

**SONORAN DESERT CONSERVATION PLAN
STEERING COMMITTEE**

EDUCATION SESSION

**August 14, 1999 (9:00 a.m - 12:30 p.m.)
Arizona-Sonora Desert Museum (Gallery)
2021 N. Kinney Road / Tucson, Arizona, 85743**

RANCHING WITHIN PIMA COUNTY

**Ranch Tradition and Conservation
in the Altar Valley Area
Sue Chilton**

INTRODUCTION: SHARON BRONSON

It is my pleasure to introduce you to yet another District 3 constituent, Susan Chilton. Sue is a partner with her husband Jim, in a family business called Chilton Ranch and Cattle Company. They own and operate historic ranches at both the northern and southern ends of the Altar Valley to the Arivaca watershed. Mrs. Chilton earned her Bachelor's and Master's of Arts degrees from the Arizona State University, no boos please. She is a student of practical southern Arizona range biology. She is currently Vice President of the Altar Valley Conservation Alliance and is a founding member of the Arizona Common Ground Round Table, a collaborative group of environmentalists, ranchers and researchers who subscribe to the goal of a "shared sustainable landscapes." She will present to us today, the Ranch Tradition and Conservation in the Altar Valley Area, particularly emphasizing historic cattle ranching as the best tool to achieve multiple environmental and economic goals. Please welcome Sue Chilton.

RANCH TRADITION AND CONSERVATION IN THE ALTAR VALLEY AREA: SUE CHILTON

Good morning. I was sitting there and this paper came around that my husband just stood up and mentioned and I will see if I can dispel a couple of the myths, extremely and widely publicized myths but we will see if we can give you some information on it.

First of all, I would like to start by saying that if we all had neighbors like Tom Sheridan, we would all be really, really wealthy in an important respect. He is a neighbor and we are glad to have him. He is also a member of the Altar Conservation Alliance so he operates globally and thinks nationally and all that other good stuff. In any case, I am going to skip things that are slightly repetitive of what Tom said and go on with some further elaboration.

What is a ranch?

A lot of people do not really know. I am going to try to give you a little visual idea. Back in the homestead days, ranchers came out from the east, driving their own herds because there were no cows out here to just round up out in the country. In the east, eastern homesteaders were given 160 acre lots of land to homestead. Now that homestead of 160 acres in the humid east with a higher precipitation, was the number selected because it was big enough for a family to support itself. It yielded enough product to take care of their families and with that number, no more acreage was needed.

As you move west, you get more arid and even the newest residents know that, so when they continue giving 160 acre homesteads to people, it soon became obvious to everyone, including John Wesley Powell who went to Congress and said, "One hundred and sixty acres could not support one-half of one goat in a lot of places. In other places you can, but the majority of the west has vastly much less precipitation".

When these people homestead their 160 acres, Congress said they were going to give them access to the forage of what was then called, the public domain. Now the public domain was land that people could come out and homestead, so the next week somebody else came out and homesteaded right here and he turned his cattle and his sheep out on the public domain. Now they overlapped because there were no fences. Sometime later, Rancher C came out, obtained his 160 acres and turned his herd out on the public domain land also. Well, this went on to about 1890, and in the 1890's, there were some major droughts. What had occurred up to that time was that many people came out, obtained their 160 acre homestead and turned out their stock.

All of a sudden, all the ranchers got together and said, "This is not something that can go on and on. We already have all the cows out here that can be sustained on the forage that is available." They said, "Okay, let's do something about it." So the ranchers went to the federal government and said, "Can you create what is called forest reserves?" The forest reserves is the ancestor of the U.S. Forest Service. Those forest reserves, and reserve means that it was to be reserved or removed from the option of homesteading, the areas that were within the boundaries and the forest reserve were no longer available for more people to come in and homestead. This occurred at about the turn of the century, right around the 1906 era.

My dates are not exact, you have to be a historian to give you exact dates. In any case, about this period at the area called the Garces Forest Reserve, it had three purposes. The removal of the option to homestead was carried out in order to provide sustainable timber, forage and watershed. They are in the Department of Agriculture, they were not set aside as parks.

Which department are national parks in? Interior, right? Folks do not have a clear picture of why we have a Department of Agriculture. We have that department because we try to have food. Those forest reserves were set aside for the production of forest, timber and watershed and it is at that point that we started building our forest service and they said, "Well okay, this rancher has a history, he has homesteaded that property and he has been running cattle here so this is his allotment." The rancher then began fencing his allotment. As time went on, once you were given an allotment it was the exclusive right to the utilization of that forage and that right was given instead of giving larger homesteads. People do not understand that the right to the forage was a compensation to western pioneers for the fact that they were receiving much less value, less capacity to support the family than their counterparts who settled in Indiana or Iowa or someplace else.

