

Angus Operation Wins 2010 National Environment Award

Woods family works to restore ranches with family ties dating back to the 1860s.

by **BETHANY SHIVELY**
for NCBA

Leavitt Lake Ranches of Vina, Calif., has been named the 2009 National Environmental Stewardship Award winner. The operation was honored Jan. 28 at the 2010 Cattle Industry Annual Convention for making environmental stewardship a priority while improving production and profitability.

The Environmental Stewardship Award is sponsored by Dow AgroSciences, the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) and the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service (USFWS). It is administered by the National Cattlemen's Beef Association (NCBA) and the National Cattlemen's Foundation (NCF).

Leavitt Lake Ranches is owned and operated by Darrell Wood, wife Callie, son Ramsey and daughter Dallice. It has family ranching ties dating back to the 1860s. Working in segments of agriculture and without any cattle or land when they wed in 1981, Darrell and Callie had a vision to restore ranches that had been owned by Darrell's family. They began to acquire ranches and cattle, leasing property and gradually buying the former family property.

Today, they own about 3,670 acres of private land, manage 25,000 acres of Bureau of Land Management (BLM) permits and lease another 11,000 acres between the winter range annual grasslands of the Vina Plains and the summer range on high elevation meadows of Lassen County. They manage 600 mother cows and 400 yearlings and farm 600 acres of alfalfa and 900 acres of irrigated pasture. The cattle herd is made up of spring- and fall-calving herds of registered and commercial Angus cattle.

The Wood family has implemented a number of practices aimed at protecting and improving the land upon which they make a living. These include:

- Worked in cooperation with The Nature Conservancy (TNC) on a restoration plan for the Vina Plains vernal pools project. The vernal pools are home to several threatened, endangered or at-risk plant and animal species.

- Provide habitat for an abundance of wildlife, including waterfowl, mule deer, pronghorn antelope, aquatic species, upland game birds and sage grouse.

- Improved irrigation systems, constructed cross fencing, installed livestock water developments, conducted seeding, decreased streambank erosion

and implemented an overall prescribed grazing plan.

- Improved riparian conditions along Pete's Creek and restored the hydrology of the surrounding meadow. This was targeted to increase sage grouse habitat.

- Participated in Nutritional Balance Analyzer program, a pilot program that tracks forage quality on rangelands through livestock fecal analysis.

- Fenced off riparian area to improve habitat condition for wild salmon that utilize Deer Creek for spawning.

- Completed conservation and grazing plans on all the lands associated with Leavitt Lake Ranches, where resource concerns were identified and technical assistance was provided to alleviate them.

"The Leavitt [Lake Ranches] family has taken a leadership role through the cohabitation of endangered species and cattle," said Dave Petty, chairman of the Environmental Stewardship Award selection committee and 2001 national award winner. "They show that cattle ranching supports these species better than non-use of the land."

"We approached Darrell with a restoration plan to improve the condition as well as increase habitat and populations of several threatened and endangered species on the Vina Plains Preserve," said Jake Jacobson, Lassen Foothills Project director, TNC. "Darrell is an exemplary livestock producer; he has a keen sense for good land stewardship."

Darrell Wood is serious about the

family's approach to caring for the environment. "I take quite a bit of pride in knowing that this ranch is going to [thrive] in perpetuity, not only for my kids and their kids, but for future generations down the line," he said. "I feel very good about that."

Callie Wood says caring for the environment involves respect for generations and the environment.

"Stewardship is just like values that you learn from your parents or your grandparents, and it is passed down," she said. "Our children look at what we've done, and to them that's what should be done. We've always just had a love of the land."

The lessons have been well-learned. "In order to have a sustainable ranch, we need to be a steward of the land," said daughter Dallice. "And by doing what we're doing — by irrigating and rotational grazing and working with NRCS — I believe that's stewardship."

Leavitt Lake Ranches was nominated for the Environmental Stewardship Award by the California Rangeland Trust and the California Cattlemen's Association, with which the family has partnered to apply conservation and protection practices. In addition, the Woods have partnered with USDA-NRCS through the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP); Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program (WHIP); Wetlands Restoration Program; Grasslands Reserve Program (GRP); Nutritional Balance Analyzer (NUTBAL) program and Texas A&M University. They also have working relationships with the USFWS Partners for Wildlife Program; TNC; Deer Creek Watershed Conservancy and Ducks Unlimited.

"The team at Leavitt Lake Ranches has done a tremendous amount to improve the natural resources in their care," Petty said. "Their leadership, dedication and whole-farm approach make them valiant spokespeople for our industry."



Leavitt Lake Ranches receives the National Environmental Stewardship Award. Pictured are (from left) Dave Petty, ESAP Selection Committee Chairman; Darrell, Ramsey, Dallice and Callie Wood; Dennis Thompson, NRCS; and Dave Owens, Dow AgroSciences.

Regional honors

Leavitt Lake Ranches represented National Cattlemen's Beef Association (NCBA) Region VI in the 2009 Environmental Stewardship Award Program (ESAP). Other finalists for the 2009 Regional Environmental Stewardship Award included:

- Region I: Young's Cattle Co., Rick and Jayne Young, Belmont, Ohio; nominated by the Ohio Cattlemen's Association and Belmont Soil and Water Conservation District.

- Region II: Greenview Polled Hereford Farms Inc., Jonathan "Jonny" Harris and Family, Screven, Ga.; nominated by the Georgia Cattlemen's Association.

- Region III: Eckenfels Farm, Bob Eckenfels, Sainte Genevieve, Mo.; nominated by the U.S. Department of Agriculture Natural Resources Conservation Service (USDA-NRCS).

- Region IV: Stoney Point AgriCorp, Mark Quinn and Family, Melissa, Texas; nominated by the Texas Cattle Feeders Association (TCFA).

- Region V: Pape Ranches Inc., Norm & Barbara Pape, Fred & Michelle Pape, and David Pape, Daniel, Wyo.; nominated by Wyoming Stock Growers Association.

- Region VII: Daybreak Ranch, Jim & Carol Faulstich, Adam & Jacquie Roth, Highmore, S.D.; nominated by South Dakota Grasslands Coalition.

The Environmental Stewardship Award has recognized the outstanding stewardship practices and conservation achievements of U.S. cattle producers for almost two decades. Regional and national award winners are honored for their commitment to protecting the environment and improving fish and wildlife habitat while operating profitable cattle operations. For more information or to nominate a cattle operation, visit www.environmentalstewardship.org.