Clark: The man of Hay Creek Ranch

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'Bonanza,' 'The High Chaparral,' those old Western shows," said Anderson. "They end up with extra cash to invest and think, 'Farming, that'd be fun.' But 99% of them, when they figure out how much work there is, it isn't long before they're out of there. Gordon's not that way. He took the challenge head-on."

The man of Hay Creek Ranch

It would be hard to overstate how rugged Hay Creek Ranch is.

About 12 miles east of Madras, a gravel road cut into the sides of hills climbs up then dips into a valley where the ranch headquarters lies.

In the highlands, hemmed in by snowcapped blue mountains, cattle forage among rabbit brush, junipers, sagebrush and craggy rocks resembling castle ruins.

Below, in the valleys, cattle graze and sunbathe in meadows scumbled with purple lupine.

Though Clark ambles slowly at 89, he drives fast. His employees often see him zipping up and down hills in his ATV across terrain so inhospitable it deters poachers and trespassers.

This land has played a prominent role in Central Oregon's history.

In 1873, according to the Oregon Encyclopedia, David Baldwin established the ranch as Baldwin Sheep and Land Co.

Oregon Historical Society lists the ranch as one of the earliest locations where alfalfa was grown in the state.

After Baldwin, the property

After Baldwin, the property passed through many hands.

In the early 1900s, scores of homesteaders lived on the property on 320-acre parcels, and until 1912, the Dalles-Prineville freight and stagecoach lines ran through the ranch. The property had a post office, general store and school. Today, skeletal wooden frames of homesteaders' cabins are scattered on the landscape.

Land of wool

Sheepherders once raised 50,000 sheep here each year in an era with unrestricted use of nearby forest lands in the Blue Mountains and Ochocos for summer grazing.

For decades, Clark raised sheep here, too, managing about 4,100 head of fine-wooled Rambouillets annually until, in 2011, wild horses overtook his Forest Service allotments, leaving him scant summer forage.

For two years, Clark said he went to public meetings, asking the Forest Service to control the wild horse population. Finally, he gave up, selling his flock to focus on cattle.

"I'm sad the sheep didn't work out," said Clark. "It was a fascinating experience."

Bits of the sheep operation remain: Clark keeps several Great White Pyrenees and Border Collies, which once followed the flock. And by his fireplace stand two stuffed cougars that once threatened Clark's sheep.

On the fireplace's mantlepiece



Oregon Historical Society

Hay Creek Ranch team in front of a general store at Baldwin Sheep and Land Co.

stand several trophies. The one Clark says he's most proud of is a plaque from Jefferson County Livestock Association naming him 2010 Livestockman of the Year. Beside that are surfing awards, glimpses of a former life.

The first life

Born near Los Angeles in 1933, Gordon "Grubby" Clark grew up by the ocean, where he fell in love with surfing.

"When I was young, all I wanted to do was surf," he said.

In the 1940s and 1950s, he surfed on heavy redwood boards.

As a young man, Clark worked for legendary surfboard designer Tom Blake, who invented the surfboard fin, and Hobie Alter, often called "the Henry Ford of the surfboard industry."

After studying engineering at Pomona College, Clark returned to work with Alter, this time on a special project: experimenting with foam blanks, blocks of foam from which surfboards could be made. The first lightweight foam-core surfboard hit the market in 1958.

One year later, the surfing-themed movie "Gidget" popularized surfing. Demand spiked.

Clark opened his own surf-board blank factory, Clark Foam, in 1961. According to Surfer magazine archives, the company at one time supplied 90% of the blanks that went into American-made surfboards and 60% of blanks worldwide.

The second life begins

At the crest of his success, Clark looked for investment opportunities. He recalls thinking that farmland, decreasing in supply, would one day prove valuable.

His chance came in 1993, when Hay Creek Ranch went up for sale. A victim of the savings and loan crisis, the property came at a bargain.

Clark hadn't intended to be a farmer, but he recalls that when he started building fences, drilling wells and fixing things, he quickly realized he enjoyed the work and treasured the land.

"It was fun," he said. "I love building things."

So, in 1994, he tried his hand at ranching with Rambouillet sheep he

Est. 1873
NEXT 14 MILES

Sierra Dawn McClain/Capital Press Hay Creek Ranch, one of Oregon's oldest and largest ranch holdings, was established in

bought from Cunningham Sheep Co. Around 1998, he added cattle.

Then Clark's life took a U-turn. In 2005, the surf industry was shocked when Clark announced the immediate closure of Clark Foam, which surf experts estimate had been worth \$40 million.

Clark's main reason for ending the business was that California's environmental and workplace regulations had changed through the decades, in step with changing scientific knowledge.

