

DOUBLE RAFTER NEWSLETTER # 8 NOVEMBER 2006

Well, it's about time I sat down and had another cup of coffee and put some thought into what I want to say in this newsletter. I know it's been a while since I put one out but I haven't exactly been at my desk or in my office much since the last newsletter in March. When the end of the day finally gets here, I just don't have enough brain power left to sit down and think of something to write about. If I wrote it in those conditions it would be more like a new version of Dick and Jane's- "See the horse." "See the horse run fast". "See the cowboy hit the ground". Not exactly a breath catcher!!

WWP AND THE DROUGHT: Here we are heading into the first part of November, and man, has this year been a year of extremes. We had a very mild warm winter that I completely enjoyed but then it just barely rained in the spring. We had the driest year that I have ever seen in my life. We never had measurable moisture after the first of June. The mountain had a few showers in June but they were spotty. They generally were pretty severe, but no general 3 day rains, like we normally get. Springs were just barely running on the mountain that generally runs well all season long. The dust was unreal. In the Bear Trap pasture I rode up one of the drainages in August before we had kicked cattle in and the dust on the trails from just the wildlife was several inches deep. This of course had me very concerned, because the Bear Trap pasture is one that has been targeted by an environmental group out of Idaho called Western Watersheds Project. They have been highly successful in Idaho, Nevada, Arizona and New Mexico. This group(WWP) has found an area that has been overgrazed the last several years and it was noted in the Forest Service field notes. Forest Service policy states that if there is an infraction two years in a row, sanctions will be taken against the permittee. The FS has taken no action against me even though it has been noted the last two years that it was overgrazed. The FS employees that I deal say they aren't concerned about this 10 acre area but they sure won't put that in writing. This area is next to the only fresh water in the Bear Trap pasture. The Bear Trap pasture is probably 10,000 acres in size. WWP has won lots of law suits on these types of infractions. We are just waiting to see what will follow. Maybe some judge will shut us down because of this 10 acre area on our 70,000 acre allotment, we just don't know. The scary thing is that if those 10 acres are so important on a 70,000 allotment then why not one square foot? Its funny how those on the left think that the government is the only one who sticks up for the little guy. I would think I am a little guy, but the biggest risk to me staying in business is the federal government!!! Where am I missing the big picture? WWP has targeted 23 allotments on the Big Horns as problem areas. There are over 115 allotments on the Big Horns. All it takes is a few victories and they will have won on the entire Big Horn National Forest. There is a group of us who have put together an organization to deal with these issues and many more that concern our rights to graze public lands. We are a small group and are always looking for new members to help in this fight against legalized terrorism. Our group "Guardians of the Range" is a grass roots organization made up of primarily people who graze public lands; both USFS and BLM, but we have members in the business

community also. Donations are tax deductible and we are in the fight of our lives for our very existence. So anyone who would like to help in this battle, we would welcome your membership. This does have a direct impact on keeping the CATTLE DRIVES in operation. There are several different levels of membership that you can join. If you join as a business we will send you a plaque that shows your support of rights for private citizens. I have been a member of the NRA several different times, not because I'm an avid hunter, but because I'm a believer in the rights of individuals and we shouldn't have to fear high powered lobbyist or judges who legislate from the bench. With the drought we had this summer everyone's pastures had less feed in them than on a normal year but we are very concerned that WWP will use the short forage as another reason to show that we are raping the public lands. We measured the grass in the Bear Trap pasture prior to turning in and it was shorter than what we are to leave in the pasture at the end of the grazing season.

HALLOWEEN IN SEPTEMBER: We did everything we could do to try and alleviate the grazing pressure in the Bear Trap pasture. We only put 180 yearlings in there with none of it being any of our native stuff. The native stuff just camps on the only fresh water in the pasture or right where WWP monitors. On the August trip we trailed the cattle to Sardine Lake and then rode down there every other day and pushed them back to Sardine Lake. On the 29th of August I gathered the Sardine Lake country and pushed everything to the Suspension fence where we were going to gather them about 4 days later and kick them into Dayton Gulch. I rode through and my guess was that there were about 160 of the 180 right there on the fence. Alice, Taylor and I went out on Sunday the 3rd to gather the cattle on this end and came up with 15 head instead of the 160-180 that I was expecting. It was obvious what had happened and I guess you always live and learn. There had been about 200 head of Elk hanging in the Bear Trap drainages and bow season had started the 1st of September. Most of the cattle had been in the Bear Trap drainages when the season started. Now yearlings left alone only do three things, graze, walk and make methane gas. I'm sure it was God's idea of a joke just for the environmentalist. Anyway, you can imagine what happens when people dressed up as bushes start walking through the parks, meadows and forests before daylight. Those of you who have attended the cattle handling seminar, remember what I say, yearlings are like (teenagers). Let's put it in terms that you will be able to understand better. A large group of 13 year old teenagers are out on Halloween night and just start walking up the sidewalk towards a house that has a 500 lb. pumpkin on the front porch. The large group of 13 year old boys notice 2 boys ahead of them on the porch who are about 18. One of the 18 year olds jumps on the pumpkin and smashes it and they both take off running. The 13 year olds are standing their wide eyed, and open mouthed, when the front door flies open and a police car comes flying around the corner. Now the 13 year old boys have done nothing wrong, but someone in the group yells RUN!!! There is complete and uncontrollable panic that takes over as all the 13 year olds run in different directions. They don't stop until they are certain that whatever it is that is after them is chasing the other group. That is exactly what the 180 teenagers did that we had in the Bear Trap pasture. They ran until they were sure they weren't being chased by anymore walking bushes. Then once they stop, it is like the day after Halloween, as the 13 year olds are coming off of their sugar high. The yearlings are nervous, jittery and will run at the drop

