

Hunter-Rancher Relationships in New Mexico

James E. Knight, Larry Foster, and Vernon D. Lansford

Editor's Note: A good assessment of the problem. We can all take note of the message.

Conflicts in New Mexico between hunters and ranchers have increased in recent years. This is evidenced by land-owner complaints and pressure by various sportsmen and livestock producer groups for legislation that would address the situation. In recent years rancher organizations have voiced displeasure with the New Mexico Department of Game and Fish's failure to control hunter trespassing on private land. The complaints have been related to hunters disturbing cattle and damaging terrain and ranch improvements. Sportsmen groups have complained of illegal posting of public lands and the negative effect of livestock grazing on public lands. Hunter groups have voiced displeasure at hunter densities and deteriorating game populations in some areas.

To define the problems perceived by hunters and ranchers and to identify solutions suggested by the two groups, questionnaires were prepared for ranchers and hunters concerning the 1982 deer hunting season. Many questions were asked of both groups, but several questions, such as ranch size, season hunted, etc., pertained only to one group.

A list of almost 6,000 ranchers was compiled from various sources within the Cooperative Extension Service and other agricultural departments at New Mexico State University. The list was stratified by counties and 1,500 ranchers were randomly drawn. The questionnaire to the ranchers contained questions relating to the size and type of operation, hunting conditions on the ranch, types of problems encountered with hunters, and possible solutions to the problems. The hunter group was selected by drawing the name of 3,000 hunters from a list of 1982 licensed deer hunters supplied by the New Mexico Department of Game and Fish. The questionnaire for hunters contained questions relating to the area they hunted, hunter pressure and experience with ranchers. Questions also pertained to observed problems and suggested solutions.

Rancher Questionnaire

Of the 1,500 ranchers that were sent questionnaires, 234 responded for a response rate of 15.6%.

There were not many differences in the responses when the surveys were stratified by ownership status. It was evident by the written comments that large ranches with small amounts of private land didn't even try to control the hunters—even on the private lands. Sixty percent of the respondents said they allowed hunting on the private portions of the ranch. The larger ranches were more likely to

allow hunting than the smaller ones.

Ranchers were asked to estimate how many hunters they had on their ranch. This obviously was a difficult question. The answers varied from none to 2,000. The 2,000 hunters response came from a large ranch in Lincoln County, which is mostly U.S. Forest Service land. As expected, the more public land a rancher had, the more likely he was to perceive a large number of hunters. Of the ranchers having over 60 deer hunters, 80% of these had less than half private land. A majority of the ranches reported fewer than 10 deer hunters.

The most important part of the questionnaire was in identifying problems and solutions to the problems. In order to address this, a list of problems was presented and the respondents were asked to indicate whether the item was a serious problem, a problem, or no problem at all. Of the 17 items that respondents could choose from, two surfaced as serious problems—litter and trespass. Responses were stratified by location, ranch size, ownership, and several other characteristics. No matter how the questionnaires were stratified, these two problems were listed in at least the top four, and they usually ranked number 1 or number 2. Several other problems were cited with regularity throughout the study. Vandalism, the cutting of fences, stealing, and off-road vehicle damage were often listed in the top four. Trespass dropped in frequency, as would be expected, on ranches where much of the ranch was public land; since the ranchers could not keep hunters off, they therefore didn't consider trespass a major problem.

The ranchers were asked that if they had serious problems, who did they perceive as creating the problems—rifle hunters, muzzleloader hunters, or archery hunters. The respondents indicated 93% of the problems were caused by rifle hunters and 4% by muzzleloader hunters.

One question asked of ranchers was which hunters caused the most problems—in-state hunters or out-of-state hunters. Very little variation was seen among the ranchers, no matter how they were stratified. The main response indicated that about 90% of the problem was due to in-state hunters. We also found that the more public land found on the ranch, the greater was the percentage of out-of-state hunters that were believed to cause problems.

Ranchers were asked what percentage of the total hunters caused problems. The mean response was that about 25% of the hunters caused problems.

On the more positive side, ranchers were asked how to correct the hunter rancher problems. The responses tended to have the same possible solution. Enforcing trespass laws was cited as the most popular solution to hunter-rancher problems (Table 1). There were small variations depending on how the other questions had been answered. For example, if a rancher had mostly public land he did not recommend controlling trespass since he didn't have this problem.

