

EPEC UPDATE

Hello neighbors,

For our new owners, the Environmental Preservation and Eco-diversity Committee (EPEC) consists of 8 Wolf Creek Ranch owners, and our Ranch Manager, who all share a passion for our WCR environment and a commitment to protect it. We are responsible for identifying threats, working with our scientist partners to mitigate those threats, and restoring any negative impacts back to natural reference conditions. We use best available science, and our HOA approved governing documents (Comprehensive Stewardship Plan), to determine the preferred actions, if any, to keep our ranch healthy and beautiful. We do this to preserve our conservation values, and to enhance our economic values. We work at the pleasure of the Board of Directors who has the ultimate authority, and responsibility, to protect the environment on WCR. For EPEC members, the data directs the decision.

Approximately 95% of Wolf Creek Ranch is protected under our Conservation Easement. All the land area other than the Area of Disturbance on each lot, the roads, and our HOA common area, is protected under the Easement. EPEC's domain of protection is this same area which is about 13,000 acres. Utah Open Lands is the entity that manages our Conservation Easement. Over the last several years, Utah Open Lands has been a valuable partner in providing resources to help us protect our beautiful ranch.

In general, WCR is healthy, and seems to have been getting healthier over the last 7 years. This year in particular, we are seeing a very robust crop of wildflowers, new sage growth, a thick understory (grasses, flowers, bushes) within many aspen forests, and a sense that our aspen forests are slowly making a comeback. We have been successful in many key initiatives:

1. mitigating Doug fir bark beetle infestation, but still have some threat in one of our Doug fir forests above the Woodland Gate;
2. reducing our non-native invasive weeds;
3. improving sheep grazing patterns on the ranch in an attempt to mitigate the risk of overgrazing;
4. and, we have been successful in reducing the aspen browse damage, caused primarily by elk, which threatened the health of our aspen forests.

Our goal has always been to change elk behavior to natural conditions and we have done this by introducing an apex predator for elk: humans. In Yellowstone National Park, a similar threat in 1995 was mitigated by the introduction of an alternative apex predator for elk: wolves.

For our new owners, in 2011, a diverse group of scientists from local universities, governmental agencies, the private sector, and Utah Open Lands, concluded that a large percentage of our aspen forests were at risk of demise due to the excessive browse (eating) damage caused primarily by our large elk herd. Every scientist we consulted, from a variety of specialties, opined that we needed to start a program to "cull" the herd and change elk behavior to more natural conditions. In addition, WCR won a governmental grant of \$300,000 to protect our most unhealthy aspen forests by fencing out all large animals. Most fencing has been taken down as the protected forest generally responded well and the new trees are now tall enough (escape height) to withstand some eating by our large animals: elk, moose, deer, and sheep. As mentioned above, many of our non-protected forests are slowly responding by producing more baby trees.

In 2015, the HOA approved the Comprehensive Stewardship Plan to assist EPEC, and the WCR Board, in making sound decisions to protect the ranch. The goal set forth in our Elk Stewardship Plan, approved by the Board through a Structured Decision Making Process as outlined in our Comprehensive Stewardship Plan, is for 80% of our aspen forests to be self-sustaining (at least 500 stems/acre that are between 6 and 20 feet tall). Although we are not there yet, we are heading in that direction based on our aspen counts in 2017 and 2018. EPEC is not recommending we make any changes to the Elk Stewardship Plan until we reach those goals.

The new threat identified this year is the large insect infestation affecting hundreds of acres of aspen forest on the ranch. We have had several aspen scientists weigh in and we are told that this represents a normal disturbance to aspen throughout the western US. Although the impact was aesthetically quite ugly in June, we are now seeing new leaves (second flush) on the affected trees. We don't expect any permanent impact. If, however, the same trees are affected several years in a row, it may lead to early demise of those forests. There is no recommended treatment. EPEC will continue to monitor.

We have also identified some new Doug fir bark beetle infestation and our forester will evaluate and give us guidance on how to treat next year.

As you can see, EPEC is busy protecting your investment. If the Doug fir forests die from beetle kill like hundreds of thousands of acres have in the western US, our values on the ranch will decline and our fire risk will go up. If our rangeland is overgrazed, sage will dominate, and a grass fire will become a brush fire and increase our risk of structure loss. If our aspen forests die from overgrazing from our elk herd, our property values will plummet. A healthy ranch is a beautiful ranch and a ranch that others will want to own.

As you enjoy the ranch, if you see something that does not look right, say something. If you see trees that don't look healthy, let me or Tom Cartwright know. If you see our sheep grazing in the same place for too long, let us know. If you see an area of invasive weeds (please reference your CSP Owner Handbook), please let us know.

Jim Shuler, MD
Chair, EPEC