



2010 TSSRM President Bill Pinchak with Gary Price & family

Texas Section Society for Range Management **Outstanding Rangeland Management Award** **77 Ranch**

The 77 Ranch is located in northwestern Navarro County in the Blackland Prairie ecological region of Texas. Approximately, 2,160 acres make up the ranch which includes numerous small ponds and wetlands provide excellent habitat for various wildlife species. Owners, Gary and Sue Price have been ranching in the area since 1976 when they acquired their first ranch near the town of Blooming Grove, TX. Gary's educational background includes a degree in Animal Science from Texas A&M University. Prior to ranching full time Gary managed a ranch in Lamar County and spent fifteen years working for Jen-Sal Animal Health Company, which included a six year stint with the feedlot industry in the panhandle of Texas.

Since acquiring the initial portion of the ranch 34 years ago Gary's has implemented a comprehensive rangeland management program to optimize rangeland conditions. The ranch is primarily a cow-calf operation that utilizes conservative stocking rates and a 2 herd rotational grazing system using 30 unique pastures. Flexible stocking rates are set by balancing forage supply with animal demand. The majority of the eastern rotation has been in a rotational grazing system for over 50 years. Gary has several areas that are considered to be functional tall grass prairie ecosystems that support a cattle operation. Essentially, grazing management

has been conservative to optimize livestock performance while maintaining range condition and health. The 77 Ranch operates primarily as a cow-calf operation but derives income from a variety of other avenues. Selection of cattle genetics have been chosen to optimize calf value at market. Initial breeds selected were F-1 type Hereford Brahman cross bred cows bred to Charolais bulls. Recently, the herd has been transitioning to a Super Baldie cow to reduce cow size and produce a $\frac{3}{4}$ Angus calf to target the certified Angus All Natural Markets. Marketing and value-added strategies have included preconditioning calves with age and source verification and selling direct to an all natural buyer. Alternative economic enterprises developed on the ranch include: Wetland and water development, wildlife management and restoration (stocking bass, quail habitat restoration, turkey release cooperatively with TPWD), hunting and fishing leases, harvesting nuts from 150 native pecans, marketing unwanted 2-6" cedar elm trees to DFW and Austin metroplexes and marketing of high quality hay to horse owners.

From a trend standpoint, areas that were initially in a tall grass prairie climax community continue to maintain the same level of species diversity and sustainability. Rangeland restoration and reseeding has also been a practice implemented on the ranch. Portions of the ranch were historically used for cotton production and were reseeded to a mix of native grasses including big and little bluestem, sideoats grama, switchgrass and eastern gamagrass. A noteworthy example of restoration efforts is a demonstration project on Hwy 55 that reseeded native plant species of the tall grass prairie that includes a sign describing the project to the public. Brush clearing and control efforts have been an important part of the rangeland restoration on the ranch as well.

Wildlife management has focused on bobwhite quail and efforts have centered on habitat management. Involvement in the Western Navarro Bobwhite Restoration Initiative (WNBRI) has provided the opportunity to implement landscape scale population monitoring with annual spring call counts and a quail nest depredation project in 2009.

Water quality has been optimized by the conversion of cropland to wetland. These areas were established in wetland plant species for the primary use of waterfowl. This has minimized sediment loading, erosion and other water quality issues. Subsequently it has provided an alternate source of revenue for the ranch. This specifically includes the recent conversion of a 40 crop field to a wetland through a cooperative project with Ducks Unlimited.

Gary has both the formal education and practical experience as it relates to grazing management. Gary is a leader of conservative grazing management. Gary has developed a keen awareness of wildlife management (both population management and habitat management). He is often called upon to provide a 'producer's perspective' on ranch and resource management at educational programs. Examples of his knowledge are reflected in his leadership roles with the following groups: Navarro County Extension Livestock Committee (1990 to present; chairman 1992-1994), Trinity Basin Conservation Foundation Board of Directors, Western Navarro Bobwhite Restoration Initiative, Texas Coalition – Grazing Land Conservation Initiative (GLCI) Board of Directors, Blackland Prairie GLCI Chairman, and many others.