A major chemical in Clark Foam's blanks was toluene diisocyanate, or TDI. When modern research brought to light that TDI was toxic, public records show that Clark began to face litigation, regulations and citations from OSHA, the state EPA and individuals.

In response, Clark closed his factory. He started farming full-time in 2008.

Breeding better cattle

Clark had a lot to learn about farming.

"I was considered innovative in the surfing industry, but in farming, I just copied people," said Clark. "I ask a lot of questions, and every year, my questions get better."

Recently, Clark has improved his cattle herd's genetics.

Clark's program involves collecting tissue samples from tiny punch-holes in cows' ears. He sends the samples to a lab called Neogen, where the DNA is analyzed. Clark then logs into his online Neogen portal to view data, including EPDs — Expected Progeny Differences — which evaluate an animal's genetic

worth as a parent and predict how future progeny will perform.

Clark uses the data to decide which heifers to breed and which to

He also uses data on expected progeny differences to decide which bulls to buy. Every two years, Clark buys a young, top-quality Black Angus bull and uses its semen to artificially inseminate 600 cows per year, or 1,200 cows over the two-year period.

"I'm very careful about the bull I pick," said Clark.

All of Clark's artificial inseminations are Black Angus bull to Black Angus heifers. When a heifer fails to conceive following AI, however, Clark breeds a Charolais "cleanup bull" to that heifer.

Clark created a database to track genetic improvements over time.

"His cattle are real good quality," said Mehrten Homer, founder of Painted Hills Natural Beef, the brand Clark sells to.

Clint Sexson, marketing and beef cattle improvement committee chair at Oregon Cattlemen's Association, said that while DNA collection to enhance EPD accuracy is common in purebred operations, it's rare among commercial producers like Clark.

"On the commercial side, I'd say he's probably on the forefront," said Sexson

Clark breeds for three main traits: easy birthing, small body size and grading (mostly marbling). It might seem counterintuitive to breed for small animals; but Clark said he aims for able-bodied cows that can handle steep terrain and give birth easily on the range.

Karen Launchbaugh, professor of rangeland ecology and director of the University of Idaho Rangeland Center, said this kind of landscape-oriented thinking is innovative.

"I think it's becoming more common for people to get access to genetics," said Launchbaugh. "But what's not as common is thinking about genetics in this landscape sense. (Clark) is ahead of his time on that one — thinking about how the cattle fit the landscape."

Clark often uses drones to find cows on his vast property and uses walkie-talkies to alert his seven employees of the cows' whereabouts. Land and water

Clark has also sought ways to improve Hay Creek Ranch's soil and water resources.

He irrigates about 700 acres to produce silage.

Recently, Clark has been using a method called variable-rate fertilizing on his crop fields.

First, he analyzes the soil mosaic in a field, both overhead using a drone and on the ground by taking soil samples. Based on this, he creates a virtual, multi-colored map of his field. Each colored puzzle piece represents a different soil profile within the field.

He inserts this data, and a GPS device, into his tractor. Then, when the tractor moves across the field, it releases different volumes of fertilizer over different parts of the field. Using this "precision fertilizing" method, Clark aims to be sustainable, save money and improve soil health.

Clark has also looked for ways to boost the ranch's water supplies.

"With the drought, we're really scuffling for forage," said Clark.

In Clark's early years on the ranch, he drilled wells, but as restrictions on drilling have intensified, he has focused on re-developing historic springs and finding ways to move water.

Clark has set up several devices for pumping water between ranges using diesel pumps, generators, automatically filling tanks, sensors, tubes and timed pump devices.

"He really has improved the property a lot with the wells and pumps," said Homer, of Painted Hills Natural Beef.

Both Homer and Anderson, the

sheep farmer, said Clark is fortunate

that his former occupation left him enough capital to invest in high-quality equipment like computer-controlled pumps.

Though water resources in the

region continue to dwindle, Clark's innovations have helped stretch the ranch's water supplies.

According to historical records,

Clark has now owned Hay Creek Ranch longer than any previous owner. But what's in store for the farm's future?

Clark has four children by two marriages, but none of his children are interested in farming.

"I think that's the saddest part of the whole deal. It's sad that there doesn't seem to be anyone in line to carry it on," said Anderson, the sheep rancher.

Clark plans to leave his property to one of his children, a daughter. Locals have speculated on who might eventually buy the farm from her: A millionaire? A movie agency looking to make Westerns? An investment firm? Only time will tell

Whatever the future holds, Clark says he's grateful to live on Hay Creek Ranch and plans to keep farming for as long as he can.

"The more I'm on the ranch, the more interested I get in it," said Clark. "I've had two lives, but I wish I'd been a rancher all my life."

