

# Haven for Endangered Species

## Family Promotes Wildlife on Bay Area Ranch

### Koopmann Ranch

#### Tim, Melinda, Clayton and Carissa Koopmann - Sunol

In the middle of California's Bay Area, a ranch provides a haven for wildlife. This family cattle operation is nestled between a golf course named after an endangered species, commuter-packed Interstate Highway 680 and ranchettes on what used to be working rangelands. The 850-acre Koopmann Ranch has been raising cattle on land that was settled by Tim Koopmann's grandfather and great-uncle, managed by his father and Tim now maintains in accordance with family tradition.

Today, Tim, wife Melinda, and children, Clayton and Carissa, are proud that the family's ranching legacy will never be surrendered to development. With the protection offered by two mitigation easements, this piece of rural heaven, that is passed each day by thousands of commuters and gazed upon by local residents, will always remain an open landscape dotted with cattle.

In the 1990s, following the passing of Tim's parents, Herman Jr. and Tillyann, the Koopmann family was grappling with the option to sell the ranch. The estate taxes on the small working ranch, in an area with some of the nation's most expensive land, reached nearly \$750,000.

At the eleventh hour, sale of the ranch was averted through the utilization of an emerging conservation template. By working with local, state and federal officials, Koopmann has established wildlife habitat easements on his working ranch, protecting listed species including the California Tiger Salamander, California Red-Legged Frog and the Callippe Silverspot Butterfly. It is ironic that these endangered species are now helping to protect the California rancher.

The easements were funded by the city of Pleasanton, the California Department of Fish and Game and a local developer to satisfy mitigation requirements. By mitigating on a private working ranch, local economies are sustained, the county tax base remains intact and a ranching family with a vested interest serves as the land manager. With all of this, natural resources win!

Tim can often be found sharing his story with other ranchers and opening up the wildlife haven to reporters, political leaders and bird enthusiasts. All the while, he notes that "California Tiger

Clayton,  
Melinda,  
Tim and  
Carissa



Salamanders are the most lucrative livestock that I have ever raised."

While part of a last-ditch effort to avoid the sale of his ranch, the easement also fit squarely into the Koopmanns' lifelong conservation commitment. Tim has gone above and beyond the deeded terms of their easement to improve biodiversity on the ranch. In one instance, a Caltrans railroad grade changing project in Fremont was set to destroy a wetland area with a population of California Tiger Salamanders. Knowing this, Tim accompanied a local U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) biologist to the site, helped capture the species in jeopardy and volunteered to relocate them to his ranch.

"The USFWS did not want the salamanders to be graded over within the planned project, so we looked around and realized that the best place for them was at the Koopmann Ranch, because it was nearby, had suitable habitat and we knew it was never going to be

developed," recalls USFWS' Chris Nagano, who has worked with the Koopmanns on multiple occasions. "We recognize here at the Service that Tim has played a key role in the conservation of the salamander and, granted this may not work for every rancher, has shown that you can have an endangered species and it is not the end of the world."

Working with the Alameda County Resource Conservation District, Tim has hosted a variety of educational workshops on his family ranch. A majority of the workshops have been focused on stockpond management, specifically for California Tiger Salamander, for state and federal biologists, fellow ranchers, college students and consultants.

The Koopmann Ranch is home to a family, cattle, endangered species and a variety of birds. So many birds in fact, that the local Ohlone Audubon Chapter refers to the place as a "virtual bird factory." Over the years, the birds have been encouraged to come to



California Tiger Salamander





RIGHT: Bull standing next to a water trough with a wildlife-friendly ramp.

LEFT: Female, Western Blue Bird on the solar panel for one of the water distribution systems on the ranch.



the ranch because of the 75 bird boxes that are scattered throughout the place, put up by local conservationist and birder Irv Tiesen.

“I started working with Tim in 2000, placing bird boxes on his ranch for the Western Blue Bird, and, to date, more than 1,900 of the species have fledged, with an annual record of 412 birds,” states conservation cooperator Tiesen. “On the ranch, we have had to devise extender poles for the boxes, placing them seven and a half feet in the air, out of reach of predators such as coyotes, raccoons, possums and snakes.”

Tiesen has also worked on the ranch to design, build and install bird ramps. A dozen of these ramps have been placed on livestock water troughs, allowing birds and small wildlife that have the unfortunate fate of becoming entrapped in the water a chance for survival.

“A fellow cattleman, George Work, shared with me a few years ago the need to install ramps in my watering troughs in an effort to keep them clean while allowing visiting and resident wildlife to survive,” recalls Tim.

The ramps are attached to troughs scattered around the ranch that help facilitate livestock management and distribution on the rolling hills. The watering troughs are part of an extensive solar-powered water distribution system that provides a reliable source of water on the property for the cattle and abundant wildlife. With the help of the Environmental Quality Incentives Program from the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), the cost-share project resulted in the Koopmanns’ cattle better utilizing forage on the ranch and not congregating in sensitive riparian areas.

This ranch is a prime example of the conservation ethic that has been instilled over generations in the ranchers who manage the lands today – and the love of the land that is being passed on to their children. The family’s management practices have not only improved rangeland health, but have contributed to the Koopmann Ranch’s economic sustainability.

“I am excited about the opportunity to have a career after college close to home where I can still ranch,” says Carissa. “I plan to continue ranching this property, which has been made possible because of the mitigation easements that have allowed my family to keep the property and continue managing it for ranching and wildlife.”

Tim shares his estate tax survival story and conservation ethic with other ranchers. This third generation rancher is actively engaged in the California Rangeland Conservation Coalition, serves as a board member of the California Rangeland Trust and chairman for the California Cattlemen’s Association Water and Environmental Quality Committee.

Tim’s conservation stewardship goes beyond his personal ranch to his position with the San Francisco Public Utilities Commission. As a certified rangeland manager, Tim also manages grazing on 33,000 acres of San Francisco Public Utilities Commission watershed lands that supply 2.4 million people with their daily water needs.

On the ranch, Melinda is out every day monitoring the herd of cattle and observing the wildlife. Managing the ranch and finding pride in the abundant and diverse wildlife is a family affair. Weekends, evenings and holidays, you can find Tim and Melinda working alongside their children on the ranch.

“Tim and I are very fortunate to be able to pass on a family tradition to our children,” says Melinda. “More so, we are proud that our children want to continue the ranching legacy and have taken pride in the conservation practices that are ongoing on the ranch.”

