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The ranchers who provided access for the surveys deserve special recognition. Surveys were conducted on twelve different ranches covering nearly 50,000 acres. All ranchers participated on a voluntary basis knowing that field data would be entered into a public database to be used for regional planning. They participated in large part because they support long-term rangeland and natural land conservation. Yet, they made an incredible leap of faith in deciding that rare species surveys would ultimately help rather than harm their interests. The continuing support of the ranching community is essential for the final success of any regional conservation planning effort in eastern Merced County.

The East Merced Resource Conservation District (EMRCD) provided important support through its early development of a vernal pool conservation program. EMRCD initiated their program in 1998 with funding from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and the Great Valley Center. This program established relationships with many of the local ranchers who eventually provided survey access for this study.

Dr. Robert Holland, as one of the pioneers of vernal pool landscape studies, provided critical insight and inspiration for developing the study's field survey designs. Dr. Holland has been studying and visiting the eastern Merced County region since the early 1980s when he conducted a landmark study on the relationships between vernal pool plants and geology at the Flying M Ranch. The insights he has gained through the years are beautifully described in an article he wrote for the January 2000 edition of *Fremontia* (the journal of the California Native Plant Society) entitled "The Flying M Ranch: Soils, Plants, and Vernal Pools in Eastern Merced County." Based in large part on his past work, all surveys conducted for this study were stratified by geologic surface to test the role of geology on habitat and species distribution across the landscape.

Special thanks go to all of the field biologists and other scientists that contributed to this study. I'm sure we'd all look forward to another opportunity to spend countless days riding across endless vernal pool grasslands so long as we could minimize the subsequent countless nights sifting through endless data in front of a computer screen.

Last but certainly not least, I'd like to thank my wife, Pauline, for her patience and support in taking care of our family during the long days and nights required to complete this study.

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