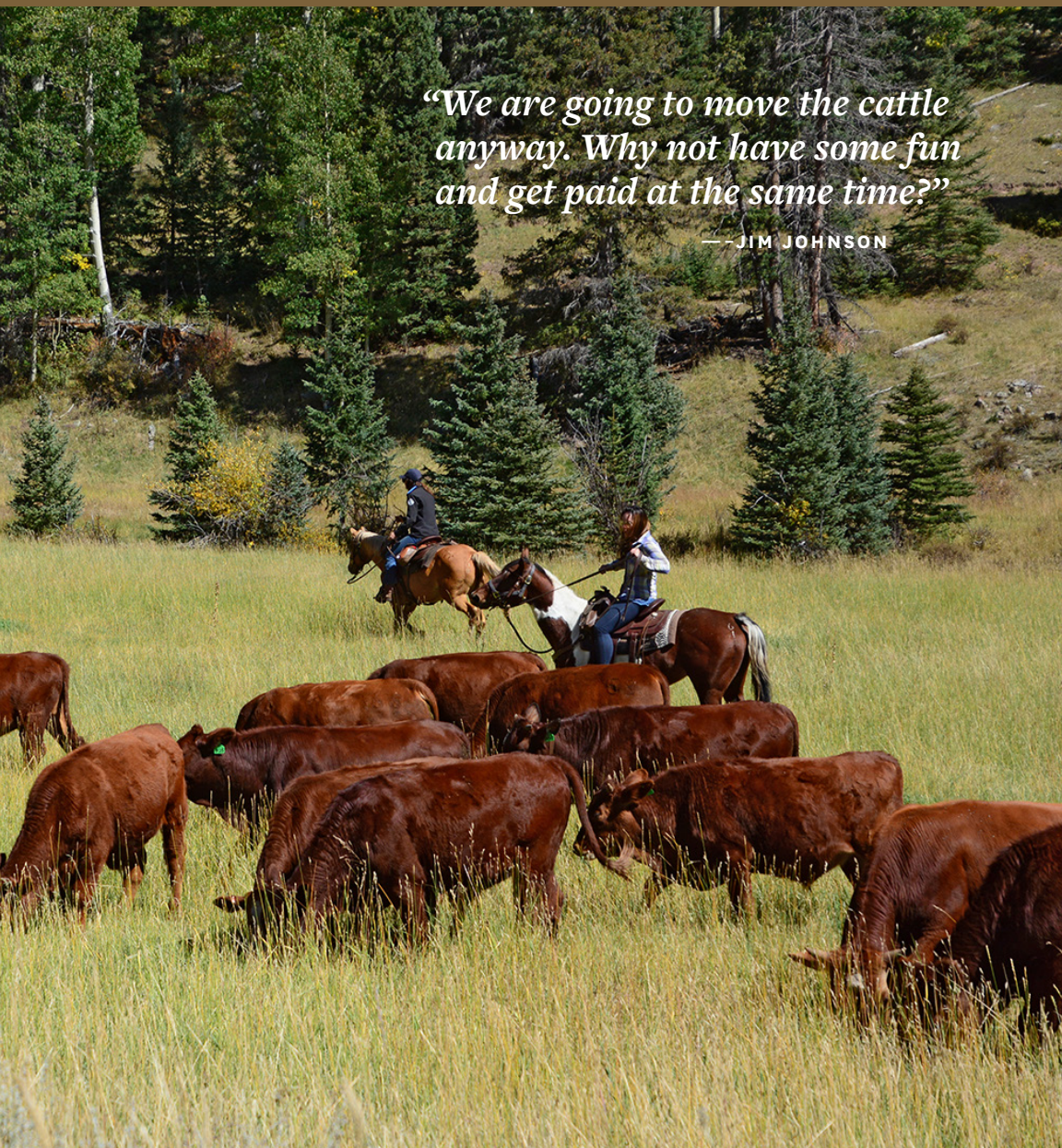


Elk Glade Ranch

Regenerative forest and grassland management to reduce fire danger, support thriving wildlife and livestock, and grow diversified ranch revenue streams.

“We are going to move the cattle anyway. Why not have some fun and get paid at the same time?”

—JIM JOHNSON



Elk Glade Ranch showcases a variety of benefits that healthy working lands can generate. Owned and operated by the Johnson and Hammond families, the ranch is nestled in the East Beaver Valley near Colorado Springs, Colorado and has thrived in the face of encroaching development and grown the value and productivity of the property by applying creativity and hard work to increase the diversity and resilience of the ranch's ecosystems and enterprises. From hunting, fishing, and grassfed beef to weddings, agritourism, and the sale of a conservation easement, the Johnsons have found many ways to leverage their commitment to regenerative management to care for the long-term health of their land, family, and community.

