

# Spring Turnout

## Ranchers cope with vehicular traffic on U.S. 95, ATVs in Owyhee County as they turnout cattle to public lands

By Steve Stuebner

**S**pring turnout is a time that ranchers look forward to ... it's a time to drive the cattle to spring pastures with the family.

For two ranch families in Idaho, spring turnout includes an additional challenge -- the Mink family trails their cattle through busy traffic on U.S. 95 near Cambridge, and the Jaca family drives their cattle into an area heavily used by ATVs in the Owyhee Mountains.

The Minks recruit friends and family to help drive their cattle along U.S. 95. It takes lots of helpers to keep the animals moving forward in the right direction and collect the strays.

For the Minks, it was the 71st consecutive years that they've done the cattle drive on Idaho's main north-south highway.

The Washington County sheriff was out in front, stopping motorists as the cattle moved up the highway. Friends and family drive the cattle along the north side of the highway with horses and ATVs.

They tried to keep one lane open as the cattle moved through, but sometimes the cattle would cross over to the other lane.

"It went good today, and we had a hell of a good crew," says Roy Mink of Mink Land and Livestock. "When the cattle come off the feed yard, they come off like a bunch of race horses, and then generally they'll slow up a bit. It went well.

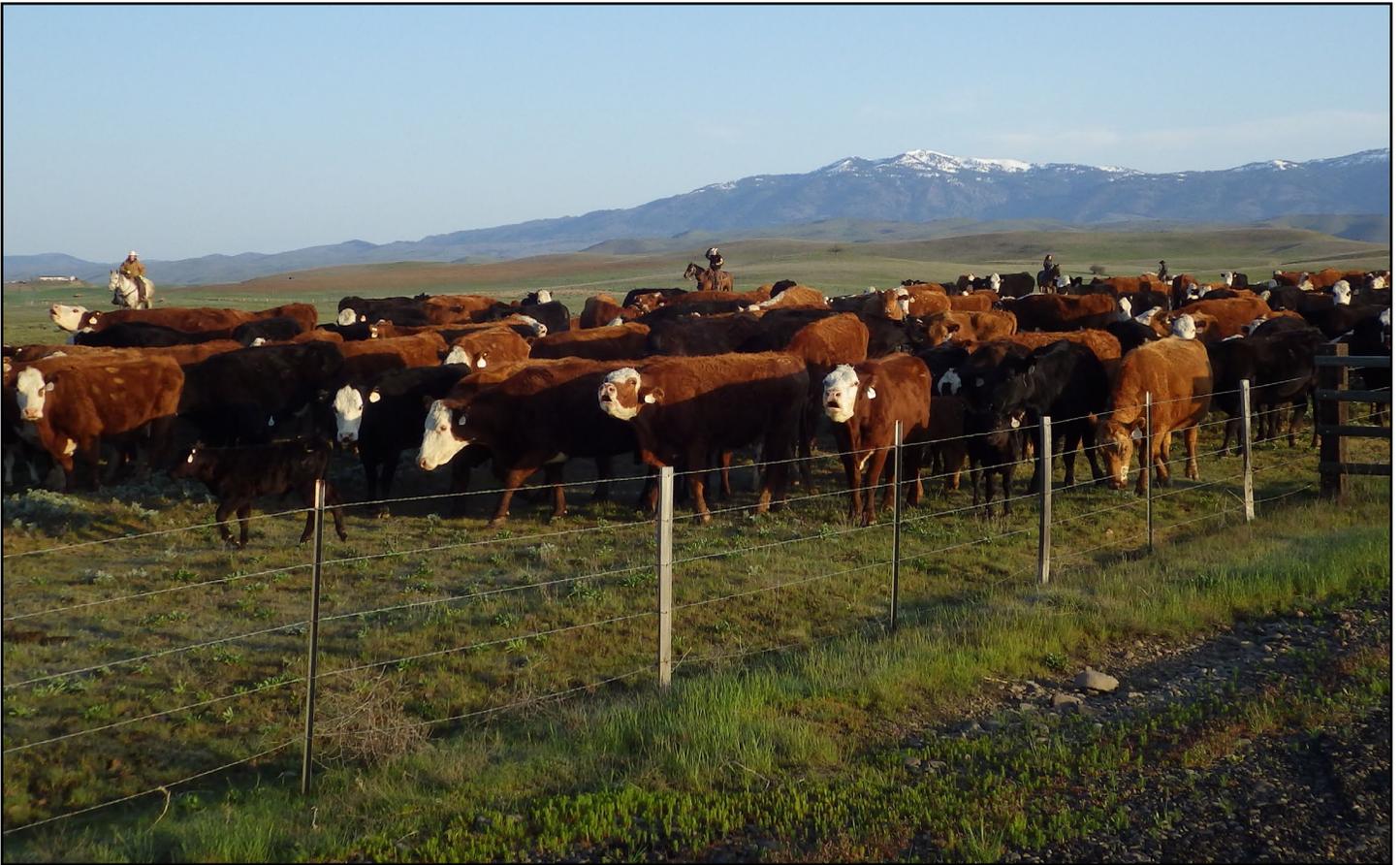
"You just try to keep 'em going. Have some kids running behind



