

E.L. Peterson Ranch



"The Peterson Ranch strives to be recognized for its environmental stewardship principles and its ability to live in harmony with wildlife – while sharing and maintaining the natural resources to be a sustainable economic unit." - Dean and Trudi Peterson



The E.L. Peterson Ranch – managed by Dean and Trudi Peterson – is located 3 miles North of Judith Gap, Montana.

The ranch was purchased by Dean's father "Erling" in 1950. It was around 1949 when Dean's father began his search for sustainable rangeland. He took a trip around Montana and, at the time, concluded that, "...central Montana was the greenest spot in Montana." He finalized the purchase of the ranch around 1950.

The ranch started out as a sheep operation. However since it's original purchase, the Petersons have expanded the operation and added more acreage. Today, the ranch is a family operation that incorporates several enterprises: beef cow/calf enterprise, beef background enterprise, contract heifer development enterprise, pasture sheep enterprise, haying enterprise, and small grain enterprise.

The ranch desires to produce livestock in a sustainable, environmental friendly system. To accomplish this goal, the Petersons use available management techniques, which are the most economically feasible and ecologically sound for the ranch.



Because the ranch is at the headwaters of the Middle Fork of Ross Fork Creek, Dean and Trudi Peterson strive to manage the riparian areas, dikes and vegetated filter strips to maintain and enhance the quality of Ross Fork Creek. In the fall of 2002 the Petersons created a berm and buffer-



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strip between the feedlot area and Ross Fork Creek to prevent run-in to the surface water. The buffer-strip was vegetated and trees were planted to stabilize the berm. In addition, the trees have served as a shelter belt and have added aesthetic value to the property. The berm diverts runoff into an evaporated settling pond and across vegetated filter strips.

Additional improvements to surface waters have occurred in upland range areas. The Petersons have installed stable access points and alternative off-stream water sources for their cattle to reduce impacts to the riparian ecosystem. During the winter months, off-stream water tanks are provided in feeding areas and are used more than 90% of the time. This helps to minimize the discharge of fecal material into the stream during spring runoff.



The Petersons have performed Environmental Assessments of their land to identify strengths and opportunities within their ranch operation. By taking an “active” management role, they have improved water drainage from the watershed above them. By diverting the flow of water around their facilities, they have minimized any potential surface water contamination and helped control erosion. They have also installed rain gutters to divert roof run-in so calving lots stay drier reducing animal health problems and mud nuisance issues. The Petersons maintain excellent drainage around the manure handling and storage areas. Because of this, manure removal is possible in nearly all weather conditions.



“We continue to review our actions and goals annually,” Dean says. “So we can continue to maintain or improve our environmental stewardship while living in harmony with the wildlife and natural resources we share.”

