

BOOK CLIFFS INITIATIVE

Brett Prettyman THE SALT LAKE TRIBUNE. [The Salt Lake Tribune](#). Salt Lake City, Utah: [Jul 6, 1992](#). pg. C.6

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BOOK CLIFFS -- Crisp cool air found its way into my sleeping bag. Rather than fighting to stay warm I decided to get up and enjoy a morning walk looking for wildlife.

Not ten feet out of the tent I was somewhat surprised to see a buck mule deer in full velvet just beyond a small group of early rising Utah Division of Wildlife Resources and Bureau of Land Management employees.

I say somewhat surprised because after only one day on this remote wilderness tour of the Book Cliffs, 50 miles south of Vernal in eastern Utah, we had come to expect the sight of a deer or elk around every corner.

After a brisk walk shooting pictures of wildlife with Salt Lake Tribune photographer Rick Egan we returned to camp for breakfast.

Soon thereafter, other members of the tour -- sponsored by the Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation, The Nature Conservancy, the DWR and the BLM -- began to congregate around a picnic table and talk about the day's events.

The main objective of the Initiative is acquisition of key privately-owned lands to protect critical habitat for all wildlife, enhance watershed and associated riparian areas, and assure public access and recreational opportunities for the future.

Other objectives include establishing the Book Cliffs as a multiple-use showcase and emphasizing cooperative management focusing on increased wildlife density and diversity.

Perhaps Alyson Heyrend of the Nature Conservancy summed it up best: "The main goal is to make changes that would reflect restoring the balance to wildlife."

The Cunningham Ranch, The H.E. Graham Ranch, The Cripple Cowboy Outfit Inc., S&H Ranches Inc. and the DeLambert Ranch all rest within the 450,000 acre Initiative area.

Of the five ranches, the Cunningham and H.E. Graham properties have already been purchased by the Nature Conservancy and then sold to the DWR.

The Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation has until February of 1993 to raise \$950,000 to secure the Cripple Cowboy property.

S&H Ranches Inc. is currently on the open market, but negotiations with Initiative people are under way. The DeLambert property will remain privately owned, but the ranch is cooperating with DWR officials by changing livestock grazing practices to improve range conditions.

"The Book Cliffs area holds the greatest potential I have ever seen," said Richard Stevens the DWR's Vegetative Research Manager. "This area is the most incredible thing I have ever seen in my career."

Stevens believes with the great forage potential in the Book Cliffs, big game management will not be limited to deer and elk. "The area can hold non-game animals too," said Stevens. "The Book Cliffs offer not only hunting opportunity, but observing opportunity as well."

The area is currently a stronghold for mule deer and has an increasing elk population. According to Clay Perschon of the DWR, the Book Cliffs offers "one of the highest quality elk hunts in the state."

Black bear and mountain lion also populate the Book Cliffs.

Wildlife officials feel the Book Cliffs carry the potential of supporting populations of bighorn sheep, bison, moose, river otters and wild turkeys.

Bill Christensen, the Utah field director of the Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation, said the whole key behind the Initiative is the partnerships between the organizations.