



# The Fish Friendly Ranching Certification Program: A Collaborative Approach to Comprehensive Ranch Planning and Water Quality Improvement

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## INTRODUCTION AND PROGRAM GOALS

A new program modeled on the popular Fish Friendly Farming Certification Program is now available for livestock ranches. The focus of the Fish Friendly Ranching (FFR) program is to validate all the positive contributions that ranchers provide for the environment. FFR is a proactive approach for ranchers to look at current management practices in relation to water quality and make changes if needed. If any specific issues are found during the inventory process (erosion locations, etc) a practical solution is worked out with the rancher with a timeline for completion. Developing a proactive plan can assist with compliance requirements of upcoming water quality regulations that may impact livestock grazing and ranching operations.

The goals of the FFR program are:

- Maintain good water quality and aquatic and riparian habitat conditions
- Comply with environmental rules but also sustain economic use of the land
- Have one program that addresses many regulations to reduce paperwork and time expended
- Keep compliance costs down by seeking grant funding to cover technical and project costs
- Provide a long term defensible plan for the landowner which sustains water quality
- Maintain privacy of detailed ranch information through private nonprofit, not government program

## BENEFICIAL MANAGEMENT PRACTICES

The Fish Friendly Ranching (FFR) Certification Program uses a detailed workbook of Beneficial Management Practices (BMPs). These BMPs address a variety of ranching practices that can affect water quality. The primary water quality pollutants are bacterial pathogens, fine sediment and high water temperatures. The FFR program assesses and applies BMPs to grazing areas, water sources, service areas, roads and creeks. The BMPs are straightforward and use low cost methods such as grass filter strips around service areas (corrals) to intercept fine sediment and pathogens. The FFR program also addresses creek habitats for salmonids.

## RANCH CONSERVATION PLAN

The Fish Friendly Ranching (FFR) Program provides for the creation of a ranch plan where FFR staff work with the rancher to develop a workable plan of land management for both livestock and water quality. The FFR plan starts with an inventory of the ranch parcels through a review of existing infrastructure, waterways and road systems. FFR staff then prepares detailed maps of the property based on the inventory and completes a draft plan for the rancher to review. While employing the same principles as other ranch planning programs, we have learned that having FFR staff create a draft plan makes it easier for ranchers to complete the process. The FFR program is run by a private nonprofit organization, the California Land Stewardship Institute, so no part of the plan is subject to the Public Records Act. The privacy of the rancher and the related livestock business is highly respected. After 2 years in operation almost 35,000 acres are enrolled in the FFR program

## CERTIFICATION

Certification is completed through a review of the ranch plan by a staff member of the National Marine Fisheries Service and Regional Water Quality Control Board. These agencies treat the certification as a collaborative process. They review the plan and the property. FFR staff are there with the rancher to answer any questions. The certification covers 5 year period then a recertification is done. Seventeen ranches were certified in 2014 encompassing 30,509 acres. Over 62 miles of dirt roads and 69 miles of blue line creeks were assessed as part of the ranch plan process.



Certifiers visit a ranch in Mendocino County to review the ranch plan and look at potential erosion sites. Rancher is explaining problem with wild pig damage causing erosion.

## PROJECTS

The FFR program finds grant funds and completes designs and permits for projects that ranchers want to do. Here are some examples.



