

Conway Ranch 2020 Annual Report and 2021 Operations Plan



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Appendices

- A. Conway Ranch Cattle Grazing Lease Map
- B. Conway Ranch Irrigation Map

I. Introduction

During the 2020-year, the County maintained a regular irrigation schedule throughout Conway Ranch, and conserved healthy vegetative conditions. Maintenance and repair activities were conducted on the Lower Conway headgate as well as on solar powered data logger infrastructure. Additional stabilization was completed on the historic ranch house. The Board of Supervisors approved solicitation for cattle grazing proposals and a Request for Proposals was published. Outreach was conducted at several community forums. Additional beneficial public uses of Conway Ranch have been identified for potential future incorporation.

Coordination with Southern California Edison and representatives from the other Settle Parties for Mill/Wilson water issues was conducted regularly. Irrigation flows were determined and shared by way of water management “tool” that was developed for water right holders.



Adair Ditch Diversion Dam

II. 2020 Operations

a. Irrigation / Water Rights

Irrigation of Conway Ranch was conducted in accordance with the 2020 OP including application for habitat maintenance and wetland enhancement purposes. For several weeks during the months of September and October, water was restricted from flowing through the SCE Powerhouse for

maintenance purposes and instead sent down the Adair Ditch. The Adair ditch ties in with the Return Ditch for a short stretch. With the aid of a cofferdam, water is sent back to Wilson Creek. Unfortunately, this route prevents the use of either Upper Conway Ditch or Lower Conway Ditch. Future shutdowns and maintenance has been requested to be conducted outside of the primary irrigation season.



Virginia Creek (Early Spring)

i. Virginia Creek Water Rights

The County has a 6cfs water right from Virginia Creek, however, due to poor ditch conditions water can not be conveyed at that rate. Much of the upper ditch is in need of major improvements. This would require approval and review by CA DFW as well as BLM, and represents a longer term maintenance issue. There may be an opportunity to get NRCS or the new cattle grazer on site to help shoot elevations

on ditch above the private property, and eliminate flat spots which is another reported issue. There is potential to increase the delivery existing water flow on north Conway meadows if the full 6cfs were received.

Water transport to the BLM section of Conway Ranch was successful after repairs to the pipeline were conducted. Valves and take out points were tested at the end of the irrigation season. Insufficient flows existed at that point to further irrigate the BLM section of the ranch but should be available for the 2021 season. Thankfully, natural springs kept the BLM section watered. This will likely not be the case in a dry year.

The sediment basins along North Conway were cleaned of seasonal sediment accumulation.



Lower Conway Ditch Head Gate

ii. Mill Creek Water Rights (Wilson Creek)

Both the Upper Conway Ditch and the Lower Conway Ditch continue to need maintenance in a few places including irrigation boxes, banks and ditch cleaning. Another attempt at charging the Lower Conway Ditch to transport water under Highway 395 and deliver to the western areas of Conway Ranch was attempted. As in previous years the saturation rate was greater than the flow and the trial was unsuccessful. The Lower Conway Ditch solar water water monitoring station sustained damage due to high winds. Repairs were made to ensure data collection was uninterrupted.

The wetland enhancement areas downstream from the aquaculture area were irrigated and continue to be successful in generating widespread growth of hydrophytic vegetation and willows.

b. Grazing

No grazing occurred during the 2020 year. However, an RFP for Cattle Grazing was published and responses were collected . The Board of Supervisors had an opportunity to review the top ranking proposal during a regularly scheduled public meeting in early 2021. The selected proposal was consistent with the existing conservation easement as well as the Conservation Management Plan.

c. Aquaculture

There were no aquaculture activities during 2020. The aquaculture raceways and ponds were used only for the purposes of moving irrigation water and maintaining bank vegetation.

d. CDFW Streambed Alteration Agreement Requirements

The Conway Ranch Enhancement Plan (approved as part of the 1600 permit) contained certain measures meant to enhance wildlife habitat on the property. This area was included in the regular irrigation schedule. Additionally, the Old Bell Ditch and the Old Bowl Ditch were charged with water to maintain vegetative growth where pipelines have replaced surface ditches.

e. Enhancements/Maintenance

Maintenance projects performed during 2020:

1. Stabilization on the historic Conway Ranch House.
2. Regular irrigation ditch and culvert cleanout was conducted by County Staff.
3. Invasive plant removal throughout the aquaculture and wildlife habitat improvement areas conducted by County staff.
4. Replacement of Lower Conway Ditch head gate.
5. Repair of Lower Conway Ditch water monitoring infrastructure.

III. 2021 Tentative Operations

(1.1) Aquaculture

No improvements or operations are being considered for aquaculture at this time.

(1.1.a) Groundwater Extraction

There are no current plans for groundwater extraction in 2021.

(1.2) Livestock Grazing

In alignment with the recommendations of the Conway and Mattly Ranch Grazing Management Plan, t cattle grazing will occur during the 2021 season under agreement with Hunewill Land and Livestock.