of a hat. Because of their nervousness, they continue to walk or stay hidden in the trees. Now they don't have any idea why they are walking, or spending days hiding, it's just that by walking or hiding, they think they are getting away from those walking bushes. So you sneak around just like you are hunting. When you spot a little group of yearlings, you read your terrain and decide how to approach the group. One thing you don't want is to ride up on them and have them take off running in the wrong direction. At least if they are going to run you want them running in the right direction. Since they are doing so much walking, when you find a group of yearlings, even if it's 4 head, you have to gather them and head to where you want to go with them, because 30 minutes from now you might not find them again. So consequently, we spent a week gathering Bear Trap. Usually we can make 3 circles into Bear Trap and have 98% of the cattle. That week was 2 circles a day. Here we are the 4th of November and I am still short 5 yearlings. It's possible that they are in the bottom of the Dry Fork canyon and will die there. The Dry Fork canyon is extremely steep with lots of rims and timber. Because of this, you can't ride it, or fly it, to try and spot the missing cattle. To think this \$4500 loss could have been caused by walking bushes.

THE SUMMER: I always enjoy my summers on the mountain regardless of what I am doing. This year I decided to keep track of everything my family and I put into this so called cheap grass that we get. The enviro's will tell you that we are being subsidized by the taxpayer. Well, here are the figures for the summer and you can make your own conclusions. Remember, in the valley I can ride, drive a 4 wheeler, or my pickup and see 90% of my cattle in 4 hours. On National Forest, we can only drive the roads, so to take care of your livestock you must ride or walk. Have you ever tried to rope and doctor a sick 800 lb animal on foot? If you do, you will end up with dirt in your shorts! Well, that leaves the only option a horse. As I have said in the past, we can ride up there for 3 days and never see more than 65% of the cattle. Well here is what my family and I put into the allotment this summer. There is not one minute of time, of any paying guests into these hours. Also, remember I lose my family about the 15th of August and must do everything by myself from that point in time. Last summer my family and I spent 816 man hours on the mountain taking care of our allotment. Forest Service policy states that all improvements must be put up before cattle enter the allotment. Now that can be a little tough to achieve when you are at 9000ft because some years, the snow drifts on the roads don't melt out until the 20th of June. That gives us one week to get all of the improvements put up, the camp set up for the cattle drives, the horses shod and all the groceries purchased for the week of the trip. Last year we spent 102 hours getting the water tanks running, and the fences up in working condition before the livestock comes to the mountain. This does not include any time spent putting the Rock Cabin Park camp up. One of the fences that we put up is an electric fence a mile long that is charged by a solar panel. This is a boundary fence between us and another allotment. To keep peace with the neighbor from the other side of the mountain we watch this fence rather close. We had a deer hunter who we believe vandalized our solar panel all summer long. It started out as something simple like just unplugging the wires and finally escalated to the point where the solar panel was damaged to the point that it wouldn't work at all. Some days, he would disconnect it the same day that we would put it back together. Now it takes just about 1 hour to ride to this fence and check it and then another hour back to

camp. I filed a report with the Sheriffs Office and kept the FS informed so that I wouldn't be held responsible for not maintaining my improvements. However, they informed me it was still my responsibility to keep the cattle where they belonged. I guess if it happens next year I will have to purchase a deer camera and catch the culprit red handed. This of course ticks me off to have to spend my money to do this but that's what I will have to do. We are pretty sure we know who is doing this, but it's just another type of harassment we get as grazers of public lands. Where in the world did respect go for other people's properties?

CATTLE DRIVE FACTS:

It takes \$49 dollars of quarters at the car wash to wash all of the saddle blankets in the spring for the cattle drives. When you are finished you have horse hair in all kinds of places that you can't begin to imagine!!!

