

## An Example of Good Land Management

A few weeks ago I wrote about how land management affects us all. Today I want to give you an example of what I was referring to.

Back in 1969, J. David Bamberger bought about 6000 acres of what he, and others, described as “the sorriest piece of land in Blanco County”, just south of Johnson City. The land had been seriously overgrazed with cedar cover over much of the area and there was no water, not even a windmill, on the property.

Bamberger set out to restore the property to what he thought was its previous, natural condition before European settlement. Back then there was not nearly as much known about how best to restore and manage Hill Country rangeland and not nearly as many knowledgeable or experienced government agents or university people to guide Bamberger in his efforts. Fortunately, he was an exceptionally gifted observer of nature and managed to figure out for himself, and by trial and error, how best to accomplish his goals.

Over the years Bamberger removed a lot of cedar, planted huge amounts of native grasses and hundreds (perhaps thousands) of native trees and laid cedar limbs and rocks across the slopes to slow down water during rainfall events and everything else he could think of that might help to restore the land. And when cattle were reintroduced, their stocking rate and management was carefully controlled to best contribute to the restoration.

As the years went by and all of the above activities began to show results, springs started flowing where none had been seen for decades. The flow was slow at first, but eventually significant amounts of spring flow resulted in a small perennial creek. This creek was eventually dammed to make a small lake, the outflow of which flows off the ranch into a creek which flows into the Pedernales River and eventually into Lake Travis.

This flow of water off the Bamberger Ranch benefits everyone downstream who now have increased stream flow 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, 365 days a year and all of that extra water eventually is available to the people of Austin, most of whom have never heard of J. David Bamberger or the Bamberger Ranch Preserve and who certainly didn't pay a cent for the extra water they have from his efforts.

Over the years David Bamberger and the Preserve have been a model and a teacher and an inspiration for all Texans, landowners, conservationists, naturalists, range scientists and biologists alike. He has certainly made the path to land stewardship and restoration clearer and easier for all of us.

I tell this story not only to acknowledge the many contributions of David Bamberger and the Bamberger Ranch Preserve, but as an example of how land management matters and how healthy native habitat has benefits for all Texans. Most of us don't have the land or the resources David has, so whatever we do will have to be done on a smaller scale. But if enough of us small landowners do our part to improve and protect our little piece of land, the overall results can still be significant.

I would be remiss if I didn't point out that not everyone who makes similar improvements to their property will necessarily have all the same results as David had, especially people with much smaller properties. All properties are different with different problems requiring different solutions. And in spite of our best efforts, some changes to the landscape take many years to show real improvement—Mother Nature doesn't always work on our human time scale.

For those readers who live in town and don't own any rural property with native habitat, I would suggest you can still make a contribution to the overall health of the land. First, be a conservationist—use water as if it were the scarce commodity it is. In fact, don't be wasteful in anything you consume and don't pollute with fertilizers and insecticides or introduce exotic plants or animals. Be supportive and involved with all nature and conservation-related organizations and educate yourselves about nature and native habitats and policies that affect them. An informed citizenry is the best defense our native lands can have.

As the population of Texas continues to increase at a high rate and more and more native habitat is lost, the more precious the remaining natural areas will be.

Hope everyone had a great Thanksgiving. Until next time...

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