(1.3) Irrigation

As snowmelt has been occurring earlier this year Irrigation is already under way. As of the date of this report Wilson Creek water rights are at 5cfs for Mono County. Flows will continue to be scheduled and adjusted in line with the Lundy Creek Drainage Daily Report.

(1.3.a) Virginia Creek Water Rights

As of the date of this report approximately 2cfs of an allocated 6cfs are being diverted. Future water diversion will continue to be in accordance with the County's water right (1860 decree=2.5cfs; 1863 decree=6cfs total). The ditch is in need of maintenance, and in its current state is not capable of conveying the County's full 6cfs water right. Available water from the Virginia Creek Diversion will be spread across the North Conway Meadow in accordance with past irrigation practices and now considering presence of cattle.

(1.3.b) Mill Creek Water Rights (Wilson Creek)

Mattly Ranch is currently receiving approximately 1.5cfs of a appropriated 5cfs. This is intended to bring up feed as soon as possible while also seasoning the ditch. Irrigation will occur until ground is saturated, then allowed to dry. This schedule is approximately 3 weeks on and 3 weeks off. This will be conducted in cooperation with the proposed schedule for grazing. The Wilson Creek water will rotate between use on Mattly Ranch and the Aquaculture Area, where it will be utilized on the Bowl Meadow and the Enhancement Areas. This schedule will continue throughout the summer season.

If sufficient water supply is available, an additional attempt will be made to transport water through the Lower Conway ditch and delivered to the northwestern corner of Conway Ranch which hasn't seen irrigation water in several decades. Successional late growth vegetation has thoroughly overtaken previous grassy area.

In the 1600 permit enhancement area, an effort will be made to clear out willows from the ditches, to provide access through the willows to the diversion structures.

(1.4) Small-scale organic agriculture

A proposal has been received to utilize portions of the aquaculture area for small scale agriculture, as permitted in the Conservation Easement. A map of proposed areas of use can be referenced in Appendix B. Areas identified include previously disturbed areas near the aquaculture roads as well as high sediment benches within the ponds. Watering is planned to be conducted with a portable solar powered pump and will draw water from the ponds and/or raceways. The small-scale

agriculture proposal also includes a minimal cattle grazing in the Bowl Meadow. Area of use will not exceed 2.5 acres.

(1.5) CDFW Streambed Alteration Agreement Requirements

Water will be placed in the historic Bell Diversion Ditch until irrigation efforts require higher flows, at which time flow will run through pipeline. The old Bell ditch will be charged with water periodically throughout the summer. The enhancement areas will be watered intermittently, saturating and drying out various enhancement areas. At this time, the Float Tube Pond will be utilized only to get water into the outlet and downstream.

(1.6) Noxious plants

Constant and aggressive removal of sprouting Russian Thistle and Woolly Mullein will be conducted along the raceways within the Aquaculture Area, as well as along the ditches at Mattly Ranch. Invasive species removal may be scheduled cooperative project should resources and Covid restrictions permit. All newly permitted land users are required to make a concerted effort to remove noxious plants.

(1.7) Mono County – Bureau of Land Management Memorandum of Understanding for Collaborative Management of the property

There are no plans to alter the MOU with the BLM in 2021.

(1.8) Southern California Edison Powerhouse Tailrace and associated infrastructure

SCE has plans to conduct maintenance of the Mill Creek Powerhouse during the month of September 2021. It will require alternative water delivery through the Adair Ditch in order to convey water to Wilson Creek and on to Conway Ranch and beyond.

(2) Public access, public recreation, public education, and infrastructure related to such uses

Public access will continue to be maintained throughout Conway and Mattly ranches. However, public access to fenced grazing areas will be restricted during the grazing season (May-August).

A conceptual plan for trail interconnectivity is being researched and assembled. The approximate trail location can be referenced in Appendix B. The idea of interconnective trail creation includes interpretive signage.

(3) Protection of historic resources

A two phased approach to historic preservation of the Conway Ranch house is under way. Phase one was stabilization and included shoring doors and windows while repairing a large break in the roof structure. These efforts will hopefully prevent further damage from wind and snow events through the winter and spring. The Mono Basin Historic Society has arranged for an architectural assessment to be conducted in conformity with state historic preservation office best practices. Results will guide the second phase of the project which may be more of a restoration.

(4) Any alternate nonprofit or county commercial use of the property other than aquaculture or grazing compatible with protection of conservation values

The small-scale agriculture may be either a community effort or a for profit effort of providing locally grown food.

(5) Construction, maintenance, and repair of the property's roads and trails

As needed, the roads throughout the aquaculture area will be mowed by County staff, along with select roads which provide access to irrigation points on Mattly and Conway. Mowing helps prevent the potential of fire when the vegetation grows tall on the roads, dries out and vehicles continue to drive on these roads.

(6) Communications with funders, lessees, easement holder, and regulatory agencies

Communications may be provided at the June Lake CAC, Mono Basin RPAC, Bridgeport RPAC, and Mono County Fish and Wildlife Commission, while projects coordination is conducted with the BLM, SCE, ESLT and the cattle grazer. Final plans will be presented to the Board of Supervisors at a regular meeting.

