

Elk Stream Ranch
Property Management Committee Report 2017-2018
Submitted by Steve Boone, PMC Chair

The year was an overall stable year, with no extraordinary events or needs.

Snow Removal:

The winter of 2017/2018 proved to be a relatively dry one, with snow falls well below normal. As per our customary practice, snow monitors were on the watch for snow levels that might require plowing. If snow came in relatively minor amounts, the snow would be driven down by occupants in the canyon. If heavier falls occurred, Cecil would normally plow those areas of heavy accumulation. However, in addition to the weak and infrequent snow storms, the winter temperatures were relatively mild, preventing the road bed from freezing. This in turn made effective plowing difficult and risky due to the damage a snow plow can cause to the unfrozen road bed. All in all, though, the system of local road monitors and a responsive and experienced snow plow operator kept the roads open and drivable.

Road Repair and Improvement:

The roads of the canyon were in very good shape going into the winter last year, and the spring maintenance was begun on schedule. There were no extraordinary projects anticipated so instructions to Cecil were to address the standard areas of concern. Those included recovering road material from the edges of the roads, blading the road surface, borrow ditch restorations, and road culvert well clean outs. Also on the agenda but not yet completed at this date is gravel work on G3 above the final switchback and blading work to address the washboarding south of our gate. Cecil expects to return to complete the unfinished projects on or about August 10.

Two significant road projects accomplished were at our entrance, the replacement of the entry bent and the installation of a new and much improved cattle guard. The installation of the bent was accomplished sometime in October/November 2017 but the logs required more aging before potential staining and final banding of the log clusters. That work will hopefully be completed before this winter. The new cattle guard was the result of yet another failure of the previous guard. The broken guard was determined to be well beyond its useful life, so rather than patch and reinstall, again, the PMC and the board decided the most prudent and cost effective course was to have it replaced. The PMC believes the new guard is a great addition to the road system.

Grazing Lease:

As noted last year, the PMC and the board have engaged the Natural Resource Conservation Service, NRCS, to provide assistance to the association's management of our grasses, as affected by moisture levels as well as grazing herd size and length of season. This assistance includes providing a pregraze assessment for determining recommended herd size and graze length, as well as mid graze assessment to determine the overall health of the grasses during the course of the grazing season. Finally, a post graze assessment will be accomplished, to be conducted early fall. Shaan Bliss, our resource assessor out of Pagosa Springs, who has been assigned to our association, has been very responsive and active in providing the assistance we need. This spring he came and did a pregraze assessment tour of the canyon with several members of the PMC. At that visit, he also assisted several members of the PMC construct exclusion boxes, 3'X3'X3'

fenced t-post boxes that prevent cattle from grazing the selected spots. Assessments can then be made throughout the graze, as well as post graze, to determine the overall condition of the grasses, grazed and ungrazed. Adjustments can be made mid graze, if needed, but the biggest benefit of these devices is in planning future grazes based on past performances. We intend to make these devices a regular part of our grazing process going forward. During the spring assessment, Shaan determined that the canyon was in fairly good shape and could support a grazing plan of a relatively small herd and a length to be determined by the June/July/August rainfalls. He did have a couple of areas of concern and these were addressed by the PMC, which developed a strategy to better manage the grazing habits of the herd to reduce stress on the few areas of concern. This was accomplished by strategic placements of water tanks and salt licks, along with regular rotation of the cattle between north and south. Wayne Robb contracted to bring in a herd of 25 pair and one bull. He was informed the canyon was in need of rain and if none came in sufficient volume and frequency soon, the graze would likely be terminated early. He understood and appreciated our position. I'd like to point out again, and stress, it is my judgement Wayne Robb is an exceedingly responsible rancher and immediately responds to any concerns the PMC expresses. He repeatedly proved that again this year. The grazing season, however, proved to be a short one. The dry winter left the canyon in need of precipitation, early and often, in order for the grazing season to be successful. We had neither, so the decision was made by the members of the PMC to terminate the graze in mid July. Mr Robb had them removed within days of our request.

Weed Mitigation:

Tyler Willbanks of Rocky Draw Ag Services began last year aggressively attacking pockets of noxious weeds throughout the canyon, as well as applying a pre-emergent on large fields of cheat grass in the fall. He began this year in the spring where he left off last year, spot treating a variety of noxious weeds in the meadows and open spaces, as well as along the roads. However, due to a potential change in association weed mitigation policies, the aggressive approach was dialed back a bit until both Tyler and the PMC could find policy clarity going forward. As of the writing of this report, the pause is still in effect. I'm confident any new change in policy will be spelled out at this year's annual meeting, and aggressive weed mitigation can then be resumed.