# SSU Field Stations & Nature Preserves Galbreath Oral History Project

Summary of History of Land Management at the Galbreath Wildlands Preserve taken from interviews with family and friends of Fred Galbreath

# FIRE

**Reasons to Burn**

They [Native Americans] would burn every summer. They did that for two reasons. The principle one was for the sprouts for the deer. After you burn you get fresh green tender sprouts and the best way to find a big fat buck is to find out where there’s been a burn and they are eating that. Also they did that to clear land, same as we do.

Fred Galbreath Presentation Humboldt State University 1995

I did a lot of burning to keep the underbrush down. There are bad by-products because that fire destroys trees to a certain extent, but it does keep the brush down and that means you don’t have the terrible wildfires that you have today. I’m a believer in controlled burning very much.

Fred Galbreath Presentation Humboldt State University 1995

# Burn Frequency

Today’s rancher fights an impossible battle because today there’s litigation on everything. By any chance if a fire spreads over into a neighbor’s piece of land, mostly likely you’ll be sued. Twenty years ago, fifty years ago, they would thank you for helping clear out the land. Not today. They would sue.

Fred Galbreath Presentation Humboldt State University 1995

That was probably about 1952 or 3. But we used to burn every year up until then. Back then, heck, my dad and Fred, they’d go along and just start a fire, just to clean up areas. I think it did a lot of good for the habitat, and since then … you can’t burn .. the growth has gotten so heavy, that if you set a fire now, it would burn so hot, it would kill everything.

Duane Ornbaun, Ranch Manager 1970-2000

Interview May 14, 2011

# AGRICULTURE

…we didn’t raise hay or nothing like that, we had an irrigated field house of alfalfa.

Duane Ornbaun, Ranch Manager 1970-2000

Interview May 14, 2011

Back in those days we cut hay down in the field, and we’d haul hail, loose hay, on the wagons, and put in a barn. I don’t know if you ever saw them haul hay like that, but there’s a fork and you stab it in the hay of the wagon, and you have a tractor pull this rope and up into the loft and dumps it.

Duane Ornbaun, Ranch Manager 1970-2000

Interview May 14, 2011

# DAMS ON THE CREEKS

A hundred years ago they tried to irrigate [a field] by using water from up above from some of the streams. They used a riveted pipe, a four-inch pipe. They put dams across Suffroni Creek but they couldn’t contain the water because in those days they had very, very heavy storms and heavy water fall and the dams I think would be washed out. The remnants of the pipe were there and are still there. I don’t know if you’ve ever seen riveted pipe but we have a lot of it still as a remnant of what they did.

Those people worked pretty hard. Today with our modern equipment, we don’t know what hard work is.

Fred Galbreath Presentation Humboldt State University 1995

..this is where they dammed it up. This is the narrowest spot on the river. Fred said the dam was huge. I can’t believe they hauled all these rocks in here but this is the only place on the whole creek where you’ll find this. It looks natural, but over the years it was put in here.

Charlie Hiatt, Friend Site Interview July 14, 2011

Oh yes, he pulled in some bulldozers and dammed the Rancheria – which was quite interesting – to create an irrigation pond along the Rancheria. Of course, that’s all been restored now. That happened – I forgot about that – in the seventies.

Nina Hyatt, Granddaughter Interview April 25, 2011

You can see the outline of the dam. It used to go all the way across the river and they had pipes going over it. Of course it would blow out every winter. Fred in his later years, he wanted to get up to the falls, so he had me cut part of the dam out.

Charlie Hiatt, Friend Site Interview July 14, 2011

# EROSION

He [Fred Galbreath] hated erosion. He did everything he could to control it. Sometimes, if it rains too much, you can’t stop it, but he was very big on providing culverts to divert the water into the streams. He was into planting grasses that would bind the ground, not just grasses, but plants like clover, which also provided feed for sheep, but would keep the ground from eroding. He was very conscious of the land and the kind of resource that it is.

Bob Johnson, Son-in-Law Interview April 16, 2011

On roads, we put in water bars every fall. We do a lot of mulching. Any skid roads are mulched very thoroughly. Roads are susceptible to erosion and if you don’t drain them properly or put culverts in you can have a lot of erosion. When I went over to that ranch, there wasn’t a culvert on the ranch, or any of the ranch roads. Not a one. It’s not too hard to put culverts in. They’re not too expensive. So I put in culverts all over the ranch now.

Fred Galbreath Presentation Humboldt State University 1995

Wherever there was a sharp bend [in the river], if it was eating into the adjoining land, Fred would take old trees or logs, maybe materials left over from logging, and throw that down in the bend and put something heavy on it to buttress that area of erosion. Generally speaking it worked. I can’t remember what year it was, but rainwater took out everything on one end of his pasture. He had a pasture of about ten acres of fairly flat ground along the edge of Rancheria Creek, which parallels that pasture and then makes an abrupt right turn. The creek took out about half an acre of that pasture.