Trough that overflows and carries fine sediment to nearby creek



Replacement trough does not overflow and is wildlife friendly



Service area with an adequate buffer to filter fine sediment from runoff



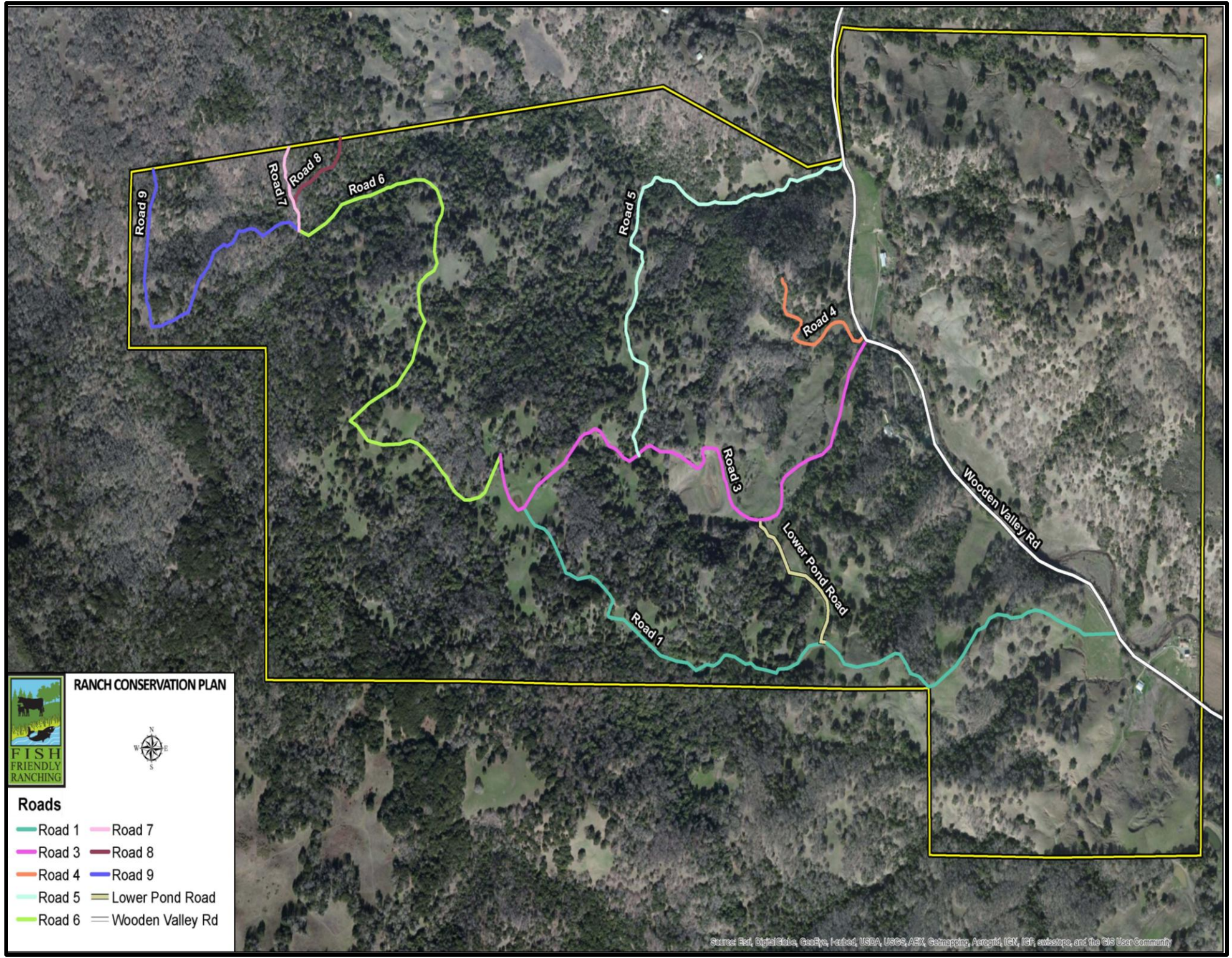
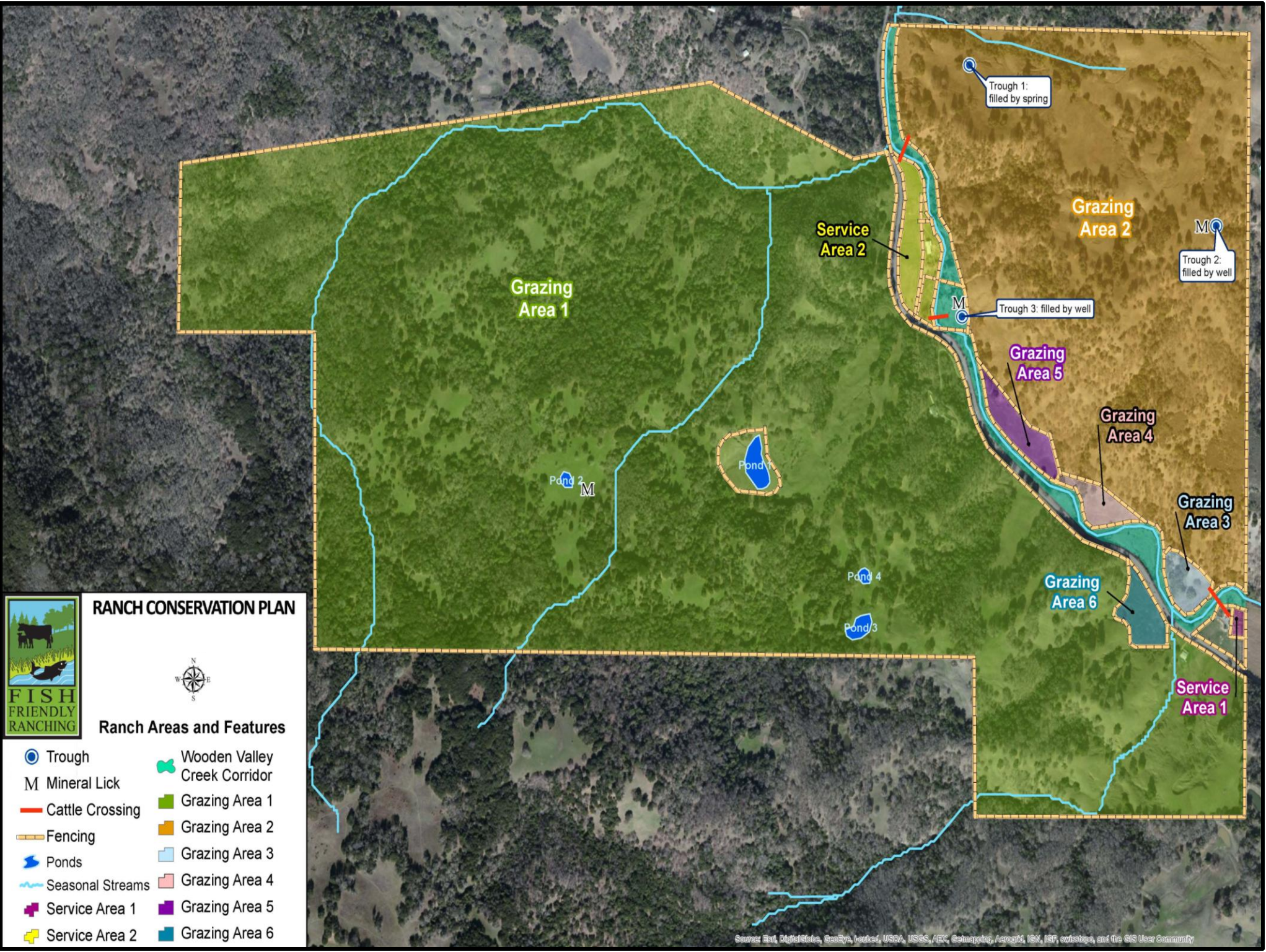
Service area without an adequate buffer to filter fine sediment from runoff



Grass covers the banks of ephemeral creek protecting from erosion



Eroding ephemeral creek delivering fine sediment into water



Entrenched creek was graded to set 15 ft. tall banks back. Willows were installed and erosion blanket used to protect graded area. 4-H students helped install native oaks. Landowner was part of project crew and installed willows. FFR program acquired grants for all design, permitting and implementation costs.