James E. Knight is wildlife specialist, New Mexico State University Cooperative Extension Service, Las Cruces, New Mexico 88003; Larry Foster is Beef Cattle Specialist, New Mexico State University Cooperative Extension Service; Vernon D. Lansford is a former research assistant, Department of Agricultural Economics, New Mexico State University.

Table 1. Perceived solutions to hunter-rancher conflicts as identified by New Mexico ranchers.

Rank	Solution
1	Enforce trespass laws
2	Allow no one to drive off established roads during the hunting season
3	Stiffer fines for trespass
4	Have only one season
5	More courtesy by hunters
6	Have more game wardens in the field
7	Shorten season

Another suggested solution, which has since been implemented by the New Mexico Department of Game and Fish, is to allow no one to drive off established roads during the hunting season. The third most popular solution also related to trespass in that stiffer fines should be charged for trespass prosecutions. The fourth solution in popularity included having only one season per year rather than the stratified seasons presently used in New Mexico. The fifth solution was for the hunters to show more courtesy. Having more game wardens in the field and shortening the seasons were down the list on the possible solutions.

Ranchers were asked to describe positive experiences they had had with hunters. Positive experiences varied, but some were related to allowing access to public land or hunter providing assistance to a rancher. Most said they had not had any.

The respondents were also asked to select their most negative experience. These answers were ranked by popularity and as expected, trespass was the number one negative experience. Other highly ranked negative experiences related to ranch damage such as cut fences or damaged tanks and windmills. Other negative experiences related to complaints by ranchers, damage to livestock, and public land access.

The final question asked of ranchers was, who do you feel most represents you with hunting-related problems. The New Mexico Cattle Growers Association was indicated by 31% of the people to represent the livestock industry on hunter-rancher problems. Nineteen percent of the respondents indicated no one represented them and 15% indicated the Department of Game and Fish represented the ranchers.

Hunter Questionnaire

Of the 3,000 hunters that were sent questionnaires, 682 responded for a return rate of 22.7%.

Respondents were asked to identify positive experiences they had with ranchers. Forty-five percent of the hunters said they had had no positive experiences with ranchers. It should be noted that this response could also indicate that the respondent had no contact with any rancher. Of the 476 positive experiences identified by the respondents, 30% involved courtesy displayed by the rancher. Eighteen percent of the positive experiences were related to public land access.

Respondents were asked to identify negative experience

Table 2. Perceived solutions to hunter-rancher conflicts as ranked by 1982 licensed New Mexico hunters (Total occurrences in top 5)

Rank	Solution
1.	Accurate maps
2.	Courtesy by hunters
3.	More cooperation between the groups
4.	Public education
5.	Courtesy by ranchers
6.	Limit out-of-state hunters
7.	Prohibit off-road driving

with ranchers. Sixty-seven percent reported they had had no negative experiences with ranchers. Again, it should be noted, this response could indicate the respondent had had no contact with a rancher at all. Of 198 negative experiences reported, 31% were related to public land access, 26% involved the lack of courtesy shown by the rancher, and 13% were related to trespass.

Respondents were asked if they observed any hunter-caused damage. Forty percent of the respondents did not observe any hunter-caused damage and of the hunter-caused damage that was observed, 28% of it was reported as being littering and 16% damage to habitat.

With respect to who represented them in hunting matters, almost half the respondents reported that they were represented by the New Mexico Department of Game and Fish. Thirty-one percent reported they were represented by local sportsmen's organizations and 6% by the New Mexico Wildlife Federation.

The hunters were asked if resident or nonresident hunters were responsible for most hunter-caused damage. Of the 383 respondents with an opinion, 47% reported out-of-state hunters were responsible for most hunter-caused damage.

As in the rancher questionnaire, the final two questions to the hunters dealt with identifying perceived problems and solutions to hunter-rancher conflicts. Respondents were asked to identify the top five causes of most hunter-rancher conflicts. Forty percent of the hunters ranked trespass or failure to ask permission as the number one cause of hunter-rancher conflicts. Fourteen percent of the hunters identified access denial to public lands as the number one cause of hunter-rancher conflicts. Thirteen percent of the respondents thought disrespect for others' rights was the primary cause of the conflicts.

The final question involved ranking the top 5 solutions to hunter-rancher conflicts (Table 2). Twenty-seven percent of the hunters felt accurate maps that would identify public and private land were the primary solution to hunter-rancher conflicts. Ten percent of the respondents identified more courtesy by hunters as a primary solution.