Time went on and this rancher over here got on in age, his kids had moved somewhere and did not want to ranch. So Rancher A bought the allotment and the homestead in this ranch because the economies of scale and what would support a family in 1890 cannot be done today. So now this ranch is here and it now has two 160 parcels in private land. Well, this process went on and on and on so now maybe this rancher or his descendants also bought this allotment. What you buy when you buy an allotment, is foraging rights, you are not buying the land. The land belongs to the forest reserves, the forest service, the U.S. Government and technically to the public, but it is the government who is out there running it. What you buy is the private land and the exclusive right to the forage.

Can you take your cows out tomorrow and put them on someone else's allotment? What would happen?

Along comes the Livestock Inspector and says, "These are trespassed cattle." Now when you own something, what you own is the right to use it, right? Okay, the ranchers own the forage, but this is a split domain.

Do the ranchers own the timber?

No.

Do the ranchers own the wildlife?

No.

Can someone come out and mine on your ranch?

Yes, they can come out tomorrow, stake out a claim on our ranch, on the forest because it is another one of those rights we do not own anymore than you do. If you want to come out tomorrow and place a mining claim and try to look for gold in California Gulch, it is legal!

However, if you want to put cows on our ranch, that is illegal because the ranchers bought the right to the forage.

Now, a statement has been made and it is true in general, but I want to describe it for the Altar Valley. Ranchers basically own a section or less of private property, this is not true in the case of the Altar Valley for the actual commercial cattle ranches. I would say that all of the working ranches in the Altar/Arivaca Valley own thousands of acres of deeded land and they acquired those thousands of acres through ancestors who homesteaded that property more than 100 years ago.

Our neighbors, the Noone's, and Ted Noone is a veterinarian and instructor at the UofA, Chad's family was out and about at the same time as the King's and they homesteaded land there. Many of the ranching families in this part of Southern Arizona are families who came in the 1800's which includes my husband's family. They were here in the 1880's also. Over the course of years, the ranching families purchased other allotments and that is what you own when you say you own a ranch. Now what you own is a big headache too, because you acquire the state land trust as one of your co-managers when you purchase the allotments, you acquire the forest service or BLM as one of your co-managers and believe me, they do manage. They are at the table when you make all of your ranching decisions, virtually they participate in your decisions as to where to rotate or when to use what pasture.

When you buy a ranch, can you just throw any number of cows out?

That is what the public seems to think. When you buy an allotment it has a number attached to it. This allotment may be for 200 head, you cannot put 200 more out there and make it 400 head. This allotment might be for 400 head, that is all you can put out there and that is the maximum. You can put less, you can take what is called "non-use" and for some reason such as there is a drought or something and do less, but you cannot put more.

Now how do you buy a ranch? Do you go to the government and say, "Forest service, I want to buy an allotment?" What will they say to you?

We're not a real estate agency, go buy a ranch from the rancher.

What is the rancher selling you?

The rancher sells you the private land and the right to a certain number head of cattle. The right to graze 200 on this allotment, the right to graze 400 on this allotment and you pay for that at the rate of approximately two to three thousand dollars per animal unit.

Does that include the cows? Ranchers please tell me, does that include the cows?

No. You still do not have a cow! All you have are the transferred exclusive right to graze that piece of territory from someone else to you. Now you go to the forest service and you say, "Here's the deed of sale, I bought the ranch." They say, "Okay, we will transfer that allotment to your name."

Can the forest service say, "No, I am going to give it to my next door neighbor?"

No. It is not something that the forest service can say, "We like him, these are our political party and he gets it." Sorry, you have to go with your deed of sale, show you bought the ranch. When you buy it, you put out a lot of money per animal unit.

Now what?

Now you go out and buy your solar energy convertors. What are those? Cows. Yes, the best solar energy convertor out there.

What does a cow eat?

Grass, forest, all kinds of stuff. Can you eat it? No, not the most die-hard vegetarian in this room really wants to make a meal out of what our cows eat.

What does a cow do? How many stomachs does a cow have?

Four. How many do you have? Some of you think at least two. A cow can digest high silica, high cellulose foods that we cannot digest because we will get appendicitis. A cow converts native forage that you do not want to see on your plate, things humans cannot eat, and they convert sustainably. That is, they only eat down to a certain point, a cow is not a goat. If you manage cattle grazing, you are increasing the health and the diversity of the plant population out there and you heard the word "manage."

There is plenty of evidence out there and I will ask some of you range scientists that are in the room, if you agree with me. Managed grazing produces healthier plant communities and a greater variety of wildlife habitat and better communities than overgrazing or nongrazing. Managed grazing is better for the ecological system. Your cows convert this native forage to beef then they get up to approximately 500-550 pounds. Again, they have done all of that without fertilizers, irrigation, chemicals of any kind, tractors, the tillage of soil or anything else. At that point, what happens to them?

