



Ponds at Rancho Larios provide water for livestock and wildlife.

SBALT NEWS

Rancho Larios preserves grazing, wildlife, and open space

By Karminder Brown

Rancho Larios is a 521-acre property located southwest of San Juan Bautista. The land was donated to SBALT in 2004 to permanently protect the open space that wraps around the Rancho Larios residential community.

In addition to productive cattle grazing, the foothills and wetlands of Rancho Larios host many species of wildlife and native plants. The property falls within the headwaters of the Elkhorn Slough and provides connectivity for wildlife to move between the Santa Cruz Mountains and the Gabilan Range. Its conservation value for wildlife will be enhanced by the protection of neighboring Rocks Ranch by the Land Trust of Santa Cruz County.

In December 2020, a 3-year lease was renewed with the grazing operator who runs Charolais cattle on the Rancho Larios property. As part of the lease renewal process, SBALT staff and board met with the operator and a rangeland conservation consultant to review the grazing approach, biological resources, fencing, and other infrastructure. Though it is similar to past leases, some



changes were made to improve the grazing contract for SBALT, the rancher, the residents of Rancho Larios, and the health of the land.

Although Rancho Larios is not open to the general public, SBALT looks forward to inviting donors to guided birdwatching or wildflower walks on this beautiful property, as soon as gatherings are permitted.

The mission of SBALT is to conserve regionally significant lands that sustain productive agriculture, preserve open space, and maintain the rural character of the county. Visit www.sanbenitolandtrust to learn about other lands protected by SBALT. ■



Rancho Larios hosts many species of native wildflowers, such as this Checkerbloom.



California mule deer captured by trail camera at Rancho Larios