Rancher Fences Creek to Slow Erosion

Brad Anseth

Joe Jepson, a young Townsend rancher in southwest Montana, has fenced both sides of a creek that winds through his property. This is part of a long range plan to improve the soil and water resources on his 480-acre ranch that he bought 3 years ago.

Originally he planned to fence only along one side of the creek, mainly to get better livestock distribution on his irrigated pasture. But in 1981 the creek went wild and caused him to think about more fencing.

The 1981 Memorial Day storm accelerated the erosion and slumping along Deep Creek, the creek running through his ranch. The high waters almost destroyed his irrigation pump site. This caused him to want to do whatever it took to keep the creek in its banks. The fence seemed a good idea. He thinks this will encourage the brush to spread out and send down more roots to stabilize the banks. Just keeping the cattle off the saturated banks should eliminate some sloughing.

The creek is the prime livestock water source for to pastures. Jepson is fencing a 30-foot corridor across the creek for livestock water and to serve as a moving lane. He plans to grade and riprap this section.

Jepson’s concern for reducing erosion on the creek is part of a larger plan he has for the ranch. He thinks the entire ranch needs attention.

He has signed a Great Plains contract with the U.S. Soil Conservation Service for fencing as well as other soil and water conservation work. Under the contract he will receive technical help and cost-share funds. In the end he will have three dryland and two irrigated pastures instead of just one large pasture as it was.

The fences will help Joe toward his goal of getting situated to run 100-200 head of yearlings. As a part of that goal, he has also seeded 100 acres of dryland grainland to alfalfa and pubescent wheatgrass, rested his rangeland for 2 years, and plans to develop a well to bring stockwater to 3 of the 5 fields.

Once the improvements are in place, Jepson plans to develop and use a grazing system on the ranch. He knows it will take time to improve the soil and water resources, but he has already seen the improvement and plans to continue his work.

The development of students through internship opportuni-
ties. The result is mutually beneficial to the students, to the internship employer, and to the industry or profession that the student joins. Our students have been fortunate to locate productive internships which fulfill the field training and experience requirements associated with the degree. We thank those in the range-livestock and related industries who are making the program a success. It would not work without their participation.

The author is with the Soil Conservation Service, Bozeman, Mont.

Editor’s Note: This article is an example showing that small ranchers too, are interested in soil conservation and range management.