

Unique water systems help ranchers quench cows' thirst

By DIANNA TROYER
For the Capital Press

Frustrated with constantly hauling water to his thirsty cows, Jed Heaton brainstormed about ways to eliminate the tedious chore.

With polyethylene pipe, massive tire troughs, valves, and floats, he installed a permanent watering system on his ranch south of Malta, Idaho near the Utah border.

"Through word-of-mouth, we started helping other ranchers develop springs and ponds into permanent watering systems," said Heaton, who started Range Water Solutions and Supplies in 2001.

Since then, he and his crew have installed watering systems in Idaho, Utah, Nevada, Wyoming, and Oregon. Often he works in conjunction with the Natural Resources Conservation Service and other grazing improvement programs, using

the agency's range improvement guidelines.

"We never thought it would get this big," said Heaton, of the family-owned company, nicknamed www.thirstycows.com by his son Tykus three years ago.

His work season starts in April and ends in December.

One of his biggest jobs was in northeastern Utah near Randolph, where he installed a system so ranchers would have a reliable water source.

"We laid 50,000 feet of 3-inch mainline pipe and grouped 20 tire troughs together, in sets of three, with a float controlling them, so they fill level," he said.

On some jobs, he has installed as many as six troughs on one float in one location, so the float controls storage of 9,600 gallons of water.

His wife, Meshia, does the bookkeeping.

"People tell me they like



Dianna Troyer/For the Capital Press
During winter, Jed Heaton maintains his equipment and replaces dozer tracks.

Jed's work because he knows how a cow thinks and can recommend the best place to put the troughs or ponds and how to configure the pipes," said Meshia. "Plus, he has a reputation for doing a quick

and quality job."

He uses high density polyethylene pipe that can be fused together at the joints with a McElroy welder.

"That joint is amazingly strong," he said. "You can beat on it, and it won't break."

The circular troughs are durable, too, because they are made from tires that were used on massive gold mining equipment. The tires are about 12 feet tall and 5 feet wide.

"We get them and cut them in half, so they're about 27 inches tall," he said. "They're great because unlike metal troughs they won't rust, dent, or spring a leak. When we put them in, we laser level the ground, so water is level in the trough."

Heaton buys semi-truck loads of pipe and other supplies to last the season. If ranchers want to install their own systems, he gives advice and sells them what they need.



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Jed Heaton's kids, Tykus and Braylee, fuse pipe joints with a McElroy welder.

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