

Dixon Water Foundation

TEEA 2015 Winner: Agriculture



Foundation uses livestock to improve watershed and soil health.

Nestled among open land in both the Trans-Pecos and the North Texas prairie, the ranches of the Dixon Water Foundation feature an innovative use of an old “technology”: livestock. Using planned grazing strategies to aggressively graze defined fields before moving the herd, they mimic the natural grazing of migratory bison, which inhabited much of this area in the distant past. This strategy actually improves the health of soil, strengthening the root systems of vegetation, and contributes to healthier watersheds and improved biodiversity on the property.

The livestock feed intensely on small plots for short amounts of time. Their waste is left on the land and serves as natural fertilizer for the grasses. Ranch managers typically allow six months or more as a recovery period for the plants and soil. Special attention is given to areas that historically had been used for agriculture and where nutrient density may be poor. Management at the Dixon Water Foundation admits more planning is required than if livestock were allowed to graze openly, but once the plan is in place it actually streamlines daily work for the ranch managers.

Through strong partnerships with universities like North Central Texas College and Sul Ross State University, Dixon provides needed space for research whose results can then be incorporated into Dixon’s land-management practices. The foundation even managed to turn tragedy into opportunity by inviting researchers from SRSU to study post-fire recovery strategies when Dixon’s Mimms ranch in Marfa was almost completely lost to fire back in 2011.

By operating as a foundation, Dixon’s education efforts are better received by peers within the industry as well as the general public. Dixon’s brand new open-air education pavilion in Cooke County, which aspires to be the first living building in Texas, invites all to experience the beauty of the land in the way it was meant to exist.

Sustainable land management is not a new concept, but it is a concept that founder Roger Dixon prioritized during his life and intended to secure through the Dixon Water Foundation after his passing. This is not a process that occurs in a single season or even necessarily in a decade but, with a patient and consistent dedication to holistic land management, the Dixon Water Foundation is assuring the most free and open lands in the state can remain healthy and productive for future generations.