



# A CONSERVATION NOTEBOOK

by Homer Stevens

In the Spring notes promoting Jim Stanley's books, reference was made to a young retired couple who had just purchased a 40-acre tract of land, built a large home with a large St. Augustine lawn, and stocked the remaining pasture with 5 Longhorn cows, a bull, goats, a pet llama, a buffalo, a flock of chickens with a few guineas, two dogs, 8 cats and a pony for each of the five grand kids. It was forgotten to mention the two automatic deer feeders.

This particular property came from the corner of a large ranch that had been in the same family for many years, but the original owners had passed away. During the litigation, the livestock had been sold. The tract had been fallow with no livestock for several years. Therefore, grasswise the land was in excellent condition, little Bluestem was almost waist high, and there were even a few plants of Big Bluestem and Eastern Gama.

Please remember that the recommended average stocking rate for Hill Country property is one animal unit for each 20-acre tract. This would mean roughly 2 cows or 2 horses (only because horses can't be divided by 3 and they have to have supplemental feed anyway) or 10 goats. This does not account for the fact that humans, dogs, cats, chickens, guineas, exotic pets, attracting extra wildlife

and house and yard space have to be accounted for in some way. Anything that bites, walks on, or lies down on grass has an adverse effect on ground cover. Now! What will happen?

The first most likely environmental effect will be that the beautiful stand of native grasses will be eaten and stomped down to dust. The new owners will blame the problem on droughty conditions, which occur more often than not, and no adjustments will be made in the hope that rains will come. Which they will, and plants will attempt to grow, but the plant survivors will be those that are thorny, produce poisonous sap or quite likely both. It shouldn't be surprising that under these conditions veterinary bills are likely to escalate.

Situations like this are not even neighborly because much of the exposed top soil will erode down onto the adjoining properties carrying with it the large quantities of obnoxious weed seed that have developed in nature's attempt to cover the ground.

The object here is only to point out realities and emphasize that knowledge coupled with thought processes are necessary to properly care for the land. Having individual stalls

and barns for animals, a large exercise area (perhaps an area), purchasing large quantities of supplemental feed of all kinds, and providing lots of labor in exercising and caring for animals can compensate for lack of area to a large degree.

In many cases, it is much better to plan ahead because cutting down on numbers of large animals is much more difficult than buying them in the beginning, especially if attachments are formed for certain individuals. Planning based on knowledge gained from observing others' prior experiences can save lots of consternation.

Granted the original example in this article is somewhat exaggerated, but hopefully it will help illustrate some of the causes and effects of over grazing, coping with drought conditions, and the overall importance of wise considerate land use. Care of the land is ingrained in my personal psyche, and it is not possible to overlook all considerations so far as grass cover and water conservation is concerned.



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