Lots of you know and some do not seem to. Okay, at this weight they are sold, in our case, to the Marana Auction and bought by probably a farmer in the Midwest. They go back there and they go to his field where he has already harvested his crops of whatever, it may be corn, soybeans, whey or wheat and the cows put on another two to three hundred pounds and get up to around 800 pounds. The cows are still eating things you do not want to eat for dinner including stems, leaves and the residue from agricultural production. That solar energy convertor converts the residue from plants to beef which is high protein and high iron. When that yearling weighs about 800 pounds, it is at that point it goes into a feedlot and gets its last 300 pounds on a ration that is supplied right there.

What else do they feed it?

The cows are fed corn, everybody knows about the corn, but how many of you use sugar? Our biggest consumer of sugar is our hummingbirds, I have already been through forty pounds of sugar feeding my hummingbirds this summer.

What is the by product of sugar? Molasses. How much molasses do all of you eat in one year?

Two tablespoons, two pieces of gingerbread? A couple of gingersnaps, right? What happens to all that molasses which is where all the vitamins are for the sugar? it is a high mineral, high iron content food. Where does it go? Into the cows! It does not go into a river, you do not eat that much pancake syrup. Okay, the cows eat more residues of agricultural production that includes the molasses.

Cottonseed meal: Is anyone wearing clothes today? I think so, most of us have something on that has cotton in it. Cottonseed meal is a valuable feed, it is high protein. Do you want it for dinner? No. Cottonseed hulls, all kinds of things that are valuable foods but we cannot eat them goes into that cow along with some corn too. Now at that point, the cows are slaughtered. Where are they? They are back in the Midwest.

This piece of paper that just was circulated came around before I stood up here to make you cheerful states, "Only three percent of the cows are from the West," well, they forgot they are born and raised in the West and then they were shipped to the Midwest. The cows were slaughtered in the Midwest and that is where the beef comes from. Now the fact is, twenty percent plus are born and raised out here. Our cows never leave the West, their calves do, and they have ten to twelve calves during their life span. Those calves spend most of their life eating things you cannot eat, and at the end, they have converted it all into beef which you can eat, right?

Now that is the real story, this piece of paper that says two or three percent is from the West forgets that they were born out here and raised out here. The Altar Valley alone, as Tom was saying, produces millions of pounds of beef a year. When you sit down and figure it out, it is in the millions. Our ranch alone produces about half a million pounds of beef. Now we are not the big kids on the block, there are a lot of other bigger ranches around us. In any case, there are some other folks who say we are out there ranching completely at the discretion of the government.

How many of you have a driver's license?

Right, we mostly all do, don't we? What is the difference between a license and a ranch? Now you folks who passed around that piece of paper think that we only have a privilege, a license to use our forage that we bought exclusive right to at a pretty high price.

Okay, where did you go when you went to get a driver's license?

You go to government, right? It is the state government and you take a little test and they give you a license. Is there a limited number of licenses? No.

Where do you go when you want a ranch? Do you go to the government? No, you go buy it from a rancher. Can you sell your driver's license? Anybody try that? I don't think so. Can you sell your ranch and the allotment? You bet you can. If you die, can you leave your driver's license in your will? It would not work, would it? If you die, will the IRS tax your driver's license? Well they sure as heck tax your ranch and that includes your allotment, it is part of your personal property, it is in your estate taxes. If this is just a license folks, the IRS owes us a hell of a lot of money back.

In other words, one part of the government is saying, "You are only out here at our whim, we can take this away from you at any time." The other part of the government is saying, "Oh no, you bought that free and clear on the real estate market, we get to tax it as personal and privately owned." Remember, I am not saying we own the land, we own exclusive right to the forage. That is the difference between a license and a ranch.

Why do ranchers need to stay out there?

Almost all of us have hunters on our place every year which is just fine. Do you know how much trouble we have with hunters on our place? Next to none, in the sense of hunters generally regard themselves as outdoors people. Hunters are generally proud of leaving a clean camp and we do not have problem with them. Here and there, there is an exception as there is some beer bust party. Do the miners cause us a problem? No, we happily share our forage area with the miners out there and there are miners on our place quite a bit. I happen to be wearing a bracelet with a stone in it that was mined on our ranch and a ring where the stone also came from our ranch.

The jewelry was made in Arivaca, literally, I mean the stone was made there and they were mined there and turned into jewelry there. We have no problem with other people who like to share access to the forest, that includes the birdwatchers, fisherman, campers, day picnickers, you name it. We do have, however, a serious problem with people who want to remove access to every other use except their's. We have a large number of people who regard their idea of what the forest should look like. I mean you get these people who pay money for organic fertilizer for their tomatoes, but that same organic fertilizer, when they see it out in nature becomes offensive. If you put it out on forest land it is bad, but if you put it in your garden, it is good. So they take pictures of cow manure out in the forest and say that is somehow evil. Those who want to expropriate the access of others to what they thought, or what they have a right to use, that is where we have a problem. We want to see multiple use and multiple sustainable, productive use.

