## DNRM Native Rangeland

The native rangeland on-campus is, and has been, an asset to the Department, from the inception of the Department. The rangeland is typical of the Short Grass Plains Ecological region that is common throughout the western portion of the Great Plains. It is one of the few remaining parcels of native rangeland within the proximity of the campus. Thus, it has provided excellent facilities on which to conduct field labs, especially for the range and wildlife courses, but also for fisheries as well. It is the laboratory for DNRM courses in the same manner as biology and chemistry labs are to the Biology and Chemistry departments. It has been especially important for the Department of Plant and Soil Science soils courses (a very important area for range and wildlife students). It has also provided excellent opportunities for faculty and graduate students to conduct field research projects on campus. In Addition to providing field labs for DNRM and Soils, the native rangeland has provided teaching and research facilities and opportunities for the Departments of Biology, Preventive Medicine, and Entomology as well as other programs on campus.

Originally, the rangeland included the half section of land bounded on the south by 4th Street, on the north by Erskine Ave., and on the West by Quaker Ave. Although the rangeland was assigned to and, theoretically under the jurisdiction of DNRM, for many years the Department had no authority to totally control activities on the land. Historically, everyone on campus viewed this land as University property and open to anyone who wanted to use it without asking permission from anyone. The Department of Animal Science was among the worst abusers. As long as the feed lot was located on campus (located where the Ronald McDonald House now sits), the Animal Science Department considered this land as theirs to use whenever they so desired. When the feedlot exhausted their feed supply or an experiment was completed and the Animal Science Department needed some place to go with their cattle, they would ‘dump’ them on the rangeland without asking permission. And, it was very difficult to get the cattle removed, because the DNRM had no authority to enforce its ownership. This activity caused severe overgrazing of the rangeland, but that was of no concern to the Animal Science Department.

In addition to the overgrazing caused by the Animal Science Department’s ‘trespass’ livestock, the Department has faced other obstacles to conducting livestock research on the rangeland. In 1983, Dr. Fred Bryant had a sheep study on the on-campus Native Rangeland. In order to reduce the competition caused by the jackrabbits, the Department was authorized to conduct a rabbit-drive to remove some of the rabbit competition. In one day’s time, 173 rabbits were killed. Once the number of rabbits had been reduced, neighborhood dogs became a problem to small animal research.

In later years (1990s) similar abuse was caused by the ROTC who moved onto the rangeland “because it is University property and should be available to anyone who wants use it”. Their training activities severely scarred the land they used and their ‘live’ fire (which they were not suppose to be using) caused range fires that were difficult to control because of the playas on the rangeland. Only after a joint meeting with the Provost, ORS, campus police (who had similar problems with ROTC activities on campus), and the Department, was the situation resolved. The ROTC, and all others, was banned from using the rangeland without permission from the Department. Ultimately, the central administration assigned the 40 acres in the southwest corner of the original rangeland to the ROTC.

The south half of the west half of the section (160 acres) that originally belonged to the DNRM, including the area re-assigned to ROTC, was lost in other land transactions. The University made an agreement with USDA-ARS who had offices, labs, and greenhouse facilities north of Lubbock to ‘rent’ some of the rangeland area for 99 years (at $1/year). On this property, USDA constructed new offices, labs, and greenhouses which put them much closer to the activities on campus to facilitate more convenient collaboration with TTU faculty on many cooperative research projects. Part of this property also includes the development of the Shirley and Mildred Garrison Geriatric Center. Rerouting of Tech Parkway to join Quaker Ave. took approximately another 40 acres of the native rangeland. When all of acquisitions of the rangeland were completed, the 160 acres that the Department had in the 1960s and 1970s, the size of the rangeland was reduced to about 120 acres. It is still a very valuable facility for outdoor labs and field research, including a first-class quail a research facility.

In the 1990s, the University hired a Master Planner who seemed to have no concept of outdoor education or field labs. And, TTU’s residential neighbors and some of the central administration viewed the native rangeland as waste land that should be developed into something ‘more profitable’, such as a research park, shopping mall, or some other revenue generating enterprise. The Master Planner’s charge was to design revenue-generating uses for the campus and construction of new academic facilities for the campus. The ultimate design had little to do with facilitating academic activities on campus, but rather development of revenue-generating opportunities for the university. Part of this design was to include the USDA-ARS Plant Stress Lab (already discussed), a research park, a shopping mall, residential complex, and a golf course. After a considerable amount of discussion and negotiation, the DNRM relinquished the south half of the rangeland, but was awarded control of the north 120 acres already mentioned. Most of the southwest quarter of the section that was formerly part of the native rangeland currently is under long-term lease to the USDA-ARS with a small portion of the southwest corner devoted to ROTC on campus. As a result of the Master Planner’s design, a first class golf course was constructed on most of the east half section of the TTU property bounded by Indiana Ave. on the east, Erskine Ave. on the north, and Fourth Street on the south. The land converted to the golf course was never part of the native rangeland. It was farmed as part of Ag Services administered from the Dean of CASNR’s office. The rangeland that remains under the control of the Department contains a playa that is representative of many of the playas on the southern High Plains. It has provided a tremendous opportunity for outdoor learning activities involving playas and wetlands.

At the time that negotiations to keep the rangeland were ongoing, there was documented evidence that there were gang activities that occurred on the poorly fenced rangeland after traditional work hours and on weekends. Therefore, the Department appealed to the University’s Central Administration to fence the rangeland to eliminate these non-desirable and potentially dangerous activities (relative to human safety). Consequently, the rangeland area is completely fenced with an 8-ft high chain-link fence with locked gates.

The fenced rangeland with locked gates is not intended to eliminate any legitimate activity on the property. This rangeland provides an outdoor learning opportunity for many individuals and several departments, with permission from the DNRM. At times there have been as many as 9 to 10 different departments involved with teaching and research activities, including the Medical School. Also, the west Texas (Texas Tech) Mesonet weather station is located on the rangeland. In spite of the problems associated with livestock competition from jackrabbits and predation by dogs, the rangeland has provided excellent facilities for physiological research on mesquite and other noxious plant species, use of fire on rangelands, plant growth and development of range grasses, water use by native plants, biology of small mammals, impact of urbanization of small mammal populations, and many other projects. It has also provided a facility for forensic research for faculty in the Department of Biology and in the Department of Preventive Medicine in the Health Sciences Center.

The rangeland includes a teaching nursery and a premier quail research facility. The Quail research facilities were constructed entirely with private funds. The range barn is also located within its own compound located on the Native Rangeland (discussed in a separate section).