

The West Greeley Conservation District recognizes conservation efforts

Every year the West Greeley Conservation District recognizes individuals who are making a difference in conservation. The people recognized are people who “walk the walk” when it comes to taking care of our natural resources, whether by promoting land stewardship and education, by leading efforts to control and manage noxious and invasive weeds, or simply by managing a small herd of grazing animals to improve the vigor of native grasses and decrease bare ground in their pastures. The West Greeley Conservation District recognized individuals at their annual meeting on February 11, who have made outstanding contributions to conservation efforts in the past year.

Named as **Conservationist of the Year** is Don Hajar of Pawnee Butte’s Seeds, Inc. Pawnee Buttes Seed, Inc. is Colorado owned and operated. The company is named after a formation of two buttes located at the Pawnee National Grasslands in northeastern Colorado. Don and his wife Janine have 28 years experience in natural resources and the seed business. Pawnee Buttes Seed, Inc. provides native and introduced grass, forbs, and shrub seed for reclamation, pasture, and turf. Don has assembled a team at Pawnee Buttes Seed, Inc. that is committed to providing quality seed at reasonable prices with honest recommendations and prompt delivery. Pawnee Buttes Seed, Inc. strives to provide the highest quality seed, good service, and sound advice.



Don grew up in the Arkansas Valley of Colorado where his family has farmed for 100 years. In a small community of farmers and ranchers, much of the subsistence of the entire community is dependent on understanding and maintaining the proper relationship between plants, water, and animals. From this upbringing, Don gained a love and respect for the environment. Through his formal education, professional experience, and professional associations he gained the technical expertise necessary to understand the scientific foundation of those ecological relationships. Don and all of Pawnee Buttes Seeds, Inc. is a great friend of the West Greeley Conservation District and all Conservation Districts throughout the state of Colorado offering technical advice and input on many District reclamation efforts.

Being named as **Rancher of the Year** for the West Greeley Conservation District are Art and Gina Gutteresen of Gutteresen Ranches with Mike and Penny Gutteresen still very interested and involved. Art began using the innovative grazing management practices that are currently employed on the ranch after attending some Holistic Resource Management seminars with Alan Savory. They began dividing their large 4 section pastures into smaller 1000 acre



pastures. This involved putting up a lot of 2 wire electric fence, extensive water development and installing 30 miles of 3" water line to insure sufficient livestock water for each of the new, smaller pastures.

Art reports that they rotate cattle through these pastures based on the maxim of "take half, leave half". In addition, Art is very conscious of the need to be flexible in terms of the number of cattle on their grass at any given time. In general they do not own the cattle that they graze, and Art describes this aspect of the business as basically "day herding for other ranches". Using this approach, the Guttersen Ranch can easily and rapidly increase or decrease their cattle numbers. Art credits the presence of many local feedlots and other ranches with cattle to graze as helping make this approach work for them. Art reports that using this more intensively managed grazing system, being aware of the potential for drought and watching their grass so as to not overgraze, they have been able to double their stocking rate. At the same time they have seen a resurgence of native grasses and they feel that their pastures are more diverse and more resilient.

The Guttersens' have also worked with Harvey Sprock from the Greeley Area Natural Resource Conservation Service office to assess the condition of the ranch. A National Resource Inventory was conducted on the ranch. This involved collecting detailed rangeland information on the ranch: species composition, density, cover, forage production, and more.

In the recent years, there has been a lot of oil activity on the ranch, which has led to the creation of other businesses such as road building and reclamation. Gina does much of the reseeded and revegetation of the oil and gas sites, oil pipelines, power lines and burn areas. Gina is not only involved with the reseeded and reclamation on the ranch; she is also a Master Gardener through the Colorado State University Extension and gives back to the community by assisting Weld County residents with home garden diagnostic problems. In 2009 she designed and planted approximately 9000 linear feet of windbreaks and wildlife thickets. The windbreaks are designed to provide shelter for cows in their calving pasture, to protect ranch roads and ranch buildings. The wildlife thickets consist of a variety of shrubs that provide cover and food such as native plum, caragana, chokecherry, cotoneaster, sumac, and sand cherry. Stands of these shrubs are surrounded by rows of hardy and dense Rocky Mountain Juniper to provide shelter for birds and other wildlife from winter storms. These windbreaks and wildlife thickets not only provide shelter and cover for both wildlife and livestock on the ranch, but they also help to collect windblown snow and drop it where it will soak into the soil and provide additional moisture to increase forage production and prevent soil erosion. It is these types of activities that exemplify the "stewardship of the land" the Guttersens' strive to enhance with all their activities on the ranch.

A related endeavor is the truck washout where the water from washing out cattle trucks is reclaimed and applied to farm fields as fertilizer. This operation is not part of the ranch, but is part of the family business. To summarize the Guttersen family's approach to ranching and the family business, Art told us "Once you get innovative with the land, it opens up all kinds of opportunities for new family enterprises". A ranching family needs to be innovative to continue to support the families that rely on it. The Guttersen Ranch is meeting these challenges.

For more information on the West Greeley Conservation District conservation practice recognition programs, visit their website at www.wgcd.org or call Joyce Wallace, District Manager at (970) 356-8097 ext. 3.