Forestland: Small woodland owners won't be held to same standards

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under fire for rendering valuable standing timber on private land effectively worthless.

Aside from no-harvest buffers expanding, the legislation imposes restrictions on beaver trapping, road building and steep slope logging.

Industry estimates peg the state-

wide impact as a 10% cut in harvestable timber acreage, which will roughly correlate with a decrease in lumber and plywood production and all the mill closures or curtailments that entails, critics say.

The effect will be particularly

The effect will be particularly burdensome for landowners with many streams on their properties, including small woodland owners who don't own vast acreages spread out over upland, lowland and riparian areas, according to detractors.

Supporters of the deal in the timber industry say it ensures future regulations under the state's Forest Practices Act will be guided



Mateusz Perkowski/Capital Press Oregon Gov. Kate Brown spoke at a May 18 signing ceremony in Portland for bills that impose new regulations on private forestland.

by an "adaptive management process" that relies on research rather than political maneuvering.

"Any changes to the Forest Practices Act will be based

on sound science," said Chris Edwards, executive director of the Oregon Forest & Industries Council, a timber group. "The science will lead us to agreements."

Environmental groups that signed onto the deal say their public show of support will deflate any future efforts to change the law through ballot initiatives, given the broad-based consensus behind the new rules.

"It becomes harder for someone to mount external efforts at the ballot to do something different," said Sean Stevens, executive director of the Oregon Wild nonprofit. "There will be a little bit of stasis that comes from this."

If the federal government approves the deal's regulations under a "habitat conservation plan" for threatened and endangered aquatic species, it would protect against lawsuits alleging landowners unlawfully harmed them and their habitat.

"That gives them a shield from liability," said Ralph Bloemers,

co-founder of the Crag Law Center. Even so, the habitat conserva-

Even so, the habitat conservation plan must first be approved by federal authorities through a public process, and its protections don't extend to terrestrial species such as the spotted owl. The plan also doesn't apply to liability under the Clean Water Act.

Though a representative of the Oregon Small Woodlands Association helped craft the deal, critics have accused the agreement's signatories of deliberating behind closed doors without input from the public.

Small woodland owners won't be held to the same standards under the legislation as industrial forest owners but the regulations will still be more stringent than they are now. The state's Board of Forestry must implement the new rules before December.

Under companion legislation, Senate Bill 1502, small woodland owners with fewer than 5,000 acres who abide by the stricter industrial standards can obtain tax credits to compensate for the loss in revenues.

Small woodland owners are more likely to live in the "wild-land-urban interface" and thus the significant reduction in their property's timber value will create pressure to convert these forests to residential or other uses, according to detractors.

For OSWA, it's gratifying that the unique circumstances of small woodland owners were recognized in the accord and they were given special consideration in the regulatory and tax provisions, said Ken Nygren, the group's president.

By engaging in negotiations, representatives of the timber and environmental communities learned their goals were not mutually exclusive, he said. They all share the aim of keeping Oregon's forested landscape healthy.

"By seeing each other as people and sharing our views with integrity, we can achieve the hallowed middle ground," Nygren said.

Name: Committee is proposing to call Vespa veluntina the 'yellow-legged hornet'

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and the UK have contacted Looney to report sightings of Asian hornets.

If Asian hornets were introduced into the U.S., the problem would increase, giving entomologists trying to contain the invasive species another problem to manage, Looney said.

The society committee, at Looney's suggestion, is proposing to call *Vespa veluntina* the "yellow-legged hornet" for its conspicuous yellow legs.

There's a third hornet in

There's a third hornet in the name game, *Vespa soror*. One specimen was found in British Columbia in 2019. It has no common name in English.

The entomological society's committee on names has recommended naming it the "southern giant hornet." It's range in Asia overlaps with Asian giant hornets, but extends farther south.

The society is circulating

The society is circulating all three names to its members for comment.

Entomologists disdain

th Asian giant hornets, but on naming insects include avoiding terms that "unnec-essarily incite offense, fear or promote negative emotional

ing bees.

reactions."

Entomologists disdain Society guidelines also the term "murder hornets," a discourage names based on

headline-grabbing term that

reflects the species' painful

sting and knack for decapitat-

The society's guidelines

race, ethnicity or cultures.

As an alternative to Asian giant hornet, Looney originally offered "giant hornet" and "northern giant hornet." In comments to the committee, Looney said a new name that was too different would be confusing and invite public ridicule.

The society's naming committee discussed both and

decided that "northern giant hornet" made clearer which species was being referred to. Looney made the point in

his submission to the common name committee that all hornets are from Asia.

"As such, 'Asian' does

not communicate anything unique or helpful about the insect's biology, appearance, or behavior," he wrote.