

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN.

I have known Cliff Gardner for nearly all of his life. Even though Cliff has lived in Ruby Valley, while I have spent my life in the Fort Halleck and Lamoille area, which areas are across the mountain from each other, we have been good friends for over 25 years now. We both like Red Angus cattle and both of us have taken an active interest in learning improved range management practices.

I was born in 1919 and am now 82 years of age. My wife Irene and I are proud of what we have been able to accomplish during our lifetimes. We have had to work hard to get into the ranching business, but we have enjoyed owning our own ranch for a good many years now.

I started out working for wages when I was 13 or 14 years old, but I stayed at home and helped my parents a lot too. My greatest accomplishment, I believe, occurred while I was manager of the 71 Ranch. John Marbel, who was the owner of the 71 while I was there, was good to work for, and we worked well together. In addition to improving the general condition of native range, we put in a lot of crested wheat seedings and water developments.

To give you an idea of what it was like at that time, I can remember watching sage hens flying off the main irrigation ditch where they had been feeding during the day, to the alfalfa field, which was on the ranch. This usually took place in the late afternoon or evening - and the sky would be filled with them - they would be strung out for a mile or more - some leaving the area where they had been feeding, while the first were already landing at the alfalfa field.

We took a lot of pride in what we were doing back then. But we can't take all the credit. I think its important that we mention the sheep industry and the effect it had on the wildlife when there was a lot of predator control going on. It was right when the most predator control was being practiced that we had the greatest wildlife production and I'm not talking just in terms of deer and sage grouse either. With the exception of coyotes and crows, and maybe mountain lions, there were more wildlife of every kind back then.

But then, beginning in the 1960's, it seemed that the people who were working for the BLM and Forest Service were becoming more and more adversarial. It seemed that they were always raising one issue or another about livestock grazing - and most of the time, the Nevada Department of Wildlife people were right in the middle of it.

I didn't like what was going on. These people weren't helping in any way. All they were doing was creating controversy and causing problems for everyone. I went on a good many of the field trips that were organized over the years - but there wasn't mush accomplished - I believe the field trips were used mostly to pressure the ranchers into doing what the agency people wanted them to do.

At any rate, with the exception of those who worked for the Extension service, I never saw anyone that worked for the government that really knew what they were doing. Non of them seemed to have a good feel for what was actually going on, on the ground. It was



mostly political as near as I could tell. And that's the difference between them and a person like Cliff Gardner. Cliff is honest. He doesn't have a political agenda except for the fact that he loves the country, he loves the ranching community and he loves wildlife.

