



Nominators Jason Hohlt and Natalie Wolff, Outstanding Rangeland Management Award Winners Suzanne & Pat Schuchart, and 2011 TSSRM President Matt Wagner

Texas Section Society for Range Management
Outstanding Rangeland Management Award Nomination
Running V Ranch managed by Suzanne and Pat Schuchart

3a. Describe improvements which have been made in range condition, range trend, livestock performance, wildlife quality, water quality, etc. as a result of rangeland management.

The Running V Ranch in southern Atascosa County is named after Suzanne Schuchart's grandmother Viola. When Viola was growing up, her parents began to acquire and piece together many small tracts of land in order to farm and ranch. The first piece was bought by Suzanne's great grandfather in 1916 from his brother-in-law. Acquiring the other acreages was quite a feat in itself due to the fact that many of these small tracts were being auctioned off in the 1920's as 10 and 20 acre tracts. The ranch now consists of 4,000 acres of owned land and another 2,000 acres of leased/operated land. Viola's mother was very active in the ranching business. She once walked at least 60 miles from the San Antonio stockyards while herding cattle all the way down to the ranch. Since the formation of Running V Ranch, a multitude of various enterprises have been practiced including squash and peach crops, herding goats, and even silk farming. With Suzanne being a 4th generation rancher, one thing that can be said is she and her family have demonstrated extraordinary stewardship of range resources over the years and have always strived to leave the land better than they found it.



Suzanne Schuchart, manager of the Running V Ranch.

When the majority of this land was acquired, it could be described as a wide open landscape; mottled prairie. Mostly native grasses were found throughout the acreage, with smaller mottes of brush and woody growth. Goats were herded on the open land by local herders for many years. Some fields were sown in Hygrea and harvested by cutting the heads off the milo and storing the seed in barrels. With the minimal brush cover, white-tailed deer were very scarce in Viola's time. Distant sightings of deer often took several minutes and much discussion to even decide what they were seeing. Needless to say, there was very little wildlife

management going on in the 1920's in this local area. Suzanne's family recognized the potential for grazing at that time and always carefully stocked the property. However, periodic drought would dry tanks and create hardship for the cattle herd. When the rains did come to break the drought, runoff was high and many of the stock tanks silted in. Carrying capacities for cattle varied due to weather and markets and could be quite low at times, but the family simply strived to make the best of what they had acquired. It was during these times and over the next 50+ years that a lack of knowledge of prescribed burning and brush management slowly allowed brush encroachment; this led to the thick brush cover that took over the majority of Atascosa County, which Suzanne fights to this day.

Four generations later, Suzanne is leading the charge to restore this ranch's rangelands. By taking an integrated approach to brush management, rotational grazing, and livestock marketing, Suzanne has greatly improved the health of the land and the productivity of the ranch for livestock, wildlife, and her children.

Range condition has improved following brush management and proper grazing. Where thickets of chaparral once stood, you will find a mosaic of brush mottes and patterns that have allowed the native grasses to express themselves once again. Once the brush work began in the mid 80's, desirable native grasses began to emerge from the persistent seed bank in the soil. Plains bristlegrass, Texas cupgrass, and trichloris are now quite common on the ranch. Arizona cottontop and sideoats grama can even be found in certain areas. These grasses are largely absent where moderate continuous grazing is used, in all but the largest, water limited pastures of the Rio Grande Plains. The first types of brush work implemented were the goats that were herded back in the 20's. Unknowingly, the herders were managing brush before the brush invasion set in. The first planned brush management method was mechanical rollerchopping, and then eventually, prescribed fire began to follow. It was in 1986 when Bill Strickland, Suzanne's grandfather, was awarded Resident Conservation Rancher from the Atascosa SWCD for his conservation & brush management efforts. The first aerial spraying, to create mottes and edges both wildlife and livestock could benefit from, was in 1990.

Like many ranches, Suzanne deals with invasive, exotic grasses and sub-shrubs that seem to invade regardless of management style. Suzanne does her best to manage the ranch so these plants can be manipulated and

utilized to her benefit. She chooses to work with Mother Nature as much as possible and let the cards fall where they may. Suzanne also keeps an open mind to different approaches to managing the invasives she encounters. By burning at different times of the year and participating in trials of new chemicals or chemical controls, she keeps a variety of methods under her belt. Her management style can also be validated by the clear water that now runs into stock tanks on the ranch. Overall ground cover on the ranch has increased tremendously. Range health is high and runoff is low. Pastures respond quickly to rainfall and carrying capacity has increased greatly. Suzanne said the stocking rates initially started at about 1AU/30+ ac. Nowadays, she can run 1AU/25ac in times of hard drought. She knows that rate can increase with good rains but understands fluctuations and will still stock conservatively.