As one Extension Range Specialist put it, "Gary's ranch is the exemplary model of rangeland management and restoration in the Blackland Prairie and is why his place has so often been the location used for tours and field days". Gary has been a leader among his fellow landowners and ranchers for many years. Starting in 1990 Gary began serving on the Texas AgriLife Extension Service Livestock Committee and assisting with educational programs and outreach efforts on a county basis. From 1992 to 1994 he served as the Chairman of this committee and continues to serve on it today. Through this avenue he recently provided leadership and support to county-level programs. In 2008 he hosted a Grazing Management Workshop on the 77 Ranch with 87 people attending. Attendees were able to observe the impacts of his rangeland resource management strategies and enhance their knowledge of native plants in the Blackland Prairie ecological region. In 2009 he provided cattle for a Grazing and Stockmanship Workshop that were used for a cattle handling demonstration.

Gary's leadership has expanded beyond traditional cattle and ranching roles. Gary has played a pivotal role in the development of the Western Navarro Bobwhite Restoration Initiative (WNBRI). WNBRI is a cooperative of landowners that are managing approximately 30,000 acres with the goal of enhancing bobwhite quail habitat and populations. Activities of this group have included field days, rangeland restoration activities and 4 annual quail call counts. Gary also serves on the Board of Directors for the Trinity Basin Conservation Foundation (TBCF). TBCF is a group that focuses on natural resource management practices and programs that positively impact the Trinity River watershed. Gary served as a cooperator in 2009 on a Quail Nest Depredation Demonstration conducted by the County Extension Agent and Texas Parks and Wildlife Technical Biologist. Another wildlife species that Gary has focused on is the Rio Grande turkey when he served as one of three release sites in Navarro County in 2009. Gary is a member of the Texas Coalition-Grazing Land Conservation Initiative (GLCI) Board of Directors and currently serves as Chairman of the Blackland Prairie GLCI regional Coalition.

Investing in tomorrow's natural resource managers is also a high priority for Gary and his wife Sue. They have hosted a joint program with Texas Wildlife Association (TWA) called L.A.N.D.S or Learning Across New Dimensions of Science on his ranch. This program has partnered two schools (one in Dallas and one in Blooming Grove) together for a hands-on natural resources training. This effort includes a field day at the ranch where youth are instructed about plant identification, wildlife management, rangeland management, watershed function and much more. Gary also devoted much of his time as the Chairman for the Navarro County Youth Exposition Commercial Heifer Division, serving as the Chairman from 1998 to 2007. As the Chairman Gary coordinated the record books, interviews, exams and exhibition for 4H and FFA youth. In 2004 he donated a heifer to the winner of the division.

This type of service and dedication to cattle production and natural resources should not and has not gone unnoticed. In 1995 Gary Price was selected as the Navarro County "Farmer of the Year". This award is given annually to the farmer and/or rancher who provides exemplary leadership, work-ethic and dedication. In 2007 Gary and Sue Price were selected as the recipients for the Leopold Conservation Award for Texas from Sand County Foundation and Texas Parks and Wildlife Department (TPWD). This award is part of the Lone Star Land

Stewards Awards Program and each year TPWD seeks to recognize land stewards from each of the 10 ecological regions in Texas.

Each new endeavor must fit our long term plan of economic and ecological sustainability. Their impact must improve the condition of the land, be sustainable and mesh with our quality of life goals. We understand the awesome responsibility of stewardship we have to the land and our community. We like to share what we believe and what we have learned from others. A land ethic is not easily taught or learned but rather it is acquired over time through years spent on the land observing successes and failures in trying to live “with” the land and all its components.”

Gary Price has proven himself to be a steward of natural resources. He has a working knowledge of ranch management and cattle production and a passion for conservation. He has also passed on his knowledge and passion to his son who currently works on a ranch in the rolling plains of west Texas. His diligence and commitment make him rise above his peers of fellow landowners and ranch managers. TSSRM is proud to announce the 2010 recipient of the Outstanding Rangeland Management Award to Gary Price and the 77 Ranch.