(7) Restoration, enhancement, and study of natural resources

There is also interest in attempting to restore extended reaches of the Lower Conway Ditch to convey water from Wilson Creek to upper Conway Ranch which would significantly enhance vegetative health. There are no specific plans for enhancement, aside from compliance with the 1600 permit.

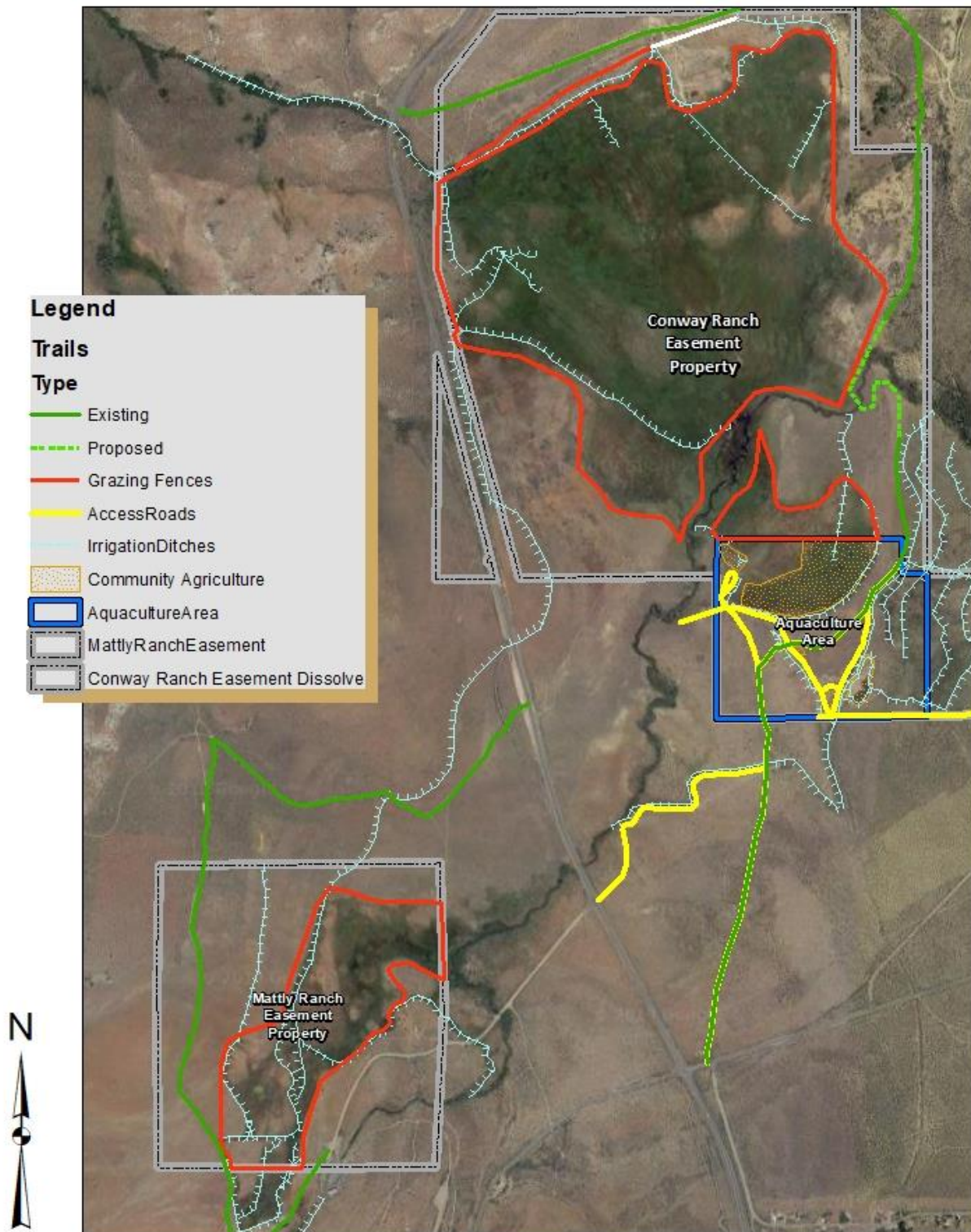
(8) Property restoration upon cessation of aquaculture or livestock grazing operations.

Grazing is scheduled to begin this year and anticipated to improve meadow health and biodiversity. Fencing will be situated strategically in order to prevent access to spring sources, conserve riparian corridors, limit impacts to wetland areas as well as heavy brush areas. Efforts will continue to limit the spread of invasive plant species.

(9) Any other activities and uses that the County may wish to include which are not otherwise expressly addressed in the conservation easement

The Mono Lake Kutzudika Tribe has requested use of portions of Conway Ranch for annual Cry Dance events. Details have yet to be established.

Conway & Mattly Ranch Grazing Area



Conway Ranch Irrigation Map

