

Feces like 'fortune cookies' to researchers

The manure droppings of Oregon's wild horses and other range animals are a little like "fortune cookies," according to a couple emerging experts on the subject.

"When you open them, each one has a story in it," said Mike McInnis, who, with fellow Oregon State University rangeland resources doctoral student Dave Ganskopp, spent two years (1979-1981) in the rugged mountains and desert of southeastern Oregon collecting the feces of wild horses, antelope, bighorn sheep, mule deer, cattle and other animals.

McInnis and Ganskopp's field studies were funded by a U.S. Bureau of Land Management and OSU's Agricultural Experiment Station. They are back on the OSU campus analyzing their manure samples and other information, such as data on forage production, and writing their doctoral dissertations and reports for the BLM.

Analyzing the feces of range animals, they explained, is a big step toward learning what the animals eat at various times of the year, where they eat, how nutritious various forages are and how healthy the animals are.

The BLM decided to fund the research because it needs that sort of information—especially data on grazing overlaps between animal species—to manage wildlife and domestic animals on the public land it oversees, according to

Jerry Wilcox, wild horse specialist for the BLM's Vale district.

"If you go looking for scientific information about wild horses, especially, you'll find just about nothing," Wilcox said.

BLM picked the researchers' study areas.

McInnis was assigned an area about 23 miles long and 18 miles wide in the rounded, treeless Sheephead Mountains near Burns Junction (about 90 miles southeast of Burns). The area is part of the most densely populated wild horse range in Oregon and mule deer, antelope, cattle and other animals live there.

Ganskopp was assigned

an area about 15 miles long and six miles wide in the Owyhee Brakes, an erosion-torn patch of hills and gulches about 25 miles northwest of Jordan Valley that rivals the Grand Canyon country of Arizona for ruggedness in spots. Bighorn sheep, mule deer, cattle, wild horses and other animals live in the Owyhee Brakes.

Both researchers got to know their territories intimately, using four-wheel drive trucks and their feet to follow animals day after day and some nights so they could pick up fecal samples and observe the creatures' behavior.

With the aid of a pilot and helicopter rented by the

BLM and a veterinarian armed with a tranquilizer gun, the students put collars fitted with radio transmitters on several horses in each area to help them monitor the movements of wild horse bands.

McInnis and Ganskopp have not finished interpreting all the data. But both have impressions of how the animals fit into their habitat.

"I didn't see any serious overlaps in my area," said Ganskopp. "Although the diets of horses and cattle, in particular, did overlap. As a gross generalization, you can say horses used the area's hilltops, cattle used the lowlands except in the

late spring and early fall and sheep used the rough terrain. Deer were not much of a factor (there weren't many in Ganskopp's area)."

"Bad years" are when grazing overlaps are most apparent and damaging, he said.

"I was really praying for a drought at least one year of my study because that's what determines what an area can sustain in the way of animal life," he said.

McInnis doesn't think he uncovered any damaging overlaps, either. He did observe the impact hard times can have on range animals.

Many horses had chipped and broken

teeth—reminders of sticks and rocks the animals chewed on while trying to nibble grass down to the roots during Oregon's 1977 drought, he said.

The marred teeth only hint at the damage overgrazing can inflict, McInnis claims.

"The thing you really have to worry about is the top inch of soil in any area," he said.

McInnis and Ganskopp are confident they've developed valuable skills for future range studies.

"There's an art to collecting (horse) manure," McInnis said, elaborating. "You have to get it while it's fresh so you know for sure which band of horses

it came from. And you want to get samples from as many members of the band as possible.

"I usually try to sneak up and let them see me

run." Without making quick movements. That way they stand around and look you over and, uh, relieve themselves before they

