoia Natural History Association is a non-profit membership organization dedicated to supporting education, interpretation, research, and the natural and historic preservation of Sequoia and Kings Canyon National Parks, Devils Postpile National Monument, Lake Kaweah, and other areas of the National Park System. The Sequoia Natural History Association is committed to enriching the experiences of visitors and promoting public awareness of the significance of national parks through educational programs, publications, and financial support.

Sequoia Riverlands Trust

Contact: Niki Woodard

Address: 427 South Garden Street
Visalia, CA 93277

Phone: 559.738.0211

Email: info@sequoiariverlands.org

Website: www.sequoiariverlands.org

County of Activity: Kern, Tulare

Issue Focus: land use, watershed quality, wildlife and habitat

Group Type: land trust

Public Events: celebrity entertainment fundraisers, guided tours of preserves

Volunteer Opportunities: field guides at preserve, restoration

Accepts Donations: Yes

Description: The Sequoia Riverlands Trust is a community-based conservation organization, comprised of residents and partners who care about the southern Sierra Nevada and San Joaquin Valley. We engage in land protection, stewardship, restoration and education efforts in the region surrounding the Kings, Kaweah, Tule and Kern rivers from the southern Sierra foothills to the Tulare Lake Basin.

Sequoia Riverlands Trust works with willing landowners on voluntary conservation agreements and other forms of creative land protection; uses the best available science to care for and restore the land; educates children and the community about the value of conserving natural and agricultural resources; and participates in public planning efforts that keep our communities vibrant, thriving and beautiful.

River Ridge Ranch

Contact Name: Dr. Gary Adest

Address: P.O. Box 879, Springville, CA 93265

Phone: (559) 539-0207

Email: info@river-ridge.net

Website URL: www.river-ridge.net

County/Counties: Tulare

Issue Focus: botanical, forestry, land use, wildlife and habitat

Public Events: annual fundraiser in September; Spring concert series.

Volunteer Opportunities: in collaboration with **WildPlaces**

Accepts Donations: Yes

Description: River Ridge Ranch is a 722-acre working cattle ranch on the North Fork Tule River. Our southern Sierra Nevada location is adjacent to the Giant Sequoia National Monument and two miles from downtown Springville. We have an active revegetation and restoration program; we host hundreds of schoolchildren for outdoor education, we are a concert and music venue, we provide facilities for group use such as weddings, retreats, picnics, reunions and camps. Our mission is to model healthy working landscapes as an alternative to subdivision of large parcels of blue oak woodland.

Sierra Club - Mineral King Group

Contact Name: Janet Wood, Chair

Address: P.O. Box 3543, Visalia, CA 93278

Phone: (559) 739-8527

Email: janet.wood@sierraclub.org

Website: <http://kernkaweah.sierraclub.org/mineralking/>

County: Kings and part of Tulare Counties

Issue Focus: Local Land Use Planning; Water Issues, Sequoia National Forest and National Park Issues

Volunteer Opportunities: Yes

Accepts Donations: Yes

Public Events: Monthly outings and social events; bi-monthly film series; Earth Day; waterways cleanup

Description: The Sierra Club Mineral King Group serves Kings County and most of Tulare County (excluding the Porterville area, served by the [Kaweah Group](#)), in California's fertile San Joaquin Valley, near Sequoia National Park. The Group, headquartered in Visalia, is named after the famous high Sierra mountain valley, Mineral King, that was the focus of the Sierra Club's successful campaign in the 1960's to stop a huge ski resort from being built in that beautiful mountain valley.

The Mineral King Group carries on a variety of conservation and outdoor activities, working on city, county, and regional conservation issues, and enjoying and working for the protection of the nearby Sequoia National Park and Sequoia National Forest.

Sierra Club – Tehipite Chapter

Contact Name: Gerald D. Vinnard

Address: P.O. Box 5396, Fresno, CA 93755-5396

Phone: (559)431-5780

Email: gvinnard@cvip.net

Website URL: <http://tehipite.sierraclub.org>

County/Counties: Fresno, Madera, Tulare

Issue Focus: all

Public Events: General Meetings third Wednesday of each month; Annual Banquet

Volunteer Opportunities: outings leadership, lobbying, event planning, watershed restoration.

Accepts Donations: Yes

Description: The mission of the Tehipite Chapter of the Sierra Club is to provide outings for its members and the general public, to educate and inform its members and the

general public about environmental issues, and to influence and persuade public leaders to preserve and protect the environment.

Tulare County Audubon Society

Contact Name: Brian Newton
Address: 1407 W Laurel Ave, Visalia, CA 93277
Phone: (559)627-3571
Email: bandj1407@yahoo.com
Website URL: coming soon

County/Counties: Tulare
Issue Focus: Identification and education about local birds and their environment
Volunteer Opportunities: currently board openings (May 2009)
Accepts Donations: Yes
Public Events: Free monthly programs. Free birding field trips.
Description: Tulare County Audubon Society (TCAS) is a local chapter of both the California and National Audubon Society

WildPlaces

Contact Name: Mehmet McMillan
Address: P.O. Box 853, 35549 Hwy 190, Springville, CA 93265
Phone: (559)539- 5263
Mobile: (760) 447-1702
Email: info@wildplaces.net
Website URL: www.wildplaces.net

County/Counties: Tulare
Issue Focus: all
Group Type: educational outreach, restoration
Public Events: Adopt-A-Sequoia Program, Springville Apple Festival, River Ridge events
Volunteer Opportunities: Rio Limpio clean up days, Immersed in the Wild – H.O.M.E.Y. events, other
Accepts Donations: Yes

Description: WildPlaces engages in restoration and education work to help re-connect the cycles of nature. It combines high quality, volunteer-driven habitat restoration projects with an ecosystem-based education program. These both repair adversely impacted ecosystems and raise awareness about the effects such environmental damage reaps on the human community. Each step of the way WildPlaces enables its volunteers and members to connect with nature and empowers them with the knowledge and ability to help heal the land.

PUBLIC OFFICIALS AND AGENCIES

Tulare County Board of Supervisors

Address: Administration Building
2800 West Burrel Avenue
Visalia, CA 93291

Phone: (559) 733-6271

Fax: (559) 733-6898

Email: jforbes@co.tulare.ca.us

The Tulare County Board of Supervisors meets weekly on Tuesdays at 9:00 A.M.

Website: <http://www.co.tulare.ca.us/government/board/default.asp>

Senate Representative – 18th District

Counties Represented: Kern, Tulare, Inyo and San Bernardino

Website: <http://republican.sen.ca.gov/web/18/pro.asp>

Assembly Representative – 34th District

Counties Represented:

Website: <http://republican.assembly.ca.gov/members/a34/index.aspx>