Bob Johnson, Son-in-Law Interview April 16, 2011

There’s one place I could show you over there that he put in steel beams. Driven in along the bank and then he put a heavy wire and then he planted willows behind it, and it saved a whole lot of field. And that thing runs about 150 to 200 yards long, so it was a very expensive project.

Duane Ornbaun, Ranch Manager 1970-2000

Interview May 14, 2011

They were probably some of the first people in this part of the country to do anything like that. And the idea of spending hundreds and thousands of dollars to try and save an irrigated pasture from the ravages of the river was kind of new to the local population.

Nancy Johnson, Daughter Interview April 2, 2011

…my house was the postmaster’s house and there was a post office in front. And the flood of ’37 took out the post office and my house was filled with mud or a lot of mud. And there was a house in front of the Yorkville ranch which was also taken out during that flood. And it even moved the bridge because the river had gotten pretty high.

Duane Ornbaun, Ranch Manager 1970-2000

Interview May 14, 2011

# LOGGING

**Prior to 1940s**

… I know that area was logged prior to his purchasing the property. You can definitely see that it has been logged. A lot of it, most of it is second growth. I think there are a few exceptions. There are a few older redwood groves there.

Nina Hyatt, Granddaughter Interview April 25, 2011

The use of redwood wouldn’t be acceptable today. They would cut down redwood trees for the heart lumber, make them into fence posts and pickets. The finest lumber we have is pickets and fence posts. Today they would go into superior paneling and things of that kind. They would cut trees down and leave logs eight to twelve feet in diameter, just leave them there because they’re a little too hard to get out...I just pulled a log out about three or four weeks ago and it must have been there for a hundred years. The redwood was just as good as it was when it was cut down. The loggers left it.

Fred Galbreath Presentation Humboldt State University 1995

# 1940s to 2000

I would like to see trees allowed to grow without disease or without logging, except as necessary for old or dying trees….I do a little logging operation, cutting down diseased and dying fir, and redwood suckers that come up from second growth. If there’s a stump with seven or eight suckers around it, I’ll cut four or five of them so that twenty or thirty years from now they’ll have two good second growth redwoods rather than half a dozen bad suckers.

Fred Galbreath Presentation Humboldt State University 1995

I have one man on the ranch all the time. During the logging season, or when I’m cutting out trees, I have a special crew that does that. All of you are not too familiar with the old saws we used fifty years ago, two man saws, one on each end of the saw. No one ever heard of a chain saw in those days.

Fred Galbreath Presentation Humboldt State University 1995

# Species Logged

Yeah, they were logging Doug Fir. In the 40's and 50's it was solely Doug Fir. In fact I don't believe my father ever logged a Redwood log off the Preserve. I think I have the distinction of being the only one that ever logged a Redwood off of the ranch while Fred owned it.

Charlie Hiatt, Friend Interview April 26, 2011

There was a Tan Oak market, and we were thinning some Tan Oak. Tan Oak, Fir, Redwood...we did take a few Pine trees out that were either dying, dead, or had already fallen to the ground. But not a lot...a very small margin.

Charlie Hiatt, Friend Interview April 26, 2011

The saw mill [Hiatt Mill] set right there. It was a fairly small saw mill. They were cutting fairly small timber. They would skid the logs down on this side [from west] and then they rolled them down onto the mill, and I assume the lumber came out on that side over there [east side].

Charlie Hiatt, Friend Site Interview July 14, 2011

# GRAZING

**Cattle vs Sheep**

That country doesn’t, in my judgment, have the strong grass you need for cattle. The rains are pretty heavy there. It’s nothing to have eighty inches of rain, and when you have that much rain, you don’t have the strong grass. The other reason is that all that land is fenced, with pastures, cross fencing.

When you have cattle and they decide the pasture is greener over in this pasture they go through the fence.

Actually, it was good grazing land. The rest of it was just...the Oak trees were good for the sheep, because the sheep ate acorns. That was a good load of food for them. The cows: not so much. They would [eat the acorns] but prefer not to.

Charlie Hiatt, Friend Interview April 26, 2011

# Sheep Grazing Practices

I bought a book on sheep ranching and held it with my left hand and rode my horse with my right hand, and that’s about the way I learned about sheep ranching.… I had Marino sheep. I bought some pure- bred stock up from New Zealand during the war which is another long story because it went through the Japanese blockade.

Fred Galbreath Presentation Humboldt State University 1995

There were sheep in a number of different places. Four different places there was livestock. To get them up, you go over horseback, and you start hollering. The sheep will start moving, and they’ll all move to the top of the hill, and you got good dogs, and you go up there to round them up. Then you drive them back to the barns.

