

January 16, 2013

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

FROM: Society for Range Management, New Mexico Section
Contact: Jim Thorpe
575-868-4686; jimthorpe53@gmail.com

New Mexico Society for Range Management Announces Range Stewardship Awards

The New Mexico Section of the Society for Range Management (nmrangelands.org) presented outstanding range management and stewardship awards to two New Mexico ranches during the Society's annual meeting January 10-11, 2013 at the Farm and Ranch Heritage Museum in Las Cruces.

“Excellence in Range Management”

Any Individual or Group actively engaged in, implementing, advocating, practicing, or stimulating any activity that results in the improvement, awareness, advancement, or education of Range Management. This honor is to be used to complement, recognize, and applaud any individual or group deserving recognition for efforts in Range Management.

Trigg Family, Trigg Cattle Company, Tucumcari NM

The Trigg Ranch comprises 52,000 acres of rugged rangeland in the mesa country of northeastern New Mexico approximately 30 miles northwest of Tucumcari in the Western Great Plains and Central Great Plains Land resource Regions. Established in 1918 by Steve Trigg Sr, the ranch supports a family-owned-and-operated cow-calf operation and is now in the hands of the third, fourth, and fifth generations of Triggs. The ranch is set up as a trust and overseen by the entire Trigg clan, comprising seven different families—all grandchildren of Steve and Bess Trigg. Their collective vision has been to create an entity that was managed by the family and for the family, with an emphasis on continuity and both long term ecological and economic sustainability.

Kristen (née Trigg), Rick, and Caitlin Holmes manage the day-to-day operations of the ranch; however, the overall goals of the ranch are broadly discussed by the whole family and all major decisions are reached by consensus in a way that reflects the strategy of, according to Kristen, an environmentally, financially, and socially sustainable ranching operation. In 2002, following the death of Steve Trigg Jr, the Trigg family decided to initiate a transition to holistic management (HM), a decision-making framework that

integrates systems thinking and adaptive management, to facilitate the process of restoring badly degraded rangelands. Prior to that, Steve Trigg had been resistant to changing his approach to grazing management. Grasslands had deteriorated under continuous and heavy cattle grazing, which had been in place since 1918. As such, the ranch was characterized by severe soil erosion and patches of bare ground.

“You could see something wasn’t working, or you could see a better way of doing something. And he just didn’t want . . . anybody’s ideas,” said daughter Kristen Holmes. Having perceived this degradation, she and her sister, Sally Trigg were drawn to an alternative way of managing based on what they had observed on other ranches practicing HM. “Seeing the grass that was grown,” recalled Kristen, “and how much better the land was.” In particular she was impressed by the improvement in the bare ground: plant ratio; the appearance and increase of cool-season grasses resulting in a more diverse plant community; the increased number of water sources and improvement in water quality in riparian areas; better utilization of all grasses (evidenced by more evenly grazed pastures and paddocks); and gentle, easily handled cattle. These were all major incentives for the adoption of a new approach to management.

In 2002–2003 Kristen and Rick attended a 6 week intensive HM course through the Savory Center for Holistic Management (now Holistic Management International) but found the prospect of implementing a new management system on a ranch with an essentially wild herd of cattle daunting, both financially and technically. Instituting rotational stocking—to change the distribution of grazing—required new fencing and water systems, for which they received some financial assistance through the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP). One of the major challenges they faced was modifying the behavior of the cattle, which, in the Holmes’ experience, are often resistant to changing their location and grazing patterns if they have been under extensive grazing management for many years. According to both Kristen and her daughter Caitlin, a cow that has grazed in one place for many years will continually want to return there, even “to where there’s absolutely not a blade of grass.”

Working with grazing consultant Jim Howell, the Holmeses began the slow process of transitioning the entire management system of the ranch. Using the 14 existing pastures (ranging from 1,000 to more than 6,000 acres), they began moving the cattle short distances in a group. These pastures were then organized into three “management areas”—North, South, and West—based on similarity of terrain and ease of movement from one pasture to another. They began the process of reducing the size of the paddocks with additional fencing until they had established the infrastructure for rotational stocking. The new, smaller paddock size (200 to 400 acres) enabled a reduction in the stocking period and, the Holmeses speculated, increased the likelihood that the cattle would “realize” that frequent rotation takes them to new, high quality forage. “It’s a big behavioral change to get [the cows] to rotate, and rotate as a group,” according to Kristen. “That was our biggest hurdle. And that’s what’s taken the longest.” The ranch now has three separate herds grazing for shorter periods in more paddocks with longer rest periods, which they say allows the grass to recover. The ranch now supports

about 700 “The ranch now supports about 700 “gentle” mother cows and “store-bought” bulls at a conservative stocking rate of 71 acres per cow unit, a rate that Kristen Holmes has been able to maintain through the current severe drought conditions. She reports that implementation of rotational stocking has resulted in observable and recorded improvements in the condition of the land as measured by new seedlings, which are reducing bare ground and contributing to growth of more grass and better distribution in the ages of perennial herbs and grasses, which will eventually add to ground litter resulting in better utilization of moisture and reduced erosion. The increased “hoof action” and litter have contributed to longer-lasting spring and surface water and more resilient grass that responds more quickly when there is rain. The Holmeses have documented these land health changes through annual comprehensive monitoring of 12 permanent sites scattered over the ranch. The annual monitoring takes Rick, Kristen, and four to 12 Trigg family members 4 to 5 days to complete.

