



Dry Cottonwood Creek Ranch

RESTORATION SOLUTIONS ON WORKING LANDS



Stop and visit us at Dry Cottonwood Creek Ranch. From I-90, take the Galen exit. Head east towards the river, and cross over the Clark Fork. Take a left at the "T" onto Eastside Road and go about a quarter of a mile. The Dry Cottonwood Creek Ranch headquarters, barn, and corrals will be on your left.


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The Clark Fork Coalition is working to build a healthier watershed through community outreach and on-the-ground partnerships in environmental restoration.

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Dry Cottonwood Creek Ranch is a 2,300-acre working cattle ranch in the upper Clark Fork valley. The ranch is located east of Interstate 90 near Galen, with 4.3 miles of Clark Fork River frontage, and Dry Cottonwood Creek flowing through the property. It supports 150 head of cattle, and includes a grazing lease on adjacent U.S. Forest Service land. The Clark Fork Coalition purchased the land with the help of two partners in 2005.

The ranch is located within the Upper Clark Fork Superfund complex, and cleanup will occur on our property during the next several years. We have invited the Environmental Protection Agency and Montana's Department of Environmental Quality to take our ranch through the most ambitious cleanup possible. At the same time, we are working to increase irrigation efficiency, improve riparian health, and reduce energy costs and water use. We hope to produce a viable model of irrigated agriculture for the Clark Fork valley, one that turns a profit while protecting working lands, water quantity, and water quality.

We want Dry Cottonwood Creek Ranch to be a place where other landowners can try out ideas and share notes about what's working and what's not—and help make sure ranching remains a part of life in western Montana. Our door is always open, and we'd love to show you around.

Sustainable Agriculture:

On Dry Cottonwood, we're modeling a suite of innovative and sustainable ranching practices. To date, we have protected Dry Cottonwood Creek and the Clark Fork River with wildlife friendly riparian fences, designed a rotational grazing program that makes extensive use of temporary electric fence, and started a comprehensive monitoring program to keep track of how our management changes the land.

Our Beef:

As part of our ongoing efforts to implement and demonstrate promising new ranching models that also make a profit, we now retain a percentage of our calf crop on the ranch. We finish these steers on grass, butcher them locally, and sell the meat directly to consumers in and around the Clark Fork watershed.

Superfund Cleanup:

As the process of remediating and restoring the Clark Fork moves forward, the ranch will serve as a proving ground for new ideas and methods. By facilitating an efficient, effective, and comprehensive cleanup on the ranch, we hope to demonstrate that restoration and ranching can complement each other.



A Living Classroom:


In partnership with groups like the Clark Fork Watershed Education Program, the Watershed Restoration Coalition, and Powell County High School, we bring local students to the ranch to learn firsthand about stream restoration, land management and ecology. Students have monitored reaches of Dry Cottonwood Creek and worked to re-vegetate and restore impacted riparian areas.

Outreach & Education:

Dry Cottonwood is a resource for residents of the Upper Clark Fork River. We host tours, workdays, and field trips to educate people about the Superfund process and projects taking place on the ranch. The ranch also serves as a field office for the Clark Fork Coalition, and is a venue for meetings related to the cleanup and stewardship of the Clark Fork River.



Weed Management:



We use a handful of biological and chemical methods to combat infestations of leafy spurge, knapweed, and other noxious weeds. Sheep grazing is the largest component of our weed management program. Each summer, a band of 700 sheep grazes across our pasture, and although they're only on the ranch for two weeks, the sheep do an excellent job of consuming and controlling invasive species. We complement their efforts with insect releases and spot spraying.

The Bottom Line:

Dry Cottonwood strives to demonstrate that good land management can be ecologically sustainable and economically stable at the same time. To this end, we've partnered with government agencies, such as the Natural Resources Conservation Service and Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks, to add roughly \$35,000 of annual, non-agricultural income to the ranch.