



View of distant ridgelines from the highest point on the Wilkinson Ranch. *Photo by Lynn Overtree*

SBALT REPORT

Wilkinson Ranch – Rugged beauty and working land protected forever

By Lynn Overtree

Not all SBALT lands can be seen from the road, like the Silva Ranch in San Juan Bautista and

the Cook Ranch in Tres Pinos, but all sustain agriculture and conserve the rural character of San Benito County. The 3,173-acre Wilkinson Ranch is our largest easement, yet a small portion of the working rangelands that cover more than 500,000 acres of the County's scenic and ecologically rich rural lands.

Wilkinson Ranch is a working cattle ranch. The development rights were donated to SBALT in 2001, creating the conservation easement, which means the ranch will always remain in agriculture.

For SBALT staff and board, it is an honor to tour this remote property annually to monitor our easements. In May, after an hour's drive across adjacent rangeland, we

San Benito Agricultural



entered the ranch through an oak savannah valley. The canyon narrowed, guiding us up to the ridgeline.

Along the ridge small creeks carved their way down the hillsides. Standing on the highest point of the ranch, elevation 3,656 feet, our guide, Mark Klassen, said that on a clear day he can see all the way to the Sierra. He added, "Both our cattle and California oaks are doing well. Also, our cameras throughout the ranch show evidence of vibrant wildlife, including nocturnal protected species." Knowing the ranch is permanently protected by a conservation easement gives him confidence that the unique landscape and all the wildlife it supports will never be threatened by development.

To learn more about your local land trust, visit www.sanbenitolandtrust.org.



Guide Mark Klassen points toward the Sierra, visible on a clear day. *Photo by Sara Steiner*