In addition to their interest in implementing a more sustainable approach to grazing management and seeing improved conditions on the land, the Trigg family was drawn to the idea of profiting from the generation and sale of carbon credits. Because many of the range management practices they had adopted as part of their transition to HM were in alignment with the CCX Rangeland Offset Protocol, e.g., rotational stocking and the practice of planning and documenting management activities, the family was able to enroll in the offset program without having to undergo a significant transition. It is also notable in that the Trigg Ranch is one of the few (and perhaps only) to have generated income from carbon credits.

The New Mexico Section of the Society for Range Management is pleased to present its Excellence in Range Management Award to the Trigg family of Trigg Cattle Company in recognition of decades long efforts in practicing and promoting range conservation and improvement on semiarid rangelands in eastern New Mexico.

“Excellence in Range Management”

Don and Bonnie Thompson, Thompson Cattle Company, Santa Rosa NM

The Thompson family first came to Santa Rosa from Beggs Oklahoma in 1938 when W.M. Thompson (Don’s Grandfather) purchased land in Guadalupe County. Don’s father, M.G. Thompson followed after, often with Don as young boy in tow. Once married, Don his wife of 53 years, Bonnie Porter-Thompson, began acquiring neighboring parcels, eventually buying out his father’s interest in the ranch & now known as Thompson Cattle Co. It is a six-generation family operation with son, Ace (wife Estela Tenorio-Thompson, daughters, Aesa & Danni, sons' Porter & Trey) along with Don’s son-in-law, Bo Cribbs (wife Teresa Thompson-Cribbs) & grandson, Guy Don Cribbs managing the day to day happenings and work on the ranch.

Thompson Cattle Company covers 35,000 plus acres comprising thirteen recognized range ecological sites, running between 500 & 1,000 mother cows and additional yearlings depending on the grass/water conditions year round. Range conservation and improvement practices over the years have included extensive mechanical brush control (cholla and juniper) followed by re-seeding and strategic deposition of juniper trunks and slash into erosive channels. Initial trial and error experimentation eventually produced effective techniques for this innovative practice which were showcased during a 2010 field day held in cooperation with the Guadalupe County Livestock Producers and the New Mexico State Range Improvement Task Force. Improved grazing distribution has been facilitated by extensive improvements to watering infrastructure and developments of dirt tanks, diversion and retainer dams to capture, store, and release run-off for beneficial purposes such as stock water and forage production.

Beyond the ranch Don has been prominent participant in community affairs, including being a leading advocate for Wind Energy in Guadalupe County, tirelessly educating himself on all aspects of it and meeting with people all over the state in order to improve the competitiveness of Guadalupe County for wind farms and wind energy infrastructure (sub-stations and transmission lines).

Of special note, Don and several neighbors worked with the NRCS to form the *Pintada Watershed Conservation Coalition* to further facilitate landscape-scale conservation projects on the 600,000+ square mile Pintada Watershed, a major contributor to undesirable sediment flows reaching the farming regions along the Pecos River below Santa Rosa. In addition, Don assisted with the formation on the *Cuervo Creek Watershed Coalition* in the northeastern part of the county.

Through health crises, droughts, blizzards & fluctuating cattle prices, Don has never allowed hardships to be a reason to ever complain or give up. He has been knocked back pretty hard more than once, but always looks at not so good situations as little bumps in the road that we'll overcome. His amazing attitude & love for his family, his friends, his community and the family ranch is unfaltering. He is truly committed to educating and helping others (most especially the young) in Agriculture and Land Conservation so they, too, can become stewards of the land.

The New Mexico Section of the Society for Range Management is pleased to present its Excellence in Range Management Award to Don Thompson and the Thompson Cattle Company in recognition of decades long efforts in practicing and promoting range conservation and improvement on semiarid rangelands in eastern New Mexico.

The Society for Range Management is dedicated to the conservation and sustainable management of rangelands for the benefit of current societies and for future generations. Rangelands comprise almost one-half of all the lands in the world, and are extremely important to society for the goods and services they produce and for the ecological services they provide. For more information visit the society at rangelands.org, and for the New Mexico Section, nmrangelands.org.