



2020-2021 Operations Managers Report

It has been an average year for Pine Lakes Ranch operations. We will have had about the same number of cows for about the same number of days. The roads have maintained well, other than the Railroad Right of Way during spring break up. That challenge started with year around use and will continue until we do major work on the road base or close it during break up. In addition, the culverts under the RR are rusting out after 90 plus years and will require repair or replacement.

The one thing that is not typical is the amount of construction and heavy equipment traffic on our roads. It is difficult to balance, particularly in spring and fall, between allowing construction to continue and closing our roads to save the added expense to repair them.

Erin, a soil specialist from the Natural Resources Conservation Services, Vicki Laidlaw, Board member, and I toured the ranch as a follow up to the evaluation conducted 5 years ago. The 3-hour tour was quite thorough. Erin was well versed on the 2016 report and the recommendations made at that time. She noted that the south easement pasture, #4, that rested last year, showed that rotating the cattle frequently and resting pastures is effective in improving the grass. She pointed out that our irrigation could be improved with better ditches and more frequent water movement. She also felt that the number of cattle that we are currently pasturing is the maximum number of cattle that our pastures can maintain without damaging them. Overall, she felt we were right on par.

The question that always comes up is “Why do we not have more profit from the cattle as we did in the past?” One of the main reasons is that even though our gross is close to the same our net is less because of the expense of replacing fences, which are 30–40-years-old, and cleaning and improving ditches. How we account for the expenses is another factor that the board is working on.

This fall there is a major effort in repairing and replacing the easement pasture fences along the shoreline. The bank has eroded, and the fence is hanging over the beach. Next spring the emphasis will be the south boundary fence. We did have escapees in that area late this summer.

The 2022 grazing agreement will be a one-year agreement instead of the one year with second year first right of refusal agreements we have had in the past. Our intent is to update the 2023 agreement and invite bids for a multiyear agreement.

PLR irrigation had changes this last year. Center Irrigation has owned and operated the ditches for years. Prior to Albert Gestrin’s death this summer Center Irrigation water distribution system and its land holdings were sold to Gold Fork Irrigation Company. This has caused challenges with grazing pastures that will continue to be worked on.

Weed control kickoff day in June had a sparse turn out. Weather was still wet and cool. Few weeds had yet popped up. The effort continued through the summer by PLR workers and homeowners. We dispensed 350 gallons of herbicide. Thanks to Steve at the Valley County Weed Department for training, equipment, and herbicide.

Fuel reduction efforts were stimulated early this spring when we found that Valley County still had funds that were allocated to PLR in a grant six or seven years ago. We presented a plan to use the funds to clear encroaching trees from the roads for better emergency services access, reduce sage and other any highly flammable materials on the ranch. Through this summer and fall many of the roads have been cleared and a substantial amount of sage has been removed and those areas seeded with grass.

Charlie Chambers