Duane Ornbaun, Ranch Manager 1970-2000

Interview May 14, 2011

There is, a little sheep shed way up there on top. They used to keep a little hay in there. It’s not a very big building. That is almost the westerly corner of the property. It sets right on the property line, on the Galbreath side.

Charlie Hiatt, Friend Site Interview July 14, 2011

Once you get on the part that is now the preserve, there’s one barn, there’s a shop, some sheep feeders, though there’s no sheep, and some lambing barns, just a place with a low roof so the ewes could get out of the rain.

Bob Johnson, Son-in-Law Interview April 16, 2011

# Sheep Predators

The Fish and Game used to poison in Lake County, so that we didn’t have too many coyotes in our country. Once they outlawed poisoning for them guys, then they [coyotes] started multiplying and the sheep business was getting down and down. So Fred decided to sell that ranch and he kept this ranch with 1500 sheep. And over a period of time, that went down to about 500 head of sheep. And between the coyotes and mountain lions and all that good stuff.

Duane Ornbaun, Fred Galbreath’s Ranch Manager 1970-2000

Interview May 14, 2011

I’ve had to take the sheep out of this particular pasture though, it is about one thousand acres, because of the mountain lions and coyotes which I can’t control back there. They’ve killed so many sheep so I don’t run sheep there anymore.

# HUNTING

Anything that was bad was hunted, sometimes a coyote.

Nancy Levensaler, Friend Interview April 15, 2011

# Deer

They hunted deer there. That’s another thing – Fred was crack shot. One time his foreman and I were with him, and a deer was so far away, we were saying, “No, Fred, no, you’ll never hit that deer, you’re just going to wing it and have a wounded animal there.” He brought it down in one shot! They harvested deer for consumption, and if they got a really nice rack they’d have it mounted.

Bob Johnson, Son-in-Law Interview April 16, 2011

One of the rules he [Fred Galbreath] had, for example, if it was deer hunting season, you were not to shoot a deer within three miles of his house – those were his deer! He liked seeing those deer, because they would come and graze on his front lawn. He would sit on his front porch, and he even had names for them!

Bob Johnson, Son-in-Law Interview April 16, 2011

They would go buck hunting in August but never ever, ever – we’d have these huge gorgeous six point or eight point bucks up in the horse pasture right above the house, and they were sacred. No one ever dreamed of hunting those because they were Fred’s special reserve.

# Fish

Nina Hyatt, Granddaughter Interview April 25, 2011

While looking for steelhead in the little creek, I thought I better get behind a tree, which I did; about four or five Indians came down stream with their spears. They had been spearing steelhead. I wanted to stay very quiet under the dripping tree while they did their job and I got all wet. We used to have Indians in that part of Mendocino County quite a bit.

Fred Galbreath Presentation Humboldt State University 1995

…a lot steelhead, a lot of salmon, back in those days they had hookbill salmon that come up. They have a pretty long face with a hook on it, and they’re big. They’re nice sized salmon. And there’s lots of them.

Duane Ornbaun, Ranch Manager 1970-2000

Interview May 14, 2011

There’s a field down here, a 40-acre field, along Rancheria creek. Back then we used to be able to dam up Rancheria creek until Fish and Game outlawed it. They claimed it wrecked the trout and stuff like

that, and the silt. But I don’t believe that because we dammed up the water and it back up the water and make a pretty good safe haven for all these trout and there would be a lot of nice trout in that swimming hole. And they would grow to fair size.

Duane Ornbaun, Ranch Manager 1970-2000

Interview May 14, 2011

…And what Fish and Game did back then was, they came along one year and cleaned the river. All the logs cleared out of the river and stuff like that, but then the trout didn’t have any place to hide so the stream was…now they come around and let things stay in the river, so that the trout have a place to hide.

Duane Ornbaun, Ranch Manager 1970-2000

Interview May 14, 2011

# Pigs

There were also a lot of problems with the wild boar that the Spanish introduced to the land. I know there was a lot of destruction of the fields and hillsides and that continues. It’s really very, very destructive. So they would hunt for boar, and we’d have pork from the ranch and venison and all of that that dad would hunt.

Nina Hyatt, Granddaughter Interview April 25, 2011

We’d go over there and find a herd of pigs in the irrigated field that was back a long time ago in the 1960s or 70s. They’d be tearing up the field and we’d chase them down the field trying to get them. We always had a lot of pork in the freezer. It’s very good to eat by the way.

Duane Ornbaun, Ranch Manager 1970-2000

Interview May 14, 2011

Lots of hogs. Lots of wild pigs. This year, wild pigs have made a comeback. In the 80's there was a huge amount of hogs. We had a couple of real dry winters, and they either died off or people were able to hunt them almost to the point of extinction.

Charlie Hiatt, Friend Interview April 26, 2011