

Rietmanns, leaders in water quality stewardship

Editor's Note: This article is reprinted and updated with author Merlyn Robinson's permission.

The hardships endured by pioneers within Morrow County's rugged area have bred a tenacity inherited by some of today's ranching families.

In 1853, the Albert Wright family trekked westward from Illinois by wagon train. They settled near Oregon City. The family moved to the Hardman area in 1872, when the Willamette Valley became crowded. A son, Anson, was 12 years old at the time.

Through determination, hard work and the purchase of other homesteads, Anson Wright's holdings eventually encompassed the area from below Ruggs to beyond Rock Creek. Before his death in 1936, he deeded separate parcels of his vast spread to seven of his children.

Today, two ranches survive from the sales and consolidations of those seven legacies. McKinney Creek is the home base for these ranches, now century farms owned by Anson's descendants.

On one ranch are Pat Anderson-daughter of Walter Wright, one of Anson's sons-and her husband, Don. Their daughter, Tami, her husband, Mark Rietmann, and their daughters, Shelley and Shanna, also live there.

Close by, on the Horseshoe Hereford Ranch, live Beth Clark-daughter of Raymond Wright, another of Anson's sons-her husband, Barton, their son, Ned, his wife, Kathy, and their children, Matt, James and Sarah.

Great changes have impacted each generation-the Great Depression of the 1930's, cattle replacing sheep when the wool market crashed, improved roads and vehicles replacing horses for transportation and farm power.

In spite of the conveniences of modern technology, cattle ranching still requires hard, year-round labor. As stewards of the land, ranchers must focus on protecting the environment, along with

calving, branding, doctoring and feeding livestock.

Cattle herds were once driven to summer grazing in the mountains, where they were only occasionally checked before being gathered again in the fall.

Today, due to updated range management policies, permittees using Forest Service land must spend two person-days for each day of cattle grazing. This labor-intensive strategy allows these two ranching families, the Clarks and the Rietmanns, to continue to graze cattle for about three and a half months a year on the Hardman Forest Service allotment.

Out of their herds, these two ranches are permitted to run 322 head of cows, with calves at side, on about 22,000 forest acres overlooking the North Fork John Day River. Within this allotment run small streams that contribute to the river's headwaters. Permittees have developed off-stream watering places, while part of Wilson Creek has been permanently fenced and enhanced with fish weirs.

To lessen the impact of cattle on the Hardman allotment, the area has been divided into units, and cattle are moved in a rotation system. To better utilize forage, riders make sure that cows are distributed.

In a cooperative effort, the U.S. Forest Service provides fencing materials, while the permittees furnish labor. Portable electric fencing is used to protect sensitive areas. Permittees move the electric fence in conjunction with cattle rotation.

Barbed wire fencing costs about \$5,000 per mile, while solar-powered electric fencing is estimated at \$600 per mile.

"These permittees are very forward-thinking," says Heppner District Ranger Delanne Ferguson. "They have learned the science and are willing to adapt to new technology."

Extensive monitoring and record keeping are paying off, according to Mike Borman, Oregon State Range Land Resources Extension specialist.

He claims that under the new policies there has been an increase in forage, which benefits wildlife as well as cattle.

However changes are not just happening on the summer ranges of the Forest Service lands. In 1993, the Oregon State Legislature passed Senate Bill 1010, that requires the Oregon Department of Agriculture to help reduce water pollution from agricultural sources and to improve overall conditions in a watershed. Senate Bill 1010 targets streams that are designated "water quality limited" by the Oregon Department of Environmental Quality. This list contains over 900 of Oregon's waterways, some of which flow through Morrow County.

In response to this Senate Bill, and some of the recent ballot measures-such as Measure 38, the Rietmanns have taken a proactive approach on their private lands. With the same energy and "forward thinking" that they have addressed concerns on the Forest Service lands, they are addressing those concerns on their private lands. They learned that a rancher, by developing a Water Quality Management Plan, can become in compliance with the rules of Senate Bill 1010. But, with further research, they found that no one has ever developed a Watershed Water Quality Management Plan to comply with Senate Bill 1010. Just because it hasn't been done before never discouraged this pioneer family.