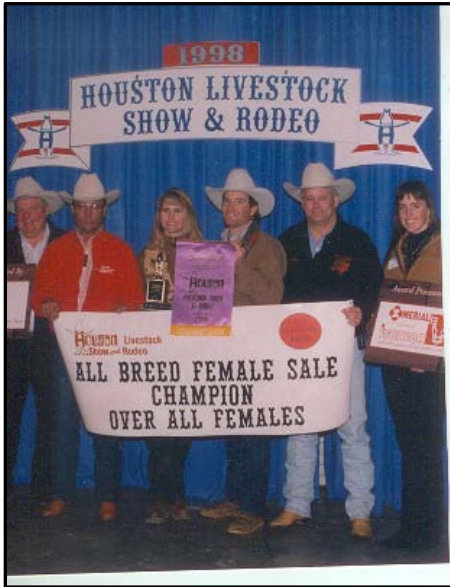


Alkali sacaton grows thick in drainage areas and throughout several blackland pasture sites.

rangeland management practices which are used to help meet ranch goals.

3b. Describe in detail

Suzanne's family has always strived to properly stock and not overgraze. Suzanne carefully monitors growing conditions and stubble heights on the ranch. She spends lots of time on the ranch thinking about where her cow herds should go next. A decision deferred grazing system is used. There are two herds of breeding cows on the ranch which are rotated throughout 26 pastures of operated land; with carrying capacities ranging from 8ac/AUY to 80 (where she flash grazes and manages more game). One of the herds is composed of F1



Suzanne and Pat's success on the show circuit has helped them develop a private customer base for their livestock.

Brahman x Hereford cross cows. The second breeding herd is composed of Hereford cows. Suzanne mentioned that several years back, the family wanted to have F1 tiger-striped cows. When she looked into buying some and found out what they were bringing on the replacement cow market, she decided she needed to be in that business. In 1992, the ranch took action, and purchased their first Hereford cows and J.D. Hudgins Brahman bulls to develop their herds. Along with building their herds, Suzanne also went on to show some of their cattle at major stock shows. Since winning the All Breed Overall Female Sale at both Houston (1998) and San Antonio (2000), the Running V has become well known for its F1 replacement cattle. Many buyers call the ranch regularly, from as far away as Tennessee, for replacement heifers and show calves.

In order to restore the ranch's rangelands, Suzanne continues with her integrated approach to brush management. Where some parts of the ranch were initially rollerchopped and others aerially sprayed, she continues these efforts around the ranch to keep brush encroachment to a minimum. Following these treatments, the ranch is careful to manage its grazing, to build up sufficient fuel loads, with the hopes of maintaining the practices with prescribed burning. The ranch has been quite diligent in this aspect and has successfully conducted prescribed burns on the majority of its acreage to date.



Brush cover has been manipulated with fire to maintain a balance between wildlife and livestock.



Electric fences work best for Running V Ranch enterprises.

Originally, there were very few interior fences on the ranch to speak of. In order to make the rotational grazing system work, permanent electric fence has been installed for cross fences. Suzanne finds the electric fences to be much easier to fix when busted and likes the way her cattle respect it; her attitude about waspy cattle that can't stay with the herd is SELL. Hand in glove, many miles of livestock water pipelines were laid and water troughs were installed to facilitate rotational grazing on the ranch. The first year the lines and wildlife/livestock troughs were installed was 1989. Suzanne continues to lay line and work with NRCS to develop alternatives and line

destinations that will facilitate her grazing efficiently. The combination of periodic fire, periodic grazing, and rest have allowed Suzanne's family to create a tremendous patchwork of habitat types. In addition, maximum flexibility is built into the operation in order to plan for drought and prescribed burning. This flexibility also gives the ranch the opportunity to strategically graze areas where exotic grasses occur. By using the tool of stock density in this grazing system, the cattle can be forced to utilize both native and exotic grasses in the same pasture. This is especially important due to the kleburg bluestem invasion in south Texas; with it likely to follow any type of brush management, focused grazing management can help reduce the canopy percentage of the plant, allowing native grasses enough room to push through. Periodic discing and burning are also used to manipulate exotic grasses and initiate forb growth to create different successional stages for improved wildlife habitat. The result of this system, to date, is a diverse herbaceous plant community with excellent ground cover.



With more than 90% of the ranch being low-fenced, proper harvesting methods have produced high quality white-tailed bucks like above.

