



#FridaysOnTheFarm: For Future Generations of Ranchers and Sage Grouse

From the kitchen table to the boardroom table, the USDA brings people together across the nation for: healthier food, natural resources, and people; a stronger agricultural industry; and economic growth, jobs, and innovation.

Each Friday, meet those farmers, producers, and landowners through our [#FridaysOnTheFarm](#) stories. Visit local farms, ranches, forests, and resource areas where USDA customers and partners *do right and feed everyone*.

This Friday, meet David Sceirine, who is protecting key wildlife habitat on his family's ranch near Bridgeport Valley, California. David and his brother Joe enrolled 2,375 acres into a conservation easement, safeguarding Sceirine Point Ranch from future development while helping the Bi-State sage-grouse, an at-risk bird that lives at the Nevada-California line where they ranch.

For the brothers, who are carrying on a family tradition of ranching, the easement made sense.

Prime Land to Protect

While developers eyed the ranch for subdivisions, conservationists were eyeing it for a different reason: it is prime Bi-State sage-grouse habitat. The ranch is home to this geographically distinct population of the greater sage-grouse that reside only along the California-Nevada state line.

The Bi-State sage-grouse was proposed as threatened by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service in 2013.

On April 23, 2015, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service withdrew the proposed listing due to commitments by multiple entities, including private landowners such as the Sceirines, to continue conservation measures outlined in the Bi-State Action Plan.

Although a U.S. judge has recently reinstated the proposed listing of the bird as threatened, pending a new review by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, conservation easements like the Sceirine Point Ranch help ensure the birds thrive and populations increase.

Ranchers in the region, including the Sceirines, are working with their local conservation partners to restore and protect key habitat, which also benefits their ranching operation and their local community.



The ranch has 1,810 acres of wet and semi-wet meadows and irrigated pasture on the property, which sage grouse need for raising their young.

Meadows and pastures are also important to sage-grouse chicks because they provide an abundance of [forbs and insects required for rapid growth](#). Various shrub species provide protective cover for sage grouse and their broods within the meadows and pastures. The surrounding upland shrub communities provide cover, nesting habitat, and additional forage for adult sage-grouse.

[Conserving wet mesic habitats — places where water meets land — builds drought](#) resilience, boosts forage productivity, and benefits wildlife. The ranch is a haven for all kinds of wildlife, including mule deer, waterfowl like ducks, [migratory songbirds](#), black bears, and trout that will all benefit from the protection of these “emerald isles.”

Restoring and conserving mesic areas is key to helping sage grouse and other wildlife thrive, and it's one of the six key approaches recommended by the Sage Grouse Initiative, a partnership led by USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service to help Western ranchers manage for productive and resilient rangelands.

Conservation Easement

An agricultural land easement protects land perpetually while still enabling the Sceirines to continue working the land.

The Sceirines enrolled the land into the [Agricultural Conservation Easement Program](#), a Farm Bill funded program offered by USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service. The [California Deer Association](#) and [California Department of Conservation](#) also provided funding for the easement.

The [Eastern Sierra Land Trust](#) holds the easement, and it's one of the land trust's largest. “Sage grouse and mule deer don't see property ownership lines. For the animals that use this property, the ideal situation is they cross from private lands to public lands, and they don't know the difference,” the land trust's Susanna Danner said.

Other Conservation Efforts

In addition to the easement, the Sceirines have made other conservation improvements to their land to enhance it both for ranching and for wildlife. They use [rotational grazing](#) to prevent overgrazing and to improve rangeland health.



“If you follow a sage grouse hen around, they like to follow the cows,” said David. “After the cows graze, the grasses are shorter, making the bugs easier for them to get.”

The Sceirines have also worked with the Natural Resources Conservation Service to remove invading conifers, which degrade sagebrush habitat and provide perches for raptors that prey on sage grouse.

Additionally, the brothers use water wisely on their ranch. Sceirine Point Ranch is part of a watershed irrigation system, meaning when they irrigate their land, the water trickles down and benefits other ranches.

“Your whole community benefits when your ranchers and farmers do better,” David said. “Our whole nation benefits. And education is the key. When you know better, you do better.”

USDA Assistance

The Natural Resources Conservation Service helped the Sceirines plan and implement prescribed grazing, irrigation improvements, and other conservation practices over the years. USDA offers a variety of risk management, disaster assistance, loan, and voluntary conservation programs to help America's agricultural producers weather ups and downs in the market, and recover from natural disasters. [Learn about additional programs.](#)

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