They asked the help of the Morrow Soil and Water Conservation District, Morrow County Extension Service and the local Natural Resources Conservation

Service to work with them and the Oregon Department of Agriculture to develop the first Watershed Water Quality Management Plan in Oregon. This plan is now in the works and most likely will be the example for most future Water Quality Management Plans in Oregon. For their leadership in conservation efforts, the Rietmanns have just received an Environmental Stewardship award from the Oregon Cattlemen Association for 1996. The award recognizes the Rietmanns for both individual and community stewardship and environmental leadership. The future looks bright with people like the Rietmanns who are willing to take on the challenges before them.

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1996 Annual Report

MSWCD Supplement to the Heppner Gazette-Tirres, February 26, 1997

Eric and Marnie Anderson of Ione selected as 1996 Cooperators of the Year

Eric and Marnie Anderson of Ione were chosen as the Morrow SWCD Cooperators of the year for 1996. The Andersons have been cooperators since March 1987 and have a fully applied conservation system.

The Andersons operate 7,000 acres in Morrow and Gilliam Counties. It is a land of little rain (annual rainfall is 9-9 1/2"), a lot of wind and challenging erosion problems. Wheat, commercial and seed, is their main crop. They also raise pea seed and dry peas, and contract some potato production.

The Andersons rely on production to solve some of the erosion problems. "High production is the best tool we have," said Eric, as it results in a high amount of residue which helps keep soil in place.

The Anderson crew strives to operate tillage machinery in a manner that will discourage blows. If a blow does start, a supply of straw is on hand to fill them and hold the soil. Straw is also applied to wheel line tracks.

All HEL, less productive or shallow soil is planted to permanent grass cover. One hundred acres of this less pro-

ductive land is enrolled in the Conservation Reserve Program. Grassed waterways, terraces and sediment dams are used to control runoff and erosion.

The Andersons are careful managers of water and have been known to turn off the irrigation pumps on a growing crop if the prospects of higher returns has dropped. They have experimented with a variety of crops, but back out if an enterprise is not profitable.

In wet years when there is a high level of volunteer wheat, the Andersons will harvest the volunteer crop. Yields on the volunteer may be low, but so are the inputs.

Eric and Marnie are also careful in their use of chemicals. Insecticides are applied in the furrow when possible, to avoid harming beneficial insects. The Andersons also have a zero tolerance for weeds. Their range and grasslands are rogued and weeds are eliminated.

The Andersons share a commitment with other farmers that calls for them to "leave the land in better shape than when they got it." "We're just temporary stewards of the land," Eric said.



Chris Rauch (r) congratulates Eric and Marnie Anderson, Cooperators of the Year

Continuous Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) sign-up

The Farm Service Agency (FSA) is now taking applications for 10-15 year contracts for the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP). Provisions of the continuous sign-up are more specific than are expected for future CRP application periods. Lands eligibility are as follows:

1. Planted or considered planted to an agriculture commodity for any two years 1992 through 1996.
2. Physically and legally capable of being cropped in a normal manner, as determined by the FSA County Committee.
3. Must fall within one of the following categories: land erodibility index of greater than 8;

land having evidence of scour erosion caused by out-of-bank water flow; land located in designated watershed or hydrologic unit areas; land located in an approved Conservation Priority Area; or land suitable for filter strips or riparian buffers.

Practices applied to the approved CRP acreage could be any of the following as recom-

mended and approved by the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS): 1. field windbreaks; 2. grass waterways; 3. shallow water areas for wildlife; 4. shelter belt establishment; 5. living snow fences; 6. filter strips along streams or bodies of water; 7. riparian buffer zones.

For more information about this program contact the FSA office at 676-9011.

CRP grazing and haying opened

On April 30th, 1996, President Clinton announced that CRP acreage would be released in all counties nationwide for emergency haying and grazing based on a national livestock

economic emergency.

Grazing was open May 1 through Sept. 30, 1996 for 5% of the CRP annual rental rate per acre per month. Haying began

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SWCD receives small GWEB grant

The district received a \$2,000 grant from the Governor's Watershed Enhancement Board for watershed improvement. The district is cooperating with the Willow Creek Country Club on riparian improvement using bio-engineering techniques.

Over the last several years, there has been extensive stream-bank erosion from increased

periods of high water. Some management practices have also been changed to allow the riparian area to heal itself naturally.

Many different varieties of shrubs and trees were planted by volunteers. Willow whips were also planted for bank stabilization and sediment trapping during high water events.