Discussion

Many of the problems identified in this survey are what might be expected when dealing with large crowds. Litter and trespass are essentially crowd problems and the more people we have utilizing hunting lands, the more serious the

problem will be. Trespass was identified by both groups as being the most serious problem affecting hunter-rancher relationships. The solution to this problem, however, is identified differently by the two groups. Most ranchers indicated enforcement of trespass laws would solve the problem. The majority of the hunters indicated the problem could be alleviated by the availability of accurate land status maps that would provide identification of the private and public lands. Some of the hunter respondents also reported that this would be a way to prevent the illegal posting of the public lands. Both groups indicated a lack of respect of rights of others as a major cause of hunter-rancher problems.

One major obstacle between better hunter-rancher relationships is attitude. Some of the responses indicated ranchers and hunters think they are expected to feel some animosity towards each other. Occasionally respondents would answer questions in such an extreme direction that it was obvious their answer reflected a desire to influence biased results. In some cases the respondents would answer all the questions in the most negative manner possible.

These respondents were obvious in the attempt to make the other group look irresponsible. It is probable that these types of attitudes are responsible for much of the strained hunter-rancher relationships existing today.

Meetings between representatives of livestock and hunter groups have and should continue to be held. One of the main objectives of this survey was to identify problems and solutions to problems. Only through a cooperative effort and more meetings between representatives can these solutions be implemented.

The most positive factor this study revealed is a strong desire by most hunters and ranchers to mend the differences that affect their relationships. Ranchers are sincerely concerned about activities that affect their livelihood and the use of the land entrusted to their care. Hunters are concerned about their ability to utilize lands and resources they have a legal and moral right to utilize. Both groups have a common desire to maintain the quality of these lands and to ensure the long-range uses of the resources provided. Only through cooperation and a sincere concern for the rights of others will the activities of hunters and ranchers be compatible.

Cooperative Projects Stretch Limited Range Improvement Funds

Thomas C. Roberts, Jr.

Clift Jordan, a cattle rancher from Kamas, Utah, and the Bureau of Land Management (BLM), in spite of depressed cattle prices and federal budget cutbacks, are putting in a well and pipeline. The pipeline starts at a well drilled by the BLM. Jordan has bought and installed the 1 1/2 miles of 1 1/2-inch black plastic pipe. The pipeline opens up country that was previously only grazed when there were puddles or snow for the cattle to use for water.

Jordan runs approximately 500 head of Hereford-Angus cross cattle on the Boulder Wash allotment in southeast Tooele County. He runs the cattle in a winter-spring season and feels they do well in the comparatively benevolent (compared to Kamas) climate.

When asked how his cattle did on the mixed sagebrush-grass allotment, Jordan replied, "These cattle winter better here than anywhere else; they have a good variety of feed." The allotment has not only the sagebrush grass community type but some salt desert shrub, pinyon-juniper, and some crested wheatgrass seedings. He felt that "the pipeline will distribute the water so the cattle will have to travel no further than a mile for water. The cattle are in excellent shape year around, with most of the cows calving in 30 days, all of them in 60 days." Another question was how he felt the pipeline

(with three troughs along its length) would improve the watering of cows that already use snow to some extent, Jordan replied, "The water system will insure that they stay in good shape when there isn't snow available and will keep the utilization of the allotment even."

The fact that this is a winter allotment and the troughs which are being installed will need to have the ice melted has led to some innovative thinking. To overcome this problem, Clift and his son use a small propane catalytic burner. "Interestingly, when there is snow on the ground they drink very little water. It all depends upon the snow conditions," Jordan said.

This is one example of the cooperative planning and execution of a project that will lead to more even utilization of the forage resource and heavier calves. Wildlife will also benefit from this project. In exchange for some pipe, Jordan is going to install a pipeline spur for wildlife. The Bureau wildlife program has funded this aspect of the project and will continue to provide water for deer and possibly antelope in the future.

Across the valley, Cal Olsen and Bob Pehrson are putting in a fence with BLM supplied material. The fence will help implement an Allotment Management Plan (AMP) that they and the BLM have developed. Their allotment in eastern Tooele County includes some pinyon-juniper type that was

The author is a range conservationist out of the Salt Lake District Office, Bureau of Land Management.