



Fence projects preserve pronghorn

By LARRY HENDRICKS
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Cory Kreuzer, 13, of Apache Junction stood on a ridge south of Lower Lake Mary Saturday morning.

With a small spool of wire fencing perched on his shoulder, Kreuzer watched as more fencing was spooled onto a contraption strapped to an Arizona Game and Fish all-terrain vehicle.

Why was he one of 60 volunteers out in the Anderson Mesa area working to take down old cattle fencing?

"Because my mom made me," he said, smiling. "But I don't mind it. It's good to get outside and take a break from the video games and spend some time with the family."

Saturday's event, one of several in 2008, is part of a larger, multi-year effort to restore the pronghorn antelope habitat on Anderson Mesa, said Henry Provencio, wildlife biologist for the Peaks/Mormon Lake Ranger District.

He credits the volunteers for helping the herd to grow and thrive.

"It's looking pretty good," said Rick Miller, habitat program manager for the Arizona Game and Fish Department in Flagstaff.

The herds are returning. In 1992, there was just one fawn for every 100 does. Last year there were 35 fawns per 100 does, even with the drought, Miller said.

The break-even point for the herd to sustain itself is between 20 or 30 fawns, depending on how rough the winter is.

"That made us feel like we were making progress," Miller said, adding that the herd has been gaining ground for the last four out of five years.

"We were losing them," Miller said. "They were getting too old to reproduce."

26 REASONS TO ACT

Several groups joined forces to come up with a consensus on why the antelope population on Anderson mesa was dropping.

Among the 26 identified reasons were:

Poor forage diversity



Larry Hendricks/Arizona Daily Sun Troy Christensen, left, of the Arizona Game and Fish Department uses a mechanical device to spool old cattle fencing on Anderson Mesa Saturday as part of an effort to restore antelope habitat on the mesa. Shane Stewart, right, of the Arizona Antelope Foundation and the Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation, lends a much needed hand. To order this photo go to <http://photos.azdailysun.com>

Inadequate water

Juniper invasion

Coyote predation

Human disturbance

Fencing

"Antelope, unlike elk and deer, don't jump fences," Miller said. They crawl under when it is possible, but some fencing does not allow that.

In 2002, a concerted effort was made to restore 60,000 acres of grassland on Anderson Mesa, Miller said.

Provencio said fencing was put up to keep cattle out of water sources to give antelope access to the best possible forage. Juniper trees were cut down where they had encroached on grassland areas.

At one point in the 1950s, about 1,500 antelope were catalogued in the Anderson Mesa area, Miller said. The herd size is now between 400 and 600 animals that roam between Interstate 40 and Lake Mary Road.

Miller said between \$1 million and \$2 million has been spent on the antelope project, which is anticipated to end next year.

"We're doing the best we can to reset this thing," Miller said. "If we keep trying to improve the habitat, the pronghorn should thrive. Now, the rest is up to the antelope."

GETTING KIDS OUTDOORS

Cory's mother, Kim, who is a member of the Arizona Wildlife Federation, said one of the goals for the organization is to get children outdoors and away from the television.

"It's very important to get them out of the house," she said, adding that she hopes by doing so, it will instill in her children an appreciation for the outdoors.

Shane Stewart from Gilbert, a member of the Arizona Antelope Foundation and the Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation, also said it is important to bring his son and daughter to volunteer work projects.

"So they'll have something to look back on and know they did something to preserve what their kids can use some day," Stewart said.

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