THE RANCH

The land that makes up Elk Glade Ranch was first ranched in 1888 (then known as the Rathke Ranch) and is still dotted with century-old buildings, homestead ruins, prohibition-era stills, and rumored lost treasure. The landscape includes pink granite cliffs, aspen and pine forests, mountain and valley meadows, and rambling streams.

REGENERATIVE PRACTICES

Caring for the ranch is a big job. The Johnsons and Hammonds own approximately 2,000 acres ranging from 8,500' - 10,000' in elevation. Much of the ranch is accessible only via horseback or all terrain vehicles (ATVs), making managing the land particularly difficult and costly.

Forest management is a top priority for the ranch to protect itself and the surrounding community. In cooperation with the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), the families have been thinning the dense forests that proliferated after logging ended decades ago in order to reduce fire danger and also support deer and elk herds that have a hard time grazing in dense woody growth.

The Johnsons and Hammonds are also caring for the meadows and valleys, historically plowed and used to grow potatoes, using a combination of re-seeding and adaptive planned grazing with cattle to restore soil, encourage plant diversity, and activate grassland health. Planned cattle grazing has also played an important role in caring for the health of their valleys where willows began encroaching and choking out grasses when beavers disappeared. The families have attempted four reintroductions of beavers, but the project has only been marginally successful and so they currently rely on carefully timed high-density cattle grazing to prune and trample the willows and care for their valley grasslands and riparian areas.

SEEING THE BENEFITS

The Johnson and Hammond families' primary goal is to "do the right thing" and to keep their land healthy and community safe, but they've had to look beyond good intentions to keep the ranch economically viable. Thanks to their innovative spirit, they've discovered numerous ways to generate revenue to support their regenerative land management.



HIGHLIGHTS

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SUPPLEMENTAL
FEED

Through improved forage production and herd management, Elk Glade Ranch no longer needs to purchase supplemental feed for their cattle herd.

2–5x

HUNTING
SUCCESS RATES

Elk Glade Ranch's regenerative forest and meadow management has significantly increased wildlife populations as well as hunter success. Hunters on the ranch enjoy success rates that are 2–5 times the state. Their sustainable hunting program generated approximately \$50,000 in net income in 2017.

\$425–495

CATTLE DRIVE FEE
PER PARTICIPANT

Grassfed cattle drives at Elk Glade Ranch cost \$425–495 per person. As part of their planned grazing program, Elk Glade Ranch hosted in 2017 30 cattle drives, 20 of which were for groups from the world-famous Broadmoor Hotel.

*“What we’re really in the business of is...
feeding the game.”*

— MARK JOHNSON



A conservation easement has been an important source of revenue to help the ranch invest in the long-term health of the land as well as purchase contiguous land to prevent development in the valley. Currently, 700 acres of the ranch is under easement with the Colorado Cattlemen's Agricultural Land Trust and the plan is to eventually put the entire ranch under easement.

Additionally, the families' management of the forests, meadows, and valleys has begun to pay dividends. Working with the NRCS, the ranch was subdivided into 13 pastures as part of a planned grazing program.

This has provided enough forage for wintering cattle on the ranch and eliminated supplemental feed costs. The grassfed cattle raised on Elk Glade Ranch are sold through an agent to Whole Foods Market at a competitive price. The cattle have also generated revenue through cattle drives. The Johnsons and Hammonds realized that the frequent cattle moves

required by their planned grazing program could generate agritourism revenue with visitors from the local resorts purchasing tickets to participate in horseback cattle drives at the ranch.

Last, from their care of the forests and grasslands, the Johnsons and Hammonds have seen the health and populations of wildlife including elk, deer, turkey, and trout increase across the ranch. With so much game, they have started a sustainable hunting program to help with management costs of the ranch as well as to keep the game populations in healthy balance.

Elk Glade Ranch shows how regenerative management can help support and create diverse economic opportunities for ranchers. While not all ranchers will be excited to host tourists and hunters on their land, the Johnsons and Hammonds are an excellent reminder that there are many ways to benefit from increasing the productivity and resilience of the land. ■



The Profiles in Land and Management Series features the work of innovative ranchers and land managers who are achieving economic and ecological benefits on working lands.

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