



The Conservation Legacy Effect

Featuring Loy Sneary

Article by LORIE A. WOODWARD
Photo courtesy of COLLEEN VAVRA

Loy Sneary of Bay City understands the power of landowner-to-landowner communications made possible through programs such as Conservation Legacy.

"When you're starting something new, it's very helpful to talk with experts, but it's vital to talk with practitioners—the people who are applying the practices to their land or businesses every day," said Sneary, who ranches with his son Adam on property that has been in the family for four generations. "When we were transitioning from set stock, rotational grazing to Adaptive High Stock Density (AHSD) Grazing, we talked to ranchers across the state and around the country who were doing it."

The practical wisdom that the duo gleaned from talking with fellow landowners helped them identify and avoid pitfalls as they adopted new techniques that have benefited the environment as well as the bottom line.

"This grazing system has been a revelation to us," said Sneary, noting that in the past four years, they've been able to increase their herd size and cut input costs for feed, herbicides, fertilizers and pharmaceuticals while increasing top soil and improving body condition for deer and the number and variety of birds including quail.

The impact on their family ranch inspired Sneary to pass the duo's hard-earned lessons forward as well.

"I feel a responsibility to share what we've learned just as surely as I feel a responsibility to carefully steward the land and natural resources in our care," Sneary said.

Along with his involvement with TWA, Sneary serves on the board of directors for Houston Audubon which owns 17 sanctuaries in five counties totaling 3,477 acres. Sneary, a former county judge and former

congressional candidate who has long been active in local, state and national Farm Bureau and trade associations such as the USA Rice Council, is a member of Houston Audubon's Land Stewardship Committee.

"It's given me an opportunity to help educate an urban audience by passing along what I've learned on our land for their use," Sneary said. "Through this experience, it's made me see the benefit of conservation organizations working together—or at least strengthening relationships—because many of our missions are similar, all driven by the same desire to leave the land better than we found it."

He continued, "The question is: How can one organization complement another and how can we reach more people in the overlap of what we do for the betterment of everyone?"

When it comes to landowners, ranchers and other production agriculturists, Sneary thinks effective outreach is achieved by creating opportunities for face-to-face interactions at seminars, field days and workshops and by recognizing common ground.

"We have to start with the baseline belief that the vast majority of people involved in land-based enterprises consider themselves responsible land stewards and attempt to do the right thing for the natural resources in their care," Sneary said. "When they have the opportunity to enhance what they're doing, they'll be open and receptive to new ideas and possible improvements."

If the new strategies can also deliver economic benefits, that's another level of real-world appeal.

"Land ownership, whether it's for production agriculture or wildlife habitat, is generally not a hobby," Sneary said. "As a business enterprise, the bottom line speaks volumes as an agent of change."

A Q&A WITH LOY SNEARY
What is the benefit of TWA's 'bigger tent'?

LS: "On our ranch, we lease our rangeland for bow hunting. When we come to TWA, we have the chance to interact with outfitters, hunters, wildlife biologists, ranchers, nature tourists and many more people who are interested in conservation from different viewpoints.

The crowd isn't a 'monoculture' of ideas and experiences. Just as nature benefits from diversity so does education and communication. One group learns from another—and we're all better for the vital, interesting, challenging conversations."

Why should people get involved in adult conservation education?

LS: "For me, land stewardship and conservation is very important. I put into action what I believe by sharing what I've learned. Our earned knowledge can benefit the land and the overall environment for the betterment of everyone, so it's our responsibility to engage and share. I think we can all agree that there is more to this life than just taking care of ourselves."

Why is it important that long-time landowners interact with first-generation landowners?

LS: "People like me who have been at this for their entire careers have gained a lot of experience. We've seen the good, the bad and the ugly and can bring that perspective.

First-generation landowners aren't confined by 'we've always done it that way,' so they often bring new ideas and new technology that long-timers may not have considered or been aware of.

It's the give-and-take that's so important. We're better together—and so is the land." ☺