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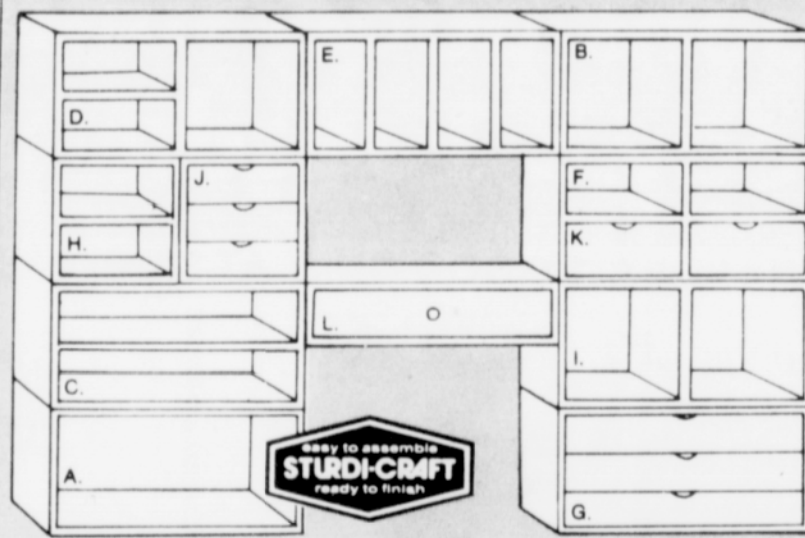
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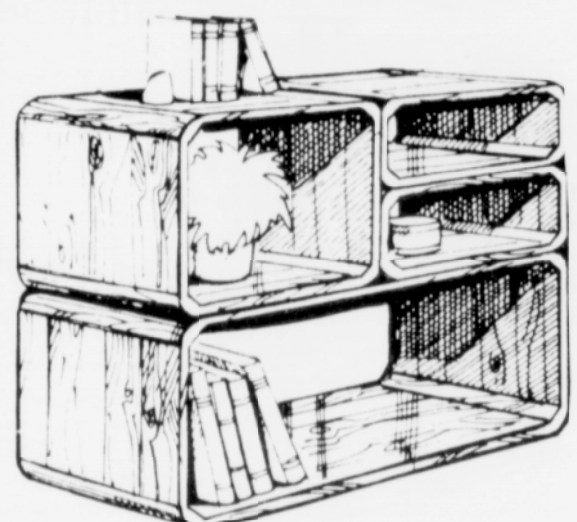
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County's Stevenson recognized

Clackamas County's Town Center Area Design Plan and Ardis Stevenson, assistant director of the County's Environmental Services Department, received special recognition from the American Planning Association last month.

Stevenson received the 1981 Oregon Professional Planning Award for the contribution to professional planning, particularly in citizen involvement, inter-agency coordination and explaining the planning process to the general public.

The Town Center Area design plan won recognition because of the innovative public facility and financial planning used to prevent problems commonly associated with suburban shopping centers.

Child's store bazaar feature

A "Child's Store" with a 50 cent top price, no adults allowed, will be one of the features of the Boring United Methodist Church Christmas Bazaar on Dec. 5. The bazaar will last from 10 a.m. till 4 p.m. The church is located at the corner of Church and Richey Roads.

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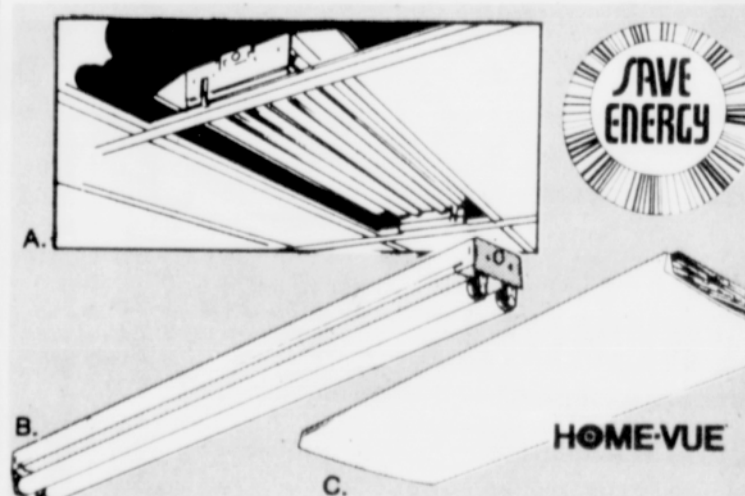
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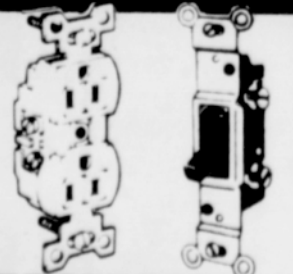
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