



February 25, 2021

RE: Senate Bill (SB) 322 Conservation Ranching (Laird) – SUPPORT

Dear Senator John Laird:

On behalf of our undersigned organizations, we support Senate Bill 322 (Laird), known as The California Conservation Ranching Incentive Program (Program). This bill will support our grasslands by providing healthy habitat for birds, pollinators, and other wildlife through traditional and sustainable means for ranchers. The Program will authorize the Department of Conservation to enter into voluntary 3-year contracts with owners or lessees of productive rangelands, grazing lands, or grasslands. These contracts will offer an owner or lessee payment in return for their enhancement of grassland habitat according to an approved management plan.

California is home to approximately 62 million acres of rangelands, however, the grasslands in California are rapidly deteriorating, as an average of 20,000 acres a year being lost to development or crop conversion. A 2019 Cornell study showed that grassland birds have declined by 52% since 1970, leaving us with 720 million fewer grassland birds than we had 50 years ago. We are not only seeing this landscape disappear, but we are also seeing birds and other species disappear along with it too.

To address the decline in grassland bird species, keep ranchers ranching, and meet our climate goals, California must work to slow the conversion of rangelands, while also partnering with land managers to improve the management of these grasslands for multiple benefits to people and wildlife.

The California Conservation Ranching Incentive Program provides the opportunity for land managers, including nonprofits, regional conservancies, and Resource Conservation Districts to save the grasslands that benefit all Californians by protecting rangeland, grazeland, and grassland from development, improving soil health by allowing the land to hold more water and protect against flood and fire, all in addition to driving sequestration of carbon in the soil to meet California’s climate goals.

Land conservation requires effective land management, in large part because grazing animals play an important role in grassland ecosystems. For the benefit provided to rangeland ecosystems, wildlife habitat, soil carbon, and water supply, the California Conservation Ranching Incentive Program has our full support.

Sincerely,

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CEO
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