

Montana Rancher Relies on Tourism to Support Century-Old Cattle Operation

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better together

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“Tourism diversifies our ranch. In the cattle business, as everyone knows, markets vary quite a bit. All ranchers I know have to have another source of income to keep the ranch going,”

explains the fourth-generation cattleman.

Located 50 miles south of Great Falls, Anderson's great-uncles began raising cattle on the land, which borders the Lewis and Clark National Forest after Prohibition put their Last Chance Saloon out of business. His dad, Gary, began guiding hunts when cattle markets dipped in the 1970s. Deep Creek Outfitters has been supplementing the ranch income ever since.

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Growing up working on the ranch and helping his dad with the outfitter business, Anderson says guiding hunts and catering to visitors are what he knows, and the two have a great synergy.

With 95 percent of Heaven on Earth guests returning each year, many have become close friends. As he's guiding hunts or sharing the best place to cast a line, he often ends up answering questions about his cattle operation. “People come here from all over to ride horses and chase cattle, but they do not have any idea what it takes to ranch. So, I answer quite a few questions. I get to teach them and show them this way of life,” explains Anderson, who even has guests join him during calving season.

He's enjoyed sharing the work with his children, Kendra and Colton. “Working on the ranch and helping with the outfitting business taught them commonsense,” Anderson says. “At 6, my son was driving a golf cart taking clients to their cabins. My kids can have a conversation with anyone.”

During the summer months, Anderson hires a cook and staff to clean cabins and manage the river's edge Last Chance Supply Store that caters to rafters. The rest of the time, the cooking, cleaning, guiding and caring for cattle falls to him. “I'm not good at work/life balance. I work all the time.” Although it's not an easy way of life, it's the life he's chosen.

“I take a lot of pride in keeping this ranch going for the next generation. Our family has worked



Located 50 miles south of Great Falls, Vic Anderson's dad, Gary, began guiding hunts when cattle markets dipped in the 1970s. Deep Creek Outfitters has been supplementing the ranch income ever since. Vic is pictured here with his daughter, Kendra after a recent hunt.

hard to keep the ranch going, even through really tough times, like the Depression and the 80s," Anderson says. "I take pride in the work I do to manage the land and keep things looking good."

When it comes to rangeland and forest management, Anderson says rotational grazing is key. "Moving the cattle from one pasture to the next keeps them from overgrazing and it gives the grass time to replenish itself each year," he explains.

To give cool season and warm season plants time to rejuvenate, Anderson alters his rotation each season. Monitoring the plants, Gary moves cattle about every month.

Miles of fence allow Anderson to rotate his herd between nine pastures throughout his upper ranch –1,500-acres in the midst of the National Forest - and the lower ranch, 3,500-acres running along both sides of the Smith River. "I know many wouldn't agree with me, but as a rancher, I actually enjoy putting up fence. I take pride in my work," he says.

Over the last decade he has spent time replacing fence his dad and grandpa put in. And each spring he rides fence lines, inspecting them for damage caused by snow or wildlife. He used to spend a week or two each spring repairing fence that failed due to snow load or pressure from wildlife and cattle, but since he installed Bekaert Cattleman® Pro 14-gauge high-tensile barbed wire, the inspection and repairs take about a day.

"I may replace a clip here or there, where a deer or elk pushes through, or where a cow put their head through the fence, but I don't have to do any big repairs," Anderson explains.

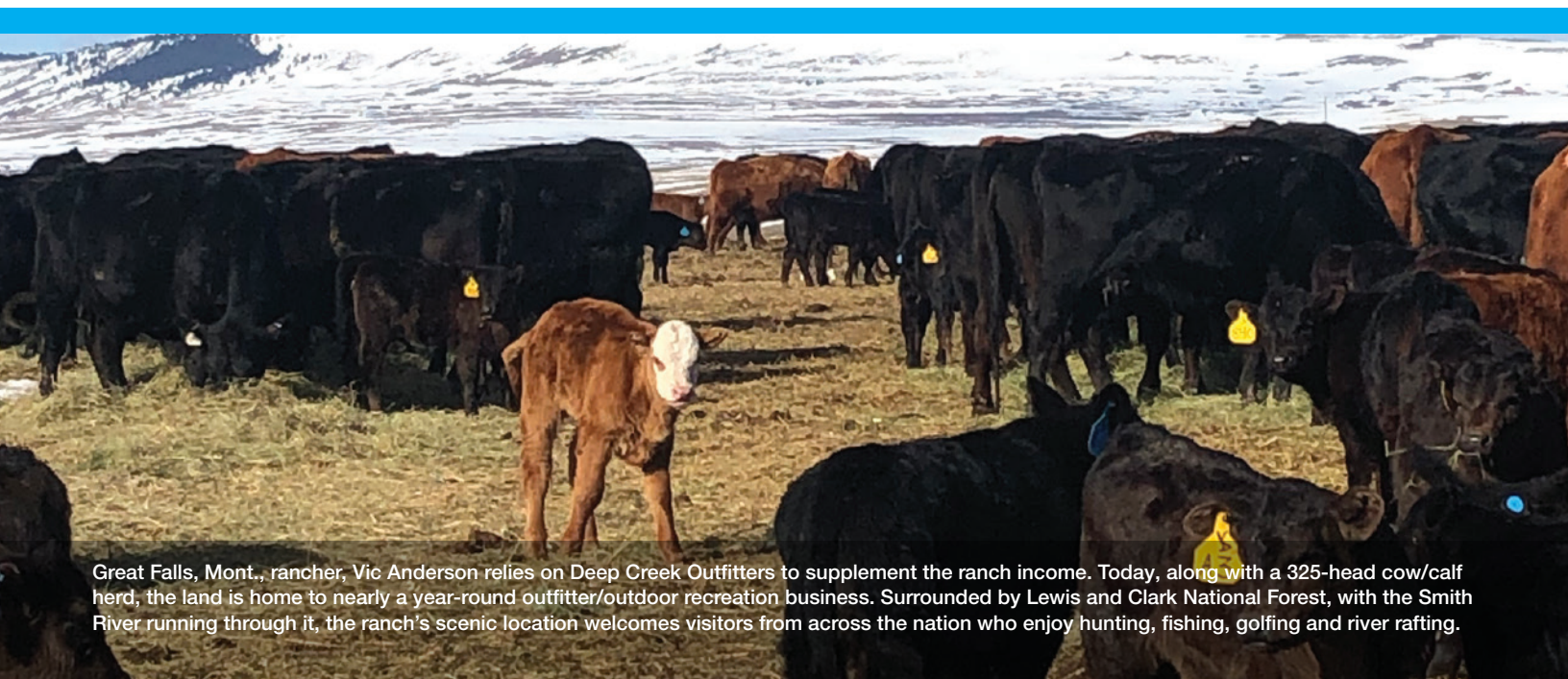
Tensile strength is the term used to describe the resistance of steel or other materials to break under pressure. Compared to low-carbon barbed wire, high-tensile barbed wire can withstand 25 to 35 percent more pressure before breaking. Because high-tensile wire only has 3 percent elongation, compared to low-carbon wire's 13 percent elongation, high-tensile barbed wire doesn't sag from snow load or when a bull elk pushes up against it.

"I see fencing like everything else I do on this ranch. When it



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comes to the things I can control, like providing guests with a nice place to stay, good meals and good horses to ride, I do it right the first time and to the best of my ability," Anderson says.



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