Now, the very last point. How do you know you have sustainable use?

In the first place, like Tom said, I invite anybody to drive down I-19, turn right where it says Amado/Arivaca, at Exit 48 and drive that road. Go to the Ruby Road, plan on spending a day, drive over the Ruby Road all the way to I-19 and back again, it makes a big loop. You will be mostly at Nogales, you can go have lunch or dinner at Pete Kitchen's, it is good Mexican food. It is a little bland but it is good. By this time, you will have gone through several historic ranches. Anybody who has driven this can tell you that the historic ranches are not a mess.

How many of you read that guest comment a couple of weeks ago where it said that the grasses had all been extirpated from the Coronado? Yes, that is what it said. Now if I wrote a guest comment that said the houses in Tucson have all disappeared, do you think the Arizona Daily Star would publish it? It may say crackpot but guess what? On the Editorial page it says, "The grasses are all gone." Well let me show you a list. This is just a list of a variety of grasses that are in one pasture we have, it has 42 varieties on it. You can see the date on it, it says 1994. I did this for an SRM Convention some years ago and have never changed it because all the same grasses are still there that were there in 1994. Some of these are in the forest, but almost all of those are native grasses.

Now, I would make a bet, and I would like to see if George Ruyle or some of the other professors agree with me, I would bet you that every grass that was here when the Spaniards arrived is still growing on the ranches. I can walk to right where there is healthy, viable, vigorous seeding stands of "X" grass.

GRASSES IN ARIVACA PASTURES, 1994

1. sprucetop grama
2. slender grama
3. sideoats grama
4. black grama
5. blue grama
6. hairy grama
7. Rothrock grama
8. Santa Rita grama
9. purple grama
10. curly mesquite
11. green spangletop
12. cane beard grass
13. Arizona cottontop
14. wolftail
15. bush muhly
16. creeping muhly
17. aparego
18. plain's lovegrass
19. Lehmann lovegrass
20. mesa 3-awn
21. spider 3-awn
22. annual 3-awn
23. spike pappus
24. viney mesquite
25. deergrass
26. sacaton
27. sand dropseed
28. plains bristlegrass
29. Bermuda
30. Johnson grass
31. annual fescue
32. squirrel tail grass
33. rabbit's foot grass
34. tanglehead
35. crinkleawn
36. woolly bunchgrass
37. slim tridens
38. annual grama
39. annual panic
40. stinkgrass
41. canary grass
42. beggartick 3-awn

There are a few imports here, however, it is not because we seeded them. They are growing because it is one of those, if you build it, they will come. We have Bermuda Grass in our front yard that we did not plant. You water it and it is there.

Let me ask, how many imports are in this room?

If we are going to be opposed to imports, we better all leave, right? I think the gentleman back there with the hat and standing up is about the only one that gets to stay.

Final conclusion: what do we ranchers need to stay out there?

Remember, we are providing open space, not because we have that purpose in life, but it is just that it works with our ranch. What we do not appreciate is downzoning because we bought the property, we paid for it and if other people want to deprive it of the uses that it legitimately was zoned for, you can purchase it for development rights or conservation easements, we will consider that....as long term too but just do not take it.

How many of you would take kindly to someone announcing that the government wants one-third of your house? You bought your house, didn't you?

Unless you are a renter, you bought your house and you paid for the whole house and if the government or some other party, I say government because I do not want to say the county, state or federal government, whichever applies, the government wants your land for a park. they need to tell you first, is that not true? And then they need to make some arrangement with you such as buying a right to the park or conservation easement, or they need to do something to reach an agreement on both sides.

How many of you would feel a little put upon if someone announced they just wanted one-third of what you bought?

Remember, they are actually debating these laws and saying, "It is not a taking, it is not an expropriation," if they only take one-third. Well, I am willing to agree with that whenever they pass a law in Tucson that it is not "theft." A thief comes in but does not steal over one-third of your property and that is why we get upset when people say, "Well we are only."

One last comment: We actually had a person from an agency who will remain unnamed say to us, "But we only want to cut 10% of your cow numbers, that would not be a problem would it?" First of all, most of my 10% times 2,000 would pay for it, and second of all, that is 100% of the profit margin. That is not 10%, he is thinking 10% off his salary, he still has 90% of his salary doesn't he? Ten percent off our cattle numbers reduces the factory, the solar conversion factory to a non-profit operation. Thank you all for your time very much, I really appreciate it. God bless you.