

# Central California Case Study

## Research Inquiry

In 2016, a private land owner hired SHRA to investigate historic water use and land settlement on a 1,200-acre ranch in California's Central Valley. Specifically, this client wanted to better understand early land ownership and settlement on the property, and how early settlers established both riparian and appropriative water rights for the parcels in question. Because land ownership in California is complicated by Mexican and Spanish land grants as well as railroad grants, the story required meticulous attention to detail.

## Methodology

This project required SHRA researchers to deploy their understanding of California water law as it related to both riparian and appropriative water rights. SHRA researchers knew unveiling the materials relevant for this particular project would be challenging. As such, SHRA researchers conducted thorough archival reconnaissance to identify the most relevant collections and types of documents for this project. In addition to creating a solid foundation for research, SHRA researchers also populated a custom database of information for this project. Numerous spreadsheets, tables, and a detailed KMZ Google Earth file helped researchers track land parcels over time. Throughout the document review period, SHRA researchers analyzed all materials through a place-specific lens to ensure that they captured spatial data for GIS mapping.

## Research Conclusion

After conducting extensive research in this case, SHRA determined that the property in question had early riparian and appropriative water rights. More specifically, SHRA uncovered the complicated story related to actual dates of settlement as well as date of patent land transfer. SHRA authored a comprehensive report including a narrative history of the ranch as well as several charts and GIS maps for visual purposes.

## Repositories and Collections Consulted

- The Huntington Library Special Collections
- California State Library and University of California Collections
- U.S. National Archives:
  - U.S. General Land Office
- Historic Maps
- California State Engineer Reports
- County Deed and Property Records
- Santa Fe and Southern Pacific Railroad Records
- Historic Newspapers

## Deliverables

- Narrative Report with Visual Appendices
- Project Database and Digital Archive
- GIS Maps



Contact Jennifer Stevens, Ph.D., for references  
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