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SBALT NEWS

Soap Lake Ranch: Where conservation, agriculture, and flood resilience meet

This article draws from previously published SBALT content and has been updated for this issue.

Nestled in northern San Benito County, Soap Lake Ranch is a remarkable landscape where agriculture, wildlife habitat, and flood protection work together. Protected by a conservation easement held by the San Benito Agricultural Land Trust (SBALT) since 2014, the privately owned 1,113-acre ranch demonstrates how working lands can provide important benefits to both people and nature.

At the convergence of Pacheco Creek, Tequisquita Slough, and Ortega Creek, the ranch includes the large seasonal wetland known as Soap Lake, aka San Felipe Lake,



one of the most significant wetlands in the region and a critical area for the Indigenous people for thousands of years. The property provides habitat for burrowing owls, migratory waterfowl, and many other wildlife species while also supporting a cattle operation that remains an important part of San Benito's agricultural heritage.

The ranch also plays a critical role in regional flood management. During heavy winter storms, floodwaters spread across the floodplain where they can slow down and temporarily collect before continuing

downstream toward the ocean. Natural floodplains like Soap Lake help reduce flood risks for downstream communities by storing excess water and releasing it more gradually.

Past storms have highlighted the importance of preserving landscapes that can absorb and manage floodwaters. By keeping these lands in agriculture rather than development, conservation efforts help protect groundwater recharge, maintain wildlife habitat, and reduce the number of homes and structures exposed to flooding.

Through the partnership between the ranch owners and SBALT, this special place continues to support ranching, conserve wildlife habitat, and provide valuable flood resilience for the entire watershed. With a strong El Niño developing in the Pacific Ocean, we face a high chance of severe flooding again this winter. It is our sincere hope that the ability for Soap Lake Ranch to flood will reduce flooding on our neighbors in the area who do have structures, including their homes.

To see more pictures of Soap Lake Ranch, visit our website at www.sanbenitolandtrust.org. ■