*The Mink Family's cattle drive on U.S. 95 was the 71st year in a row that the family has trailed their cattle on the state's main north-south highway to reach spring pastures.*



*Everyone in the family participates, including Pacey Pearson, a nephew.*



*The Mink Family and friends gather up their cattle prior to herding them on U.S. 95. It was a perfect day for the cattle drive. Cuddy Mountain is looming in the distance.*

so when the baby calves crawl through the fence holes, you can get 'em back out. It hasn't always been this easy."

People didn't seem to mind stopping for a moment on U.S. 95 to let the cattle move through. Some took pictures out the window. "Wow. I've never seen this before," says Jessica Records. "Pretty crazy! I used to work on a ranch branding cattle, but they were always contained."



*The Minks drive the cattle up a hillside after leaving U.S. 95. Everything went smooth on this particular day. "It hasn't always been this easy," says Roy Mink.*

One truck driver with Knight Trucking from Las Vegas said, "I've never seen this before ... it's like a page out of the Old West."

Eventually, the Minks reached the turnoff for their spring pasture and drove the cattle into the hills. "We're turning out to our spring pasture," says Justin Mink of Mink Land and Livestock. "We take about 200 head out, and then in mid-June, we'll gather them and take them to Council Mountain."



*The Jaca Family drives their cattle into the Owyhee Mountains near Hemingway Butte on a sunny spring day.*

Mink says U.S. 95 is the most efficient way to reach their spring pasture. "It's kind of a history and tradition that a guy hates to break," he says. "It's just easier to drive them up the highway versus gathering them into a truck and hauling them. Doing it just like we've always done it for 71 years."

It's nice to move the cattle away from the home ranch to spring pastures, Mink says. "It's a great feeling ... being able to be out here in the green and the sunshine, come out and use the grass and the resources we have available to us."

Friends of the Minks enjoy being part of the cattle drive. Terry Hendrix says he participates "just for the fun of it. It gives me something to do with my horses. I like riding my horses, so it's a great activity to do something with them."

And the kids had fun, too. Why? Jarret Mink says he was there to help because everyone in the family participated in the cattle drive. Would he do it anyway? "Yeah. I like pushing calves," he says with a grin.



*The Jaca's grandkids participated in the cattle drive. This is Josune Jaca on a horse named Joe.*



*ATV riders go slow on the trail, allowing the livestock to move off of it. Public lands in the Owyhees are managed for multiple uses. If everyone can show respect for other uses, we can share the lands for many generations to come.*

Once the cattle were herded onto the spring range, the family took some leisure time to hang out, and the kids picked some wildflowers for the Easter dinner table. "We'll do our family gathering here. We'll have some cinnamon rolls and coffee, hang out a little bit, and preparing for Easter, cuz it's Easter weekend. It's been a great day. Glad everything went well," Justin Mink says.

Meanwhile, out on the front side of the Owyhee Mountains, the Jaca family led their cattle up the trail toward Chalky Butte trailhead, a popular off-highway vehicle parking area. The Jacas have ranched in the area for multiple generations, long before ATV's were invented.

"My father was born here in 1914, right on up the road at Reynolds Creek," says Inez Jaca. "His family came here in 1909 and settled on the ranch. We've ranched here, my husband and I, for 49 years. My son is ranching with us, he's the 5th generation, and the grandchildren are the 6th generation. And they love what they do. So hopefully we can stay here for many more generations and enjoy the lifestyle we have."

As the cattle approach Chalky Butte, a group of ATV riders come riding up the trail. They are experienced riders who know how to negotiate cattle on the trail.