COW BUSINESS:

Well, the cow business continues to be tough. There are so many factors that go into causing the price to go up and down. There was an article in the Agri News in August that pointed out how three different so called experts had different points of view on where the cattle market is headed. Right now it's headed sharply down. Anyway, the three experts each had their own opinions. One said that the cattle numbers were going to show a 6% increase, the other said a 3% increase and the third said due to the drought there is no build up started. With a cow herd of around 95 million in the US, a range of that extreme is huge. With the hot carcass weight of a animal hanging on the rail around 700 lbs, you can see why an increase in numbers of 3 to 6% can have a huge impact on the market. Now, let's add one other factor to this. In 2004 and 2005, 11% of the corn crop was used in the production of ethanol. In 2006 it appears, it will shake out around 14% and for 2007 they are predicting that figure to jump to 19%. Corn is the main ingredient used in the feeding of cattle in the feedlot. With more corn being used for ethanol, this means higher prices for corn to feed to the cattle. This of course means that the feedlot owners will pay less money to buy the cattle. What happens if we have a drought in the corn producing states and have a real short corn supply? Is what happens, is that the rancher gets less for his product, and has no one to pass his costs onto. Now, put these figures together and tell me what the price for cattle will be next year? It's the reason there are very few family ranches left in the US. You will be wrong more times than you are right and in the long run it gets you. I have no clue what the price will be for next year, other than it appears that it will be sharply lower.

CREW NEWS:

Chelsie is enjoying her first year in law school.

Tyler is enjoying his first year in college maybe too much!!

Brendon will graduate in December with a degree in Political Science and a minor in environmental studies and then apply to law school. He and Erin will be married in June at the Double Rafter.

Trent is a junior at UW and is about tired of school. He will graduate a year from December, with a degree in Watershed management and Rangeland ecology.

Taylor is a freshman in high school and well.... Taylor!

Maverik got kicked on the June trip in the middle of the night by one of the mules, we think, and blew his knee in the process. He was 3 legged most of the summer, but by the September trip, was getting around real well on 4 legs. Krayton thinks that arthritis will set in before spring and he will probably be 3 legged again. I know after a day of working he now has a hard time getting up. I did get a pup out of him, and out of Randy's dog Suzie and boy is she a cutie. I had her a week and had her in the front of the pickup with me, and Boone was in the back seat. He jumped over the seat and landed on her breaking her right rear leg. Boone is Taylor's Springer Spaniel. So now I have an 8 week old pup with a splint on. We have to keep her as immobile as possible. Murphy does seem to be getting along okay. I'll take her back to the vet next week to have the splint changed.

Mom and Dad are doing fine and Dad is still working 60-70 hours a week. I am headed into Rock Cabin Park Tuesday to try and get everything packed out and closed up for the year. The big mess tent was ripped right down the middle along the ridge pole and the galvanized tent frame was broken in two again. I will probably just burn the tent if it's dry enough to burn. I have 15 cases of beer and pop to either pack out or drink. I haven't decided which would be easier and will probably wait and make that decision once I get in there. If I don't come home for days you will know the reason. We have had over 8 inches of rain here at the house since the September snow storm. I don't know how much snow is at Rock Cabin but I do know it's all white.

Well, the election is over and Krayton won his house district at this point in time by 14 votes. There are a few damaged ballots that have to be counted, and of course a recount because of the closeness of the count and then certification of the election. There are 5 damaged ballots in his district, but theoretically, he could still lose depending on any change in the recount. He was one of only 2 nominees to unseat an incumbent in the state. If the election votes stay the same Kray's winning gives the state a republican controlled house, if not it will stay democratic so there are lots of eyes in the state watching. UPDATE: The recount has occurred and Krayton's margin of victory is now 4 votes. We are still waiting to count the 5 remaining damaged ballots and they will count them Monday. Krayton needs one vote out of the 5, to win the election by one vote. There is a possibility that certification could wait until the end of November.

CATTLE DRIVE PLANS AND CHANGES FOR NEXT YEAR: It would be great to see some of our friends again that we haven't seen for several years. So let's get together for a week of torture and good food!! We have done away with the August Cattle Drive since we can't seem to make the resource (grass) and the dates match up 12 months in advance. We have expanded our pack trips and now offer several options. We will do 3 or 4 day pack trips and the first group that picks the dates, get the option of: a scenic pack trip only, a cow camp trip, or a combination of both. We could also customize a trip to fit a specific group if that was wanted, say a business retreat, family reunion, or a high adventure trip for a pack of Boy Scouts or Girl Scouts. Anyway, just let us know your wishes. The September trip will be starting a week earlier with the trip starting on the first Saturday after Labor Day. The weather the last several years has made the trip overwhelming for me, so that is the reason for the change. The other factor is that I need to get the cattle home and give them more time to rest and eat before we deliver. Last years snow storm, regardless how beneficial it will be for next year, cost me in the

neighborhood of \$15,000.00 in lost weight. With the short time until delivery, the cattle didn't have any chance to put the weight back on. This loss in revenue won't sit well with the bank. You can't spend a week of not eating and walking 40 miles and have it not impact your bottom line.

With the cost of everything going up, I'm sorry to say but there will be a 6% price increase going into effect in January 2007. In order to take advantage of the current prices you will have to book prior to that. That means receiving the down by January 1st. Well, I'm going to sign off and I hope the up coming year goes well for you. I look forward to seeing as many of you as we can again. I can't thank you enough for what you have done for the Double Rafter. I will be in Harrisburg the end February at the World Horse Expo, so if you are in the neighborhood, stop by and say Hi! We will be setting up a booth there and this year the show is 4 days long instead of 3. I believe the show starts the 25th of February.

Dana