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Environmental stewardship award goes to Yolo ranch

By Jane Braxton Little - Bee Correspondent

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Preservation of Northern California's oak woodlands, like this stretch near the 7,500-acre Yolo Land & Cattle Co. ranch, has long been a goal of environmentalists. The ranching operation has been awarded the 2008 environmental stewardship award by the National Cattlemen's Beef Association. Randall Benton / Sacramento Bee file, 2007

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The National Cattlemen's Beef Association has named a Yolo County ranching operation winner of its 2008 environmental stewardship award.

The Yolo Land & Cattle Co., owned by Hank Stone and his sons, won the national honor for its commitment to rangeland conservation and natural resource enhancement, said Bruce Hafenfeld, president of the California Cattlemen's Association.

The Stones market their 600-head Angus herd as grass-fed beef – no hormones or animal by-products. They have managed their 7,500-acre ranch between Madison and Winters using techniques that include fencing cattle out of ponds, encouraging native grasses, and planting trees and shrubs as part of a carbon-sequestration pilot program.

To control invasive weeds and increase the forage for cattle, they initiated a burn program with neighboring ranches that now encompasses 45,000 acres.

The Stones are "big-picture people" whose work carries benefits across two watersheds, said Lincoln "Ed" Burton, state conservationist for the National Resource Conservation Service, whose staff has worked closely with the ranching family.

Shortly after Hank Stone bought the ranch in 1976, he began using the rinse water discharged from a local tomato cannery to irrigate his forage and row crops. The arrangement filtered the water for the cannery in a win-win agreement that exemplifies the principles that continue to guide the family's ranch management, Hafenfeld said.

"They have been trailblazers in finding new ways to expand their ranching operation while paying close attention to conservation and protecting the environment," he said.

Hank, Casey and Scott Stone, a director of the California Rangeland Trust, share management of the ranch with their wives, Suzanne, Karen and Angela. The family operation competed with five other beef cattle

operations for the national award.

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