Steven Huffman, President of the Boise ATV Trail Riders, says, "Number one, you want to slow down. You don't want to injure them or spook 'em. You want to approach them slow, normally the sound of the engine will kind of shoo them off the trail. If not, give a hollar or a shout, and normally they'll just move off."



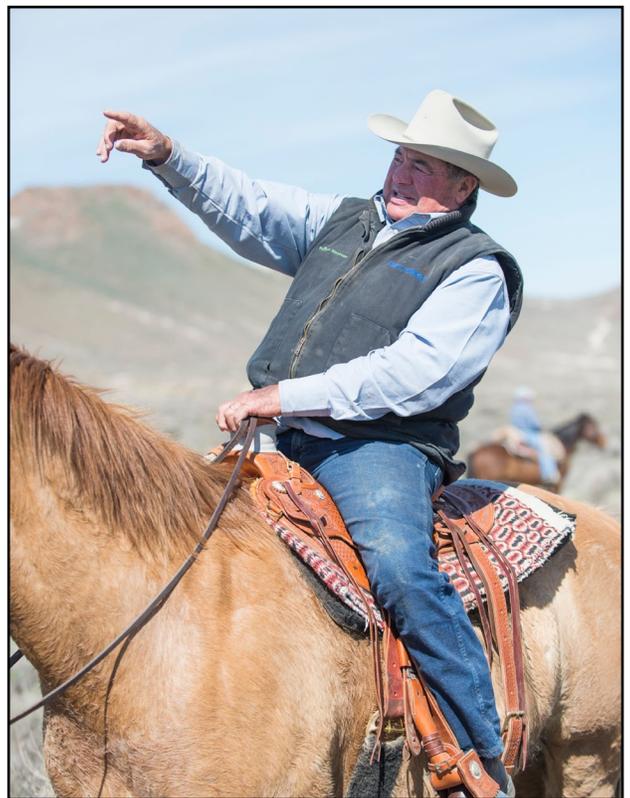
*After giving the cattle a few seconds to move off the trail, the ATV riders continue their ride.*

"The ones you really have to worry about are the calves because they're pretty unpredictable," Huffman continues. "They'll shoot off one side, and then shoot right out in front of you. So you have to be mindful of those things, but the adults will normally stay out of the way."

The Jacas drive the cattle past the ATV riders and herd them to spring pastures. And the ATV riders continue with their trail ride.

Both the ranchers and the ATV riders understand the need to share our public lands in the Owyhees. "I know how much we appreciate and enjoy this country, and we like that we can share it with the folks in town, and we hope we can have responsible shared, multiple-use of the land," Inez Jaca says. "The one thing we want stressed, we are producing food for the world's table, and it makes the economy for the state of Idaho more healthy too, so we need to be out here, but we realize we need to share it with other folks who enjoy it as well."

"Look around you, it's just beautiful out here," Huffman says. "But it is multiple use. So you also have to remember that we're visitors here. The ranchers they live here, they make their living here, so we have to be mindful of staying on the trails, and being



*Elias Jaca points out where the cattle will be heading on the spring range in the Owyhees.*



*The Jacas sell their beef to Whole Foods in Florida.*

to wholesale buyers and the product moves into the national market from there. But both families are mindful of an important bottom line -- taking care of land.

"My Great Uncle, he'd always tell me, when I was a small child, now remember one thing, you take care of this land, and it'll take care of you," Jaca says. "It's taken care of us all these years ... so that's just instilled in my mind. "Our main goal is to put meat on the world's table. And we feel like with sustainable and responsible use of the land, we will be here for many more generations."

"We need sustainable land and to take care of the environment, and replenish what we use," adds Justin Mink. "We've just got to take care of it, it takes care of us, and it takes care of people in the world for food. I'm the fourth generation, my kids are the 5th. I hope the 5th generation will have the opportunities that I have, and continue the tradition of taking care of the people and the land and the environment in general."

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good ambassadors for everybody."

The Jacas graze their cattle in the low country for about a month before following the green up to higher pastures. "The cattle are here in this area until the first part of May," she says. "We move up the country with the seasons, and eventually we get to 7,000 elevation in July 1, stay there till October, and then go back to the home ranch."

"All of our cattle go to Whole Foods now. We don't feed any antibiotics or growth promotants, and they all go to Florida in markets there."

The Minks, meanwhile, sell their beef



*The Minks drive their cattle into spring range on Council Mountain near Council.*