



Natural Resources Conservation Service
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NEWS RELEASE

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Controlled Burn Makes Promise of Better Elk Habitat

DATIL/MAGDALENA-More trophy elk, more mule deer and turkeys, more quail, and generally better wildlife habitat are the goals of the Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation as it launched its controlled burn plans on the Double H Ranch March 1, between Magdalena and Datil.

“Now they want rain,” said John Tunberg, range management specialist at the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS). “And it is snowing out there.”

The Natural Resources Conservation Service is cost sharing the controlled burn project under its Environmental Quality Incentives Program.

Reggie Fletcher, Double H Ranch ecologist, realized after working with the ranch that its habitat for wildlife could be improved, and that prescribed fire was the best way to do that. In 2002, the Double H approached NRCS and others regarding prescribed burns and organized the project. A private company was hired by the Double H to inventory the land and develop a burn plan, and a couple of test burns were completed.

Another contractor was hired to launch the most recent effort, and on March 1 proceeded with burning the black lines around the perimeter of the area to be fired. On March 7th and 8th the main burn was started, and 3800 acres was burned before the snows came. That is 23 percent of the area planned for burning this year. In another two weeks, work on the main burn will resume after the weather has improved. Meanwhile, a monitoring crew is on-site to ensure no hot spots flare.

It was imperative that the Double H Ranch act, because according to their herd counts the number of elk on the ranch had doubled in the past five years.

“Supply and demand were coming together,” said Tunberg. “They had an opportunity here to improve habitat, but fuels reduction was also a tertiary result. With this action they can carry more elk, and in general improve the wildlife habitat on the ranch.”

The Double H plans for future years include burning on a seven year schedule. By improving the wildlife habitat the ranch can also enhance the experiences for kids it hosts each year such as Scouts, and youth from Magdalena, Datil, and Reserve during Conservation Education Days.

For further information about rangeland improvement opportunities contact John Tunberg at (505)761-4488.

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