White-tailed deer and northern bobwhite quail are plentiful on the ranch. More than 90% of the ranch is low fenced and it is highly regarded by its hunters for trophy white-tailed deer. Harvesting only fully mature bucks and population management on doe: buck ratios, culling/doe harvesting has allowed the Running V Ranch to produce some tremendous free-ranch specimens exceeding the 180 inch Boone and Crocket mark. The ranch is also sought out by quail hunters for its healthy populations of birds. These birds are here, in no small part, due to the balance of habitat types maintained on the ranch. Suzanne is especially astute to graze in a manner that ensures plenty of nesting cover for the bobwhite. Along with their ranching efforts, Suzanne

and her husband Pat have tried to keep a good balance between ranching and wildlife management. It is because of their efforts on the Running V that the Atascosa County SWCD awarded them with the Wildlife Conservationist Award in 1998.

3c. Describe specifically how the nominee plans for and deals with drought.

Suzanne's drought plan starts with conservative stocking rates that have been developed slowly over time. These stocking rates are coupled with regular monitoring of the range conditions, grass stubble height, and plant vigor. Periodically, the ranch will have to reduce the cattle numbers to deal with drought. Being in the replacement cattle business, Suzanne usually has yearlings or two year olds on hand as part of the herd. When needed, 2 year old growing heifers will be sold early. If further reduction is necessary, yearlings will be the next to go. When this is not enough, calves will be sold at weaning. This practice will be followed by early weaning if needed. In the most severe droughts, older breeding cows will be sold as well. Suzanne has done such a good job of drought management that she has always been able to maintain good ground cover and has not had to sell any of the young or middle aged breeding cows she has worked to build over the years. Even in high precipitation years, like early 2010, Suzanne manages for droughts. She doesn't immediately enlarge her cattle numbers to compensate for the growth. She's just able to keep more of her herd when they're not selling, rotates more, and takes advantage of the fuel growth for prescribed burning. This is a testament to skill, patience, and the discipline required to always keep cattle numbers conservative.

Currently, these efforts can even be seen as Atascosa County is enduring a severe drought. As of mid-June 2011, the county has only received, on average, 3.5". While it can take some ranchers many months into the year before deciding to sell, Suzanne made that decision early and took charge. Recently she said she's had to sell her calves earlier, at much lighter weights than the normal 700lbs she likes them at. More importantly, she still has grass reserves and has left adequate nesting cover and forage heights after a grazing rotation.



The right side of the fence shows the tremendous productivity of the Running V Ranch following drought. This is compared to conventional stocking and grazing management on the left side of the fence by a bordering property. This photo was taken 2 to 3 weeks after one of the most severe 12 month droughts on record that was broken by a few inches of fall rain.

3d. Describe nominees skills in and knowledge of grazing management, plants, livestock, wildlife, etc.



Suzanne points out the diversity of the herbaceous plants in this area. A balance of native grass, weeds, and low-stature, mixed brush has been created by applying the tools of range management.

Suzanne and her family are committed to life-long learning and regularly attend ranch management workshops geared to wildlife and grazing. She has been a careful observer of other leaders in ranching throughout the region and carefully considers what techniques may work best for the Running V Ranch. She continually seeks out knowledge from professional agencies and similar ranchers, and regularly invites industry experts out to the ranch for advice. Furthermore, she implements recommendations slowly and properly evaluates the response before applying things broad scale. When it comes to new or

different chemicals for brush/weed control, she uses test plots for evaluation. When providing livestock and wildlife feed supplements, she also uses a variety of methods to compensate for the variety of infractions that can be incurred (feral hogs, poaching, weather,

etc...) and will even analyze fecal matter when trying to determine nutrient needs. Suzanne has been quite successful in the practices she has chosen to implement. Integrated brush management strategies, planned rotational grazing, flash grazing, and low-stress livestock handling have all had very positive impacts on the ranch.

Suzanne's ranching skills can also be solidified by the current condition the ranch is in. With the lack of rainfall (only about 5" since September 2010), Suzanne is regularly visiting the sale barns to keep her range condition in check and her livestock as healthy as possible. Suzanne knows her livestock and how to manipulate them through her grazing system. She often takes ideas from others and molds them to make them work for her.

Above all, Suzanne will tell you that there has been a lot of trial and error on the ranch and she does not claim to be an expert. She wisely states that it has been very important for the Running V Ranch to learn from others' experiences; not just their mistakes. Both mistakes and successes are extremely important to Suzanne as her and her family develop their goals and plans for the future of the ranch.

3e. Describe the livestock, wildlife or other enterprises which are used to harvest and market the rangeland resources.

The Running V Ranch strives to achieve a balance between livestock and wildlife production. All decisions are made so that habitat quality and agricultural production are carefully balanced.

On the livestock side, the ranch has two herds of breeding stock that are used to generate replacement cattle for sale as well as traditional market cattle. A herd of Hereford cows that are bred to Brahman bulls are used to produce F1 crosses that are highly sought after for replacements.

As mentioned earlier, careful selection over time has allowed Suzanne's family to produce animals that have been very successful at some of the state's top show events. Suzanne says she believes they're so popular because not only do they look good but they're gentle and can fare south Texas weather while keeping their form (when properly stocked). It's interesting talking to Suzanne about her cattle because she's very proud of them. In addition to the Hereford herd, a herd of the F1 cows is also grazed on the ranch. This second herd adds diversity to the ranch in terms of livestock production. These F1 cows are extremely long lived and productive in the South Texas heat compared to the Herefords. The F1 herd is crossed with Angus bulls to produce replacements for other customers. Many of the F1 bull calves and F1 cross calves go to traditional commodity markets. All the livestock developed and selected are based on their performance in the pasture, on grass. Forage quality is only supplemented in times of need and hay is only fed when there is a need to confine livestock in traps. The decision to provide supplement is based on the condition of the forage and consistency of the manure.



The Running V brand has become well known for a source of quality F1 tiger striped calves like these.

Wildlife management is also a big part of Suzanne's day to day life. She carefully examines the value of quail habitat on the ranch and monitors quail abundance and productivity. She has been successful in creating good quail habitat by diversifying pasture habitats and successional growth stages; which makes the habitat highly sought by quail hunters. A portion of the ranch is season leased to hunters who primarily hunt quail. Another large portion of the ranch is leased season-long for deer hunting. By applying a conservative harvest strategy, the ranch has been quite successful at growing trophy, white-tailed deer in a low fence operation. Season leases are preferred by the ranch for economics and to promote family hunting opportunities for the leasees.

3f. Describe other activities or awards related to rangeland including how the nominee promotes sound rangeland management.

Suzanne's family has long been recognized as good land stewards. Her grandfather, Bill Strickland, was recognized by the Atascosa Soil and Water Conservation District in 1986 as the Resident Conservation Rancher of the year. Suzanne and her husband Pat were recognized again in 1998 with the Wildlife Conservation Award and again in 2011 with the Conservation Rancher Award. The Atascosa SWCD felt the Running V was a



Suzanne receives the 2011 Conservation Rancher Award from the Atascosa SWCD.

true example of fine grazing and watershed management. Water quality is an important resource concern for the county, as there are several large watersheds throughout. Suzanne's grazing habits compliment those concerns; having little to no runoff is a clear result on grazing management success.

Today, Suzanne is also looked to as a leader in range management within the local community for her successful efforts on the Running V Ranch. Suzanne is an active member and Treasurer of both the Atascosa County Wildlife and Fisheries Association and the Brush Country Prescribed Burn Association; as well as a member of the South Texas Grazing Lands Conservation Initiative Advisory Board. It is not uncommon to see Suzanne at local workshops, landowner seminars or field tours—as she works hard to stay involved and lend a helping hand. Besides community leadership, Suzanne promotes sound range and wildlife management through example and strives to stay updated on new management techniques and information to better her ranch and the ranch goals.

3g. Have rancher write a brief narrative describing the goals and objectives for the ranch or farm and any unique or interesting rangeland management philosophies.

Hello and thank you for this nomination. While I can't possibly explain the ins & outs of my day to day ranching efforts, I can say my goal is simple; manage the ranch to make it more profitable and enjoyable while cutting expenses. This is ultimately done by carefully observing livestock and wildlife/hunting markets and taking out unnecessary factors in the overall process. Being a 4th generation rancher, keeping the ranch in my family, and continuing to make as many improvements as possible really drives the Running V.

I am always trying to learn from everyone else too. With all the uncertainties in this job, it can be pretty tough on you; the best tool is education. I attend classes, seminars and field days to expose myself to new ways of thinking, which helps me take ideas and implement them on Running V. One of the most important concepts I've learned is you have to be as flexible as the weather and the markets because stocking numbers and rangeland capacities change with them. Even though it seems to be cliché, the most important piece of advice I would give is don't overgraze. When times get hard and production is slim, if stewardship comes before all else, you'll more likely be able to move past that period at a quicker pace.