

CONSERVATION Showcase

If You Build It, They Will Come

The installation of wildlife watering facilities have enabled Kirk and JoAnn Cobb of the Estancia area to transform 1,100 acres of abused, overgrazed, and poached land into a safe-haven for wildlife.

About seven years ago, the Cobbs began buying plots of land and piecing back together what is now known as Cobb Ranch. They began cleaning up the land; nurturing what had been overgrazed by buffalo, clearing hazardous underbrush, and restricting poachers from the area by keeping the single road inlet gated and locked.

To re-create a wildlife friendly habitat, the Cobbs decided they needed to establish water sources for the animals. They began filling old water troughs with a hose. Lots of water was lost to evaporation, and the troughs had to be refilled every two weeks which proved to be a very laborious process.

With cost share help from the NRCS through the Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program (WHIP), the Cobbs have installed ground-level wildlife watering facilities, or wildlife drinkers. Not only are these more natural for animals to drink from, but they are also much more efficient. Water tanks are situated uphill, and supply the drinkers through the use of gravity. A float valve in each drinker keeps them constantly and consistently full. Rather than filling troughs twice a month, Cobb only has to fill each holding tank once a year.

The Cobbs installed five drinkers last summer, in different areas of the ranch that had no water. Two more are to be installed within the next two years.

“Elk finally showed back up two years ago, same thing with bears, and deer numbers are up,” said Kirk Cobb. “If you minimize the area of land they have to cover to find water, you’ll have a larger, more diversified population.”

By installing a variety of water sources, there is less threat from predators. Predators cannot stalk one water



Wildlife drinking tank ready to be replaced with ground level drinkers

hole and count on finding prey. This disperses the animal population throughout the ranch, and further encourages a variety of animals to occupy the land.

In addition to installing the five drinkers, the Cobbs did a natural spring rehabilitation project. Initially just a small trickle of water, JoAnn Cobb built a rock barrier and dammed up the natural spring into a substantial small pond that is now a reliable water source for wildlife. They also thinned the trees around the spring so that the vegetation does not quickly use up all the water.

“There’s no downside to any part of these water projects—especially when you see the fruits of your labor in increased wildlife,” said Kirk Cobb.

Through all their hard work, the Cobbs have successfully renovated their ranch from a place where wildlife was practically nonexistent, into a sanctuary where wildlife can flourish.

For more information about WHIP and how it can apply to your land, contact your local NRCS field office or go to www.nm.nrcs.usda.gov.