

THE RANCHING COMMUNITY: INSIGHTS INTO HOW TO LIVE WITH FOUR-LEGGED AND TWO-LEGGED VISITORS ^{TWS}

Nina Baucus
Sieben Ranch Company, Wolf Creek, MT 59648

Montana is blessed with many, many ranches that have been in the same family for generations. Of these ranchers, many remember earlier in this century when there was little or no game. My own father remembers unloading elk brought from Yellowstone National Park in a reintroduction project for the Rogers Pass-Lincoln Area, which now has a large population that started with two stock trucks of animals. I also recall my great uncle telling of the first deer they knew of on their property. It was a mule deer doe that was lame and my uncle spent all winter carrying hay and grain to the areas she frequented so she'd survive the winter. In the spring she had twins and so began the careful and very personal sense of guardianship of what has become a large and healthy population even today. These illustrations demonstrate some of the beginnings and attitudes that many of today's ranchers have concerning wildlife stewardship and guardianship. Today's realities include:

- Ranchers do not always understand or appreciate the sportsmen's attitude of "right to hunt public wildlife." Sportsmen did not do the nurturing of these wildlife populations.
- The demands placed on FWP for "male" species hunting creates huge herds of females, who in turn cause crop and range damage. "Sportsmen" tend to shun hunting

females — a necessity for balancing populations.

- Ranchers feel their role in providing habitat for wildlife is not truly recognized by FWP as well as the public.
- Ranchers feel the public demands that they provide not only habitat for wildlife, but also public access to the wildlife. This "attitude" causes extreme concern among ranchers and ultimately extreme friction between ranchers and sportsmen.
- Some ranchers look at **wildlife** as a way of making money to help support their ranch.
- Loss of ranchland acres to development decreases the amount of wildlife habitat available. We must keep land in agricultural production to provide wildlife habitat.
- Conflict between ranchers, sportsmen, and FWP (which gets caught in the middle) is a given, especially concerning populations, regulations, and access.

I will review some of the initiatives pursued by ranchers to accommodate their needs as well as those of both two-legged and four-legged critters while still honoring the ranching traditions of stewardship and guardianship of our common heritage.