



Desert Tracks

“Helping conserve the natural resources of the Chihuahuan Desert Borderlands through research, education, & outreach.”

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Editor: Patricia Moody Harveson

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RESEARCH IN ACTION:

Evaluating the Success of Pronghorn Restoration

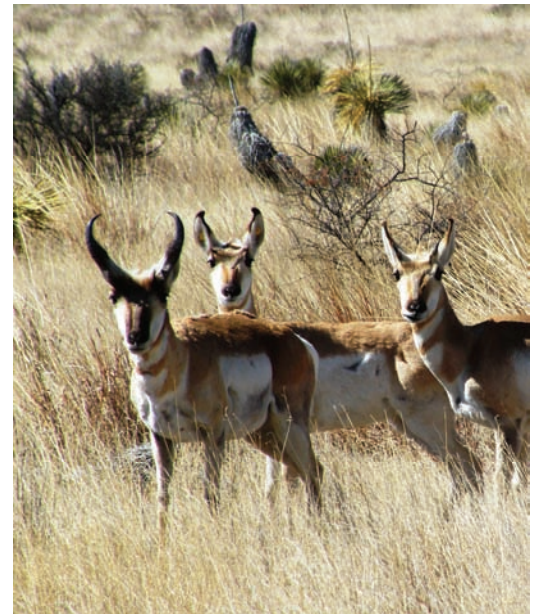
by Justin Hoffman and Louis A. Harveson

Pronghorn were once distributed over two-thirds of Texas including all areas west of the 97th meridian. Today pronghorn populations are restricted to the Trans-Pecos, Panhandle, and southern Rolling Plains regions. Historically, the Trans-Pecos region supported 60-70% of the state’s pronghorn, with numbers reaching a high of 17,000 animals during the mid-1980s. Pronghorn populations in the Trans-Pecos experienced a 70-year low of 4,731 animals in 2010 and now comprise only 30% of the state’s herd.

Several hypotheses have been proposed to explain the declining populations of pronghorn including drought, habitat loss and fragmentation, predation, genetics, and diseases. Working with private landowners and Texas Parks and Wildlife Department, the Borderlands Research Institute has initiated a series of studies investigating the causes of the pronghorn decline.

With our partners, the Institute has also initiated a restoration project to jump-start the recovery of pronghorn in the Trans-Pecos. In February 2011, we translocated 200 pronghorn from the Texas Panhandle to the Trans-Pecos.

Because we anticipate subsequent restoration efforts, we implemented a study to better understand the effectiveness of the restoration program by placing radiocollars on 80 of the 200 translocated pronghorn for monitoring purposes. Our research objectives are to assess the persistence of prong-



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A group of translocated pronghorn have found a new home on the Marfa Plateau. BRI Researchers, TPWD biologists, and SRSU students captured and relocated 200 pronghorn from the Texas Panhandle to the Trans-Pecos as part of a massive restoration project.

horn on their release sites, estimate movement rates and home ranges, monitor survival, and evaluate the reproductive output translocated pronghorn contribute to the population in the Marfa Plateau.

Results of our study will help identify the most effective means to restore pronghorn to the Chihuahuan Desert. For more information about the pronghorn restoration and monitoring project, please contact us at 432.837.8488 or visit our website at <http://www.sulross.edu/brinrm/>.



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BRI graduate students Jack Turney (l) and Curtis Greene (r) carry a pronghorn buck from the helicopter prior to loading it on the trailer.

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From the Director—“From Connecticut to California”

Who would have thought that so much could be done with such little time?

It was only November of last year when the Trans-Pecos Pronghorn Working Group decided to have a benefit to raise funds to restore pronghorn to the Trans-Pecos. We truly underestimated how the public would respond. Our initial fundraising goal was a modest \$25,000 and our intent was to initiate recovery of pronghorn with 50 animals.

But as the members of the Working Group started advertising for the benefit, making phone calls, and selling tickets, something happened. Not only did the west Texas community rally around the plight of pronghorn, but the news travelled across the state. Word of our benefit even reached from Connecticut to California!

Those that could not attend the benefit sent donations and notes of encouragement. Many shared their personal stories about pronghorn in the Trans-Pecos. All were similar: vivid memories of seeing countless pronghorn while traveling through the Big Bend, followed by subsequent trips where they saw few to no pronghorn.

With the help of our friends, we were able to raise over \$60,000 at our inaugural Pronghorn Benefit and Dinner and Dance, coupled with a challenge grant of \$50,000 from the Dixon Water and Horizon Foundations. We then leveraged an additional \$200,000 from TPWD using Pittman-Robertson Wildlife Restoration Funds. In all we have set aside over \$310,000 to restore and monitor 400 pronghorn in 2011-12.

In late February 2011, we initiated Phase I of that restoration effort. Using a helicopter and net-guns, an army of landowners, biologists, students, scientists, and volunteers successfully captured, processed, transported, and released 200 pronghorn to the Marfa Plateau. Each pronghorn sports a set of color-coded eartags and 80 received a radiocollar.

Through monitoring, we will be able to assess the survival and reproductive output of the restored pronghorn populations, and ultimately gauge the success of the effort. This data will be invaluable as we continue to restore pronghorn to other regions of the Trans-Pecos in the coming years.

Thank you again for supporting the Institute and the restoration effort!

—Louis A. Harveson

BRI Welcomes New Advisory Board Members

Sul Ross State University is pleased to introduce five new members of the Advisory Board for the Borderlands Research Institute including Brian Blackbird, J. P. Bryan, Bobby McKnight, Richard Nunley, and Ruthie Russell.

The new Board Members will join returning members Valer Austin, Alberto Garza Santos, Robie Golden, Elliott G. Hayne, Dan Allen Hughes, Jr., Bonnie McKinney, Homer Mills, John B. Poindexter, Hiram Sibley, and Allen W. Smith.

The Advisory Board is appointed by the President of SRSU and consists of constituents of the Chihuahuan Desert Borderlands including landowners, civic leaders, and others interested in conserving the Borderlands region.

Donor Spotlight: Dixon Water Foundation

In times of despair, everyone needs a friend. For the recently held Pronghorn Restoration Benefit, that friend came in the form of the Dixon Water Foundation. They, along with the Horizon Foundation, collectively issued a challenge grant totaling \$50,000. The

grant was to be used as match for funds raised for the Pronghorn Benefit.

According to President, Robert Potts, "The project was a natural fit for our Foundation. Pronghorn are an important element of our grassland ecosystem and

without them, that ecosystem could fail."

The Dixon Water Foundation has supported other projects with BRI which included assisting with costs associated with the *Desert Tracks* newsletter and rangeland restoration projects.



A grant from the Dixon Water Foundation helped BRI researchers move 200 pronghorn from the Panhandle to the Trans-Pecos.

Join Us for the 17th Leaders in Agriculture Lecture

Dr. Fred Provenza, a distinguished professor from Utah State University will deliver the 17th Leaders in Agriculture Lecture on Tuesday, April 19 at Sul Ross State University. Provenza will be presenting "The web of life: how behavior connects soils, plants, herbivores, and people to landscapes" at 3:00 pm in

the Range Animal Science Center (room 130). There is no admission charge and the public is invited to attend. A reception follows Provenza's lecture.

Dr. Provenza's research has focused on understanding behavioral processes of ungulates and livestock and how those behaviors can be used to better manage wild-

life, rangelands, and livestock.

The Leaders in Agriculture lecture series is sponsored by an endowment by the San Antonio Livestock Exposition, Inc. Previous speakers have included Clayton Williams, Rick Perry, Ben Love, Susan Combs, and Todd Staples, among others.

Please consider making a tax deductible donation to the Borderlands Research Institute to support our research, outreach, and educational programs.

San Antonio Livestock Exposition Sponsors Fellowship

The San Antonio Livestock Exposition, Inc. (SALE), has been a long time supporter of Sul Ross State University. In fact SALE is one of the largest contributors to the university contributing over \$970,000 in endowments,

scholarships, and general support to the School of Agricultural and Natural Resource Science programs since the 1980s.

Most recently, SALE has sponsored a graduate fellowship with the Border-

lands Research Institute.

The recipient of this year's fellowship is Paula Skrobarczyk of Corpus Christi, Texas. Paula is a M.S. student researching the demographics of the elk population in the Glass Mountains of Texas.



Paula Skrobarczyk is studying density, survival, and herd composition of elk in the Glass Mountains.

*Borderlands Research Institute
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Students and Faculty Attend Wildlife Conference

Twenty students and three faculty made their way to the Riverwalk in San Antonio to participate in the 47th Annual Meeting of the Texas Chapter of The Wildlife Society. SRSU students took an active role in the meeting by competing against other universities, winning awards, attending workshops, presenting papers and posters, and serving as hosts for the meeting.

Senior wildlife student, Justin Hoffman was

awarded the Outstanding Wildlife Student recognition from SRSU and was awarded the Carl D. Shoemaker Memorial Scholarship. Graduate student, Reagan Gage also won second place in the plant identification competition.

Additionally, twelve students participated in a Chemical Immobilization Workshop taught by renowned wildlife veterinarian Dr. Ken Waldrup.

Six students also presented papers including research on

elk, Montezuma quail, mule deer, songbirds, pronghorn, and habitat management techniques.



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SRSU wildlife student Justin Hoffman (r) is congratulated by Dr. Louis Harveson (l) for receiving a scholarship at the conference.