



*2013 Outstanding Rangeland Stewardship Award Recipient Bruce Berg and 2013 TSSRM President Jeff Goodwin*

**Texas Section Society for Rangeland Management**  
**Outstanding Rangeland Stewardship Award**  
**Bruce Berg (Rocosa Ridge Ranch)**

Rocosa Ridge Ranch is located in central Bosque County in the Grand Prairie ecological region of Texas. The ranch is approximately located four miles west of Meridian, TX on HWY 22. Approximately 5,973 acres make up the ranch, of which an estimated 93% is in native grass or woodlands. Approximately 690 acres of the ranch comprises hardwood and juniper draws and canyons, in which 150 acres serve as habitat for the Golden-cheeked Warbler.

Rocosa Ridge Ranch is comprised of two distinct operating units, the North and the South. In the past, the 2,960 acre North unit consisted of a quarter horse operation, and much of the unit was underutilized for grazing while other portions of the unit were used for annual crop production. The 2,547 acre South unit on the other hand was heavily utilized for livestock production.

Bruce Berg has been ranching since 1993 when he acquired his first ranch near Commerce, TX. Ranching in North East Texas taught Bruce early on the importance of

rotational grazing on introduced pasture. Prior to ranching, Bruce's educational background includes a Bachelor's degree in Animal Science as well as a Masters in Animal Physiology from the University of Missouri. Upon graduation Bruce taught animal reproduction at the University of Missouri. From there, Bruce earned his MBA in finance and went into the corporate sector working on Wall Street. In 1988, Bruce went to work for Goldman Sachs in Dallas, TX where he is currently a Management Director for the company. After a few years in Dallas, Bruce sold his ranch in Commerce, TX and purchased Cedar Ridge Ranch in Bosque County. When Bruce purchased Cedar Ridge, he was told by resource professionals "not to purchase the ranch" because they could not find a single Sideoats grama plant on the ranch. Bruce saw this as a challenge, so he began rotational grazing and reclaimed the land with brush management followed by range seeding. In 2006, Bruce sold Cedar Ridge Ranch and purchased Rocosa Ridge Ranch. Bruce purchased Rocosa Ridge because he said, "This was a neat ranch with better wildlife value because of the rangeland resources." Cedar Ridge was Bruce's testing ground to see what management practices worked well and which ones did not. After purchasing Rocosa Ridge, Bruce took his refined skills from Cedar Ridge to the new ranch.

Rocosa Ridge proved to be the opposite of Cedar Ridge in the fact that the North Unit up to this point suffered from lack of grazing on many of the rangeland sites. The South Unit however suffered from Ashe juniper encroachment. In an effort to jump start plant health, Bruce conducted prescribed burns on all but 150 acres of the ranch over a three year period. On most of the ranch this provided good control of juniper, but in the steeper sites mechanical treatment was still needed to prevent future brush encroachment. Some of these sites however provided habitat for the Golden-cheeked Warbler. These 150 acres of habitat were left untreated and Bruce entered into a 20 year mitigation easement with the U.S. Army of Ft. Hood, TX. With agreeing to preserve Warbler habitat, Bruce has received compensation to make habitat improvements on other areas of the ranch. Since then, Bruce has mechanically cleared 800 acres of juniper on moderately sloping sites that were not controlled by fire. In the near future, Bruce will begin prickly pear control on the clay flats under this agreement.

Management of the ranch has been focused on restoration of wildlife habitat and native grassland restoration thru livestock grazing. Bruce believes in rotational grazing, and to accomplish this, he divided the ranch into 17 pastures by constructing 12 miles of fence. Livestock grazing in past was confined to areas near existing water, flat hilltops and draws due to rough terrain. To correct this problem the ranch also improved grazing distribution by adding 13 miles of water lines. Now livestock utilize more of the ranch because of multiple water sources within an average pasture size of 350 acres.

Rocosa Ridge Ranch is a cow-calf operation that utilizes conservative stocking rates and a flexible one/two herd rotational grazing system. The majority of the animals are rotated as one herd for most of the year. However, after fall weaning, heifers are placed in a separate rotation in the South Unit and marketed as replacement females. Flexible stocking rates are set by balancing forage supply with animal demand, and adequate forage reserves are maintained on rangeland by utilizing introduced pasture as sacrifice areas.

The North Unit provides the majority of the grazing days for the operation. This unit consists of 9 pastures on 2,960 acres and supports 1 AU to 12 acres. The majority of these soils are on Shallow sites and are dominated by Little bluestem, Indiangrass and Sideoats grama. Bruce's goal for grazing is to maintain the integrity of these sites for wildlife habitat, and early on he saw an opportunity to protect these resources. In 2007, four old cropland fields equaling 342 acres were converted to Coastal and Tifton 85 bermudagrass to serve as early spring and summer pastures. This allowed rangeland pastures to adequately build up forage reserves for fall and winter stockpiled grazing on the remaining 2,477 acres. These pastures were particularly helpful during the 2011 drought. Additionally, 142 acres of eastern gamagrass was established in this rotation to provide quality forage to livestock.

The South Unit consists of 5 pastures on 2,547 acres and supports 1 AU to 34 acres. The majority of these soils are rocky on Low Stoney Hill and Steep Adobe sites. Numerous draws and canyons are located on this site, and the more productive sites are dominated by little bluestem, and sideoats grama. Bruce is continually searching for ways to increase the carrying capacity on this unit, and he uses disturbances such as feral hog rooting as an opportunity to seed these areas to tall grass prairie grasses.

Another passion of Bruce's is to raise quality livestock. Bruce takes care in selecting quality genetics that produce a moderate frame cow, which will produce a calf that provides quality beef. The breed of choice is registered Angus because of their ability to handle rough terrain and still maintain their body condition. Calves are born in January and steers are sold in the fall to 44 Farms and marketed as over 50% prime. Care and selection also goes into developing heifers which are sold as replacements to producers interested in improving their cow herds.

Wildlife management is a goal on the ranch and is used as an indicator to determine the health of rangeland resources. Bruce's philosophy is that "as his range improves, he must make a conscious effort to reduce deer numbers." Bruce started with a deer to 8 acres and is now at a deer to 15 with the plan to lower that number in the future. The ranch is active with TPWD and participates in the Texas Managed Lands Deer Program. As range condition improved, Bruce had to construct a game proof fence on the South Unit to keep his neighbors deer off his ranch. The ranch does not lease hunting rights or sell wildlife hunts. They instead use this opportunity to teach urban children about the importance of wildlife management, conservation, and hunter education. Bruce allows deserving children from the metroplex to participate in supervised hunts to harvest excess deer. Bruce says, "I am not trying to make a lifetime hunter out of every kid that comes to the ranch. What I'm trying to do is teach them that hunting is a tool to help wildlife and the land."

Bruce also uses his ranch to educate urban co-workers about agriculture. Every year, Bruce has two picnics on the ranch with his co-workers and their families. He gives children and parents an introduction to his goals as a livestock and wildlife producer and describes how they are used to maintain his land. To Bruce this is his way of giving back and informs consumers about where their products are raised. This also helps to shape the perception of the beef and

wildlife industry to his co-workers who go back to the city and influence other consumers. The ranch has also hosted numerous rangeland tours and field days for the public to include workshops on prescribed burning, rangeland health, determining stocking rates, and ecological site descriptions to approximately 312 landowners. The ranch has also opened the door to host the US military. In December of 2008, a unit of the Texas National Guard came to the ranch to learn rangeland management techniques prior to deployment to Afghanistan.

Bruce is a current member of the Blackland Prairie Grazing Land Conservation Initiative Board of Directors. His innovative and progressive thinking has helped lead the way for the Blackland Prairie GLCI Coalition to become a trustworthy and respected source for grazingland conservation technical assistance in the 18 county GLCI work area. He continually provides critical insight and direction for the grazingland educational programs hosted by BP GLCI. Bruce is also Director of the Samuel Farms "Friends of the Farm" committee. This group was instrumental in saving this Dallas County farm from urban development. Now the farm is used for research and demonstration projects and has provided an outlet for agricultural practices and land stewardship activities to be shared with the Dallas/Fort Worth urban community. Finally, Rocosa Ranch is also involved with the Eastern Range Initiative of the Eastern Quail Recovery Program through Texas Agrilife Extension and Dr. Dale Rollins.

Bruce has proven himself to be a steward of the land. In 2010 Rocosa Ridge Ranch won the prestigious Lone Star Land Steward Award for his outstanding efforts. He has a working knowledge of cattle production and understands how to manage his land to produce quality cattle and wildlife, while continuing to enhance his rangeland resources. He has opened the door to many not familiar with the cattle and wildlife industry. He continues to serve as an example of a sustainable working ranch, and many ranchers and agency personnel have benefited from visits out to the ranch.