

## Wranglers Work Bucksprings Fencing

By Helen Campbell

Since 1994 Friends of the Forest has been working in partnership with the Forest Service in tasks the Forest Service does not have the money or the manpower to accomplish on its own. We assist in the protection of Palatki and V Bar V by providing docents at both archaeological sites. We patrol, construct and maintain trails for public use, staff the visitor's center and the front desk of the administrative office. We provide support to the district's River Ranger and Forest Protection Officers and provide regular trash-pickup at Fossil Creek. All of these duties are performed either on two feet or four tires. Unless, that is, you belong to the Wrangler committee. Some of us ride our own horses and others ride Forest Service stock.

One of the rewards that comes as a result of working beside Forest Service rangers is that we learn about the land surrounding our community. We begin to understand the larger picture of land management and wildlife habitat. Such has been the case for the Wranglers who work with Janie Agyagos, USFS Wildlife Biologist, on pronghorn habitat and Robert Garcia, Range Conservationist for the Red Rock District. In late May the Wranglers learned that our next project would be on the Bucksprings cattle allotment, trading the hot summer dust of Sedona for the cool air in the high Mogollon Rim country.

Early in Forest Service history it was recognized that grazing was a legitimate use of the land as long as it complied with the principles of multiple use. Permits, herd size, allotments and seasons of use were attempts to protect the resource. An allotment is a piece of land where a private citizen is permitted to graze their cattle. The Red Rock Ranger District has twelve cattle grazing allotments, the average size being 70,000 acres, on which they inventory, classify and monitor rangeland vegetation for wildlife as well as cattle.

Range Managers are tasked not *only* with the health of forage and browse resources but with the protection of wildlife, fish, and rare plants on rangeland. Occasionally allotments are, for a variety of reasons, waived back to the Forest Service. Such was the case with the Bucksprings allotment. The land could no longer support cattle grazing.

The now vacant allotment has active allotments on two sides. The land has an abundance of spongy wet meadows, providing a unique and important elk habitat as well as supporting a significant elk migration route. This land is also critical habitat for an endangered species of fish-the Little Colorado Spinedace. The allotment takes in several ridges extending north to south that lay parallel to each other. Between each of these ridges are "stringers" of perennial riparian habitat that various mammalian, avian, and aquatic species depend on.

The Forest Service signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the Arizona Elk Society (AES) to repair ten miles of fence annually and maintain ten tanks. These entities have special concerns and interests in the land and will work toward the goal of conserving unique habitat. Fences will be maintained to keep cattle out of the area thus protecting prime habitation and preserving a migratory route for the elk and other wildlife. Information will be shared with Arizona Game and Fish, and US Fish and Wildlife indicating where there are tanks that are supporting wildlife as well as endangered fish and amphibians. There are over 190 earthen tanks to be surveyed and recorded.

Wranglers Craig Stevens, Steve and Ginny Rench, Marlee Vanderbeck, Jeff Upshaw, Milt Moore, Mike Ward and I rode many miles of fenceline to provide the decisively significant information on the condition of the fenceline to Garcia for this year's work with the Elk Society. He was given a GPS reading, photo of the fence damage, and a narrative of what equipment will be needed to do the repairs. We also located and GPS-ed earthen water tanks on the allotment, giving their correct location, with a narrative and photographic report of the condition. All the information is entered into a Forest Service computer program where the data will be stored and available to generations of Range Managers and Wildlife Biologists.

Armed with this information, Garcia can efficiently plan the work for each year. He'll know exactly where to begin and what he and the work crews will face when they get there. Craig Stevens, Steve Rench, Milt Moore and Jeff Upshaw also worked one long, wet weekend, providing over 180 hours of horse support to the 85 Elk Society workers.

Garcia said "This project's strategy and success were *completely* dependent on the information provided by the Wranglers."

Friends of the Forest welcomes new members. For more information, visit [www.friendsoftheforestsedona.org](http://www.friendsoftheforestsedona.org) or contact the Red Rock Ranger Station at 203-2900.

*Serving Sedona, written this week by Helen Campbell, a past-president of the Friends of the Forest and chair of the Wranglers Committee, appears Wednesday in the Sedona Red Rock News.*