

Grazing for Wildlife

Rancher Working on State-Owned Lands

Victorine Livestock

Clint Victorine - Hydesville



Clint

A high school beef cattle project has grown into a career for Northern California native Clint Victorine. After graduating from California Polytechnic State University, San Luis Obispo, with a degree in agricultural business, Clint decided to pursue his interest and passion in beef cattle production. At that time, Victorine Livestock was born.

“I did not grow up in a ranching family,” explains Clint, “But I have worked for lots of ranchers, learning from them and grazing experts along the way.” Like generational ranchers, Clint’s father can be seen working alongside him when additional help is needed, and he hopes to build a tradition his children will be interested in continuing when they grow up.

Based in the stunning Eel River Valley in Humboldt County in the far reaches of Northern California, Victorine’s 1,500 head of cattle graze on approximately 5,000 acres of private and state-owned land.

This unorthodox grazing operation began when Clint partnered with the Eel River Brewing Company to feed his cattle local, organic brew mash, the natural residual material that remains after grains have been fermented to produce beer. At first, the beef from these cattle was used in the Eel River Brewing Company restaurant.

Today, the organic, 100 percent grassfed beef Clint produces is marketed through Eel River Organic Beef, a subsidiary of Victorine Livestock. The

beef can be purchased in grocery stores, specialty markets and dining establishments from San Diego to Alaska.

Health-conscious individuals and environmental advocates can find a win-win situation in this humanely raised, high-quality product.

“Our cattle never leave the sub-irrigated clover and rye grass pastures they are accustomed to,” states Clint.

“These pastures allow us to raise a high-quality, grass-finished product that is a pleasure to eat and healthy all at the same time.”

Clint’s cattle are managed in a high-intensity, short-duration fashion on both private land and land owned by the California Department of Fish and Game.

All lands are grazed in a sustainable manner – benefiting natural resources, producing beef in a humane manner and ensuring a profitable business.

The conservation story of Victorine Livestock began a few short years ago, after Clint became concerned about the Fish and Game land just across the fence from him that was supposed to be providing forage and habitat for Aleutian Geese. Like many other publicly-owned parcels of land, the Fish and Game lands near Clint were not being actively managed.

In 1999, Clint began working with Fish and Game to develop a grazing management program that encourages the geese to use the state-owned land during their annual migration. Prior to that time, fire and mowing with heavy equipment had been used in the area in an attempt to create preferred habitat for the birds, but with limited success.

Working together, Clint and Fish and Game were determined to increase the land available for the birds by providing additional forage that would attract them off private lands.

The challenge is that the Aleutian Geese eat the same grasses that provide forage for cattle belonging to Clint and other ranchers in the valley. A number of ranchers, including Clint, were being hit hard by the tens of thousands of geese stopping off to feed in their pastures. Unfortunately, the geese are not good stewards of the land, and large flocks were eating all the grass in a pasture, leaving behind bare ground.

“An intensive grazing program was put together to create preferred habitat for geese and relieve the pressure of the species on private lands,” states Bob Smith, Fish and Game wildlife habitat supervisor.

Aleutian Geese are a success story for the role of active management for wildlife. Cooperation from a variety of partners to remove the threat of predation from non-native foxes on their island breeding grounds, along with better management of migratory grasslands in California, has bolstered the population from 1,000 birds to an excess of 100,000 birds today.



Aleutian goose



RIGHT: A corner post with electric fencing that Clint has installed to help with management of cattle.

LEFT: Cattle in a lush green field they share with migratory geese.

“Grazing by ranchers is the main reason the geese are so prevalent in this area,” states Clint.

The Aleutian Geese can be found on the Fish and Game Fay Slough Wildlife Area in Eureka and Eel River Wildlife Area in Loleta, where Victorine livestock graze, helping create the habitat the species desires.

The grazing program has been very effective in the eyes of locals. According to Clint, Fish and Game land is heavily utilized by the Aleutian Geese, the number of other waterfowl has grown, the deer herd has expanded and the raptor population has nearly tripled.

“The hawks and egrets can now see to hunt,” states Clint. “The rodents like to nibble on the new fresh growth, and, since the dead grass that was prevalent before grazing was reintroduced is gone, the raptors can spot their prey.”

On the Fish and Game Table Bluff Ecological Reserve, Clint grazes cattle to promote the Western lily. This endangered species is threatened by the natural competition of shrubs and trees in coastal areas. The controlled grazing provided by Clint is one of the limited tools available to promote suitable conditions for the plant to successfully grow on the reserve.

Clint not only manages the cattle on the Fish and Game land, but has undertaken – at his own expense – rehabilitation projects on state-owned land under his management. At a projected cost of \$6,000, this rancher has restored an area by removing two to three feet of dead material accumulated at the Loleta Wildlife Area over 15 years of no management. Through active management, including high-intensity grazing and planting of native grasses, the area is now providing additional short grass habitat for the state’s species of concern.

Clint is hopeful he may be able to recoup some of the costs with the increase in forage quality for his cattle when they graze the Loleta

Wildlife Area. He is also interested in the development of ecosystem service markets, where he may be able to capture income to offset the geese foraging on his private property adjacent to the Wildlife Area.

The presence of Clint’s cattle on the wildlife area and the rehabilitation projects he has undertaken have not gone unnoticed. Anti-grazing activists and even some Fish and Game staff were not initially convinced that cattle could improve the state-owned land. Today, however, he is excited to tell you that his positive management has converted numerous skeptics who are now excited about the cattle-improved lands and the ecological values that they are providing.

“Grazing can be done and done right to benefit wildlife,” proclaims Clint. “We have not done anything to harm the land or the wildlife. Everything that we have done on the wildlife areas has been positive.”

And to no surprise, Clint is excited to showcase the positive benefits of managed grazing and his commitment to rangeland management. He uses his experiences on the rehabilitation projects as a true testament that grazing can be beneficial.

Smith agrees. “This is a really great program. It is a win for the ranchers and a win for the department, and we look forward to continuing it.”

At Victorine Livestock, cattle are playing a vital role in providing habitat for wildlife. Clint, his family, and ranchers around the state take their stewardship of natural resources very seriously and are committed to a healthy landscape and investing in the management of both private and public lands to support the next generation of ranchers and wildlife.

