

February 16, 2023

Testimony re SB 530 Natural Climate Solutions

My wife, Donna, and I have lived on our place on the West Wall of Pine Valley since 1983. In addition to the 80 acres of irrigated pasture, our place also includes approximately 65 acres of forest, mostly Ponderosa pines and Douglas fir, with some grand fir in the shadier, more moist areas. The entire 145 acres had been used for cattle grazing for nearly 100 years. The first step we took to remedy the damage from that cattle grazing was to fence off the timbered portion, thus restricting the grazing to the irrigated acres. It didn't take long to recognize the benefits of our decision: young trees began to sprout in the lush soils of those timbered acres and the saplings, formerly trampled each year by cattle, began to recover.

Realizing that the irrigated acres – some populated by aspen stands – might benefit from the absence of cattle grazing, in about 1995 we eliminated cattle grazing as the primary use of our farm ground. The benefits of our decision were almost immediate, especially with the stands of aspen. Consequently, starting in 1998, we began managing our land with the objective of enhancing wildlife habitat.

Part of our 1998 management plan involved the installation of ponds. We already had three established ponds, so with the cooperation of the ODF&W, the National Wild Turkey Federation and Pheasants Forever, we added seven more. In addition (1998), we entered into an agreement with NRCS to set aside 38 acres of the irrigated pasture in a Riparian Area Conservation Reserve Program. That 15-year agreement has now been renewed for another 15 years and expanded to cover a total of approximately 49 acres.

Thanks to a grant from the National Fire Plan about 15 years ago, we removed most of the “ladder fuels” from our 65 acres of timber, thus allowing the remaining trees room, moisture and more nutrients to grow, in addition to helping our forests become fire-resistant. A substantial part of our timber is in the form of old growth trees, some of them 250+ years old. A side benefit of our 30+ years of efforts, one that has become much more critical over the past 40-50 years, is that our forests – indeed all 145 acres – have become a large Carbon sink. Because of recent evidence that's emerged – that old growth trees take up and store much more Carbon than previously thought – our old trees have become much more important. Managing our acreage has been a labor-intensive effort, but one which has yielded many benefits. In the face of global climate change, the Carbon storage is but one and, even if it's on only 145 acres, it's a positive contribution in the quest to keep this planet habitable for all forms of life.

Although we've been fortunate to have some support, in the form of the CRP and the NFP programs, we've invested a substantial amount of effort and money that we haven't been compensated for. Since almost all of our investment benefits the “common good”, doesn't it make sense for us to be compensated for at least some of our investment?

Thank you for this opportunity to offer input on this important piece of legislation.

Sincerely,

Mike Higgins

