

Friendly Chat

What's Happening at Mildred Kanipe Memorial Park

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The Wow of Cows

"It's all a gamble," says Sam (for Samantha) Campbell, talking about the greatest pleasure in ranching. "It's kind of fun to see it pay off. You spend quite a bit of money on cattle, bulls, feed and fertilizer and you don't know at that time if it's going to pay off, and eventually it does or doesn't."

"That's pretty much it," husband Dan agrees. "The decisions you make months in advance you hope are the right ones that will make a profit on the other end."

The young couple are in their third year of leasing land at Mildred Kanipe Memorial Park—900 acres, about 1.4 square miles, where they run 40 head of Angus beef cattle.

In Myrtle Creek, they have been raising hay. This year they'll be farming 75 acres that will be planted in alfalfa and red clover, "kind of a horse-aimed crop," Sam judges.

And they live in Dixonville, where Sam grew up in family ranching that goes back to the 1850s or 1830s, she's not quite sure.

About 15 years ago she quit her job at the Department of Fish and Wildlife, sold one of her horses and bought a couple of goats. As the goat herd grew—raised for meat and breeding—"we were able to save up money and over the years we purchased cattle."

Dan left his job with a local rancher in 2015 and the Campbells went out on their own in the cattle business two years later.

It involves them with several "little acreages" in Myrtle Creek, Dixonville and Melrose, Sam says. Like the proprietor of a tree farm who wanted to get out of the business. In order to avoid property re-classification that would move him into higher residential property taxes, the owner struck a deal with the Campbells to put some cows on his land and retain agriculture-land tax status.

Some Campbell cows come from Montana, the faster-growing of their animals. Others are pure-bred Angus from E Z Angus of Porterville, CA. "They did us a big favor by selling us a handful of heifers," Sam reports. "That bumped our herd quality up significantly."

On the day we visited Dan and Sam at the park, they were putting out a mineral supplement for the cattle and performing a herd health-check. Every two weeks, encouraged by Sam's (quite nice) yodeling, the cows troop in to lick up a magnesium compound that helps prevent grass tetany, a deficiency condition that can kill them.

The Campbells follow a worming and vaccination schedule for the cattle, but the biggest maintenance items are culling sub-par animals and "pasture health," a "huge" tag. "If your pasture is tight"—grass too short—"the cattle aren't going to do well. We like to seed and fertilize in the spring and fall. And of course weed maintenance."

Especially clearing out hawthorn, which has aggressively invaded the park. She and Dan use a skid steer (skip loader). "We sat in on a meeting with quite a few local environmental agencies discussing different methods to eliminate the hawthorn. We realized how quickly the machine worked, and it [was] going to be sitting idle quite a bit in between areas, so we approached the County and asked them if they would be interested in doing a work trade." Dan and Sam do 12 hours a month with their skid steer when the weather is not too wet and not in fire season, and the value of the work is deducted from their lease payments.



Sam and Dan (above) fortifying the cows (below).



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Mildred Kanipe Memorial Park, Oakland, Oregon

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