

# New Zealand fence good for the pasture; good for the water

An idea from New Zealand will upgrade forest pasture for Morrow County Cattle ranchers and, at the same time, improve water quality to attract spawning fish, says Susan Hayman, range manager for the North Fork John Day Ranger District of the Umatilla National Forest.

The five-strand, high tensile, smooth-wire fence built in the fashion of those in New Zealand encloses a 2,500 riparian pasture adjacent to Five-Mile Creek, in the F.G. Whitney Cattle Allotment. The pasture includes not only the creek bank but also bunch grass and timber.

Not to be confused with corridor fencing where a narrow area along a stream is fenced to protect the creek bed, the New Zealand fence project encloses a wide area so the cows cannot see the water or the green grass and creates a new type of range management.

Improved water quality is the main objective of the new management plan Hayman says. The banks of Five-Mile Creek are undercut and in danger of collapsing into the stream as cattle come down to drink or of breaking off and washing sediment downstream as ice jams break up.

Steelhead not native to Five-Mile Creek, may be expected in the future if the state blasts the falls 15 miles downstream, the only natural barrier now keeping steelhead from the John Day from coming into the stream.

Steelhead prefer a spawning ground with larger gravel says the range manager. Sediment in the stream fills the spaces between the gravel and can become hard, almost like concrete, discouraging fish from spawning or suffocating eggs already in the stream.

To further improve water quality, the forest service may plant additional trees near the creek to increase shading and keep the water cooler, another quality the fish like.

Even if fish other than the native trout never get this far up the creek, improved water quality will improve the water quality farther downstream in the John Day River system, she said.

The new management plan will also improve the pasture adjacent to Five-Mile Creek, Hayman says. The pasture has never been rested with permittees grazing 620 cow-calf



Joe Yocom of Morrow County Grain Growers demonstrates flexibility of New Zealand fence.



Susan Hayman explains how fence tension can be controlled with a simple tool.



Five-mile Creek in its current condition exhibits undercutting of the banks (background).



Cleared area creates narrow corridor for new fence.



Susan Hayman and Resource Asst. Monty Heath point to riparian pasture area of F.G. Whitney allotment.

Kentucky Blue Grass in the meadow which normally increases when grazed is on the way out in this meadow, Hayman says. This trend says that something is not right and we need to change. Cattle use can accelerate some of the natural processes, but experts disagree about how much erosion is natural and how much is caused by the cattle.

The new management plan rests the pasture for three years beginning this summer and then allows 10 days intensive grazing each year for two years resting the pasture the third year.

"If we didn't change the management system, we could work in some areas, but not achieve the results we would if we co-operate," Hayman said. Corridor fencing includes the desirable pasture, but the new plan allows ranchers in the Five-mile Cattle Assoc. to use the more desirable pasture about the same amount of time overall that they were able to with the previous system.

Short duration high intensity grazing should improve the pasture, Hayman says. After the cattle have grazed, the meadow is hit hard, but then it is rested and has a chance to recover. Cattle churning up the soil also improves the seedbed for the shallow soil grasses.

With corridor fencing, explains Hayman, the cows start pushing on the fence during hot weather trying to get to the water and the cooler area along the creek bank where the grasses are greener and tastier than the drier grasses. When a calf gets through the fence, its mother tries all the harder to get through, sometimes breaking or damaging the fence, Hayman said. Fencing a larger area prevents the cattle from seeing the more desirable pasture. Although cattle do seem to remember their favorite places from year to year,

"out of sight, out of mind," works in our favor and saves wear and tear on the fence and the pasture.

The New Zealand fence was cheaper to build than a barbed wire fence and we expect it will be cheaper to maintain, she says. This fence, financed by timber sales, will

cost \$3,300 per mile which is considerably less than the \$5,500 per mile cost of building a barbed wire fence.

The fence is 5/4 miles long beginning at the intersection of Forest Roads 5312 and 5318 and ending at the tip of Matlock Prairie. Rock jacks at quarter-mile intervals support the wires which are connected to treated posts with heavy duty tension springs. Splices without twisting maintain the full strength of the fence. Spacer posts at 80 ft. intervals keep the wires aligned. At the next quarter-mile post, the wires are connected with ratchets so the tension of the fence can be controlled. It also means that during winter months the top wire can be lowered to make it easier for elk to clear the fence, Hayman explained.

The New Zealand wire has a 6,000 lb. breaking strength so it doesn't break as easily with falling limbs or trees, says Hayman. A tree

falling against the fence may stretch the fence so it is tipped over rather than standing up, but when the tree is removed, the fence will bounce right back to its normal position.

The wires are held in place with barbed two-inch staples rather than the regular 1 1/2" staples used for a barbed wire fence.

This particular fence is built so that the first and third wires can be electrified if necessary, but the Forest Service anticipates that may not be necessary. Since the New Zealand wire carries a bigger charge than a domestic wire fence, Hayman says, the Forest Service is reluctant to use it on public lands.

Cattle tend not to rub against smooth wire to scratch themselves as

they do against barbed wire fences which will also help keep maintenance costs down, Hayman said. Lower maintenance costs are to the advantage of the forest permittees because they are responsible for upkeep on all structural improvements on the allotment.

Hayman has been involved with the project since working as an intern range manager while studying for her degree at Washington State University in Pullman. The same person rarely gets to do both the analysis of an area and then write the plan, she explains, but her involvement with both phases has given her close ties to this project. "I'm fairly confident the management plan will work," she said. "I don't see how it can fail."

## Heppner Hotel Project Loan process moves to next step

The city has moved a step forward in its attempt to gain a loan from the state housing division, city attorney Bill Kuhn said Monday. The loan for \$600,000 will be used in conjunction with a \$500,000 federal block grant already awarded the city of Heppner for development of a 28-unit elderly housing project at the Heppner Hotel.

City officials will meet with East Central Oregon Association of Counties and the state housing divi-

sion in Salem July 15 to learn how to gather the information needed for the actual loan process. The city has been in the pre-application process.

The city has been gathering pre-applications from prospective residents to convince the state that there is a need for the project. A former July 1 pre-application deadline has been extended, said Kuhn, because the city now has more time to present them to the state. The state will want to know if people will want to live there, he said.

The forms are available at Heppner City Hall.

At the July 15 meeting, the city hopes to learn how much rent the state will allow it to charge for rental units in the project. The state will be concerned, Kuhn said, that rent costs per unit are kept at a reasonable amount yet leaving the city enough money to pay back the loan. The city also hopes to learn if it understands correctly that tenants must have an income under \$28,000, Kuhn said.

## Vote-by-mail goes smoothly, Clerk says

The turnout in last week's vote-by-mail election was as large as the turnout in primary elections, said Morrow County Clerk Barbara Bloodworth. "That's unheard of in a small election." The turnout is normally 25-30% in a one issue election, she said which is not a big enough participation to say, that the outcome "is what the majority wants."

According to the number of ballots, the turnout, county-wide was about 57%. Some of the ballots mailed out were undeliverable and returned to the Clerk's Office, she said making the voting percentage closer to 67%, she said, if you consider only the ballots which were actually delivered to registered voters.

For the county's first vote-by-mail election, it went smoothly, she said. The cost was about the same as a regular election this time because she was not able to order supplies in bulk to get a price break. "Now that we know the vote-by-mail works and works well, we will

order in bulk."

Most people seem to like the convenience of the mail vote, she said, especially this time of year when farmers and those who work in timber-related jobs are so very busy.

The county can use this method for any election except a primary or general election.

Some votes came in late, however. Still in envelopes at the Clerk's office are 16 ballots which arrived June 25, nine which arrived June 26, and one which arrived June 27. Just in time to be counted were 119 ballots which arrived by mail Tuesday, June 24, and 45 which were hand delivered to the Clerk's Office on election day.

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