

Farm Beat: Programs encourage care for wildlife

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I write today of efforts to make farmland inviting to wildlife – and I don't mean the sea lion pup that waddled onto Mapes Ranch from the San Joaquin River last month.

That story from the Merced Sun-Star

(<http://www.mercedsunstar.com/2014/04/15/3603144/little-lost-sea-lion-was-found.html>) no doubt delighted a lot of readers, who were impressed with the marine mammal's pluck and the care provided by ranch hands and wildlife managers.

It was the second time in the past decade that a sea lion was found in the region – the other was near Los Banos in 2004 – but it doesn't mean they have expanded their range. They are meant to live in San Francisco Bay and other places along the Pacific coast, leaving the inland habitat to inland creatures.

Which brings us back to those wildlife efforts. One is the Leopold Conservation Award, given annually to California farmers and ranchers who embody the stewardship ethic of the late writer Aldo Leopold. The other is a wetlands protection program at the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

The \$10,000 award will be presented in December by the California Farm Bureau Federation, the Sand County Foundation based in Leopold's home state of Wisconsin, and Sustainable Conservation, a San Francisco group that works with farmers and other businesspeople.

Coincidentally, past finalists have included Bill Lyons Jr. and his family, who own Mapes Ranch. They have been widely recognized for managing crops and grazing land in a way that helps resident and migratory wildlife, notably the Aleutian cackling goose.

Nominations for 2014 must be postmarked by July 11 and mailed to Leopold Conservation Award, c/o Sustainable Conservation, 98 Battery St., Suite 302, San Francisco 94111.

More information is at www.leopoldconservationaward.org
(<http://www.leopoldconservationaward.org/>).

The USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service is taking applications until May 15 for the wetlands program. It helps owners protect or restore habitat "on frequently flooded, marginal land that is difficult to farm," said Carlos Suarez, the agency's state conservationist for California, in a news release.

More information is at www.nrcs.usda.gov (<http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/>).

Other gleanings from the Farm Beat:

- One FFA student from the region was among the statewide officers elected this week at a convention in Fresno. Haley Warner of Bret Harte High School in Calaveras County will serve as vice president for the next year.

Dipak Kumar of Tulare is the new state president for the group, formerly known as Future Farmers of America.

- UC Davis, which long has taught people how to grow food, has a new means for disposing of what consumers throw away.

Tuesday, the official Earth Day, the university will unveil a set of large tanks that digest food and other green waste from the campus and surrounding land. The result is gas that will be burned to generate electricity, along with fertilizer and soil amendments for farms.

A Sacramento-area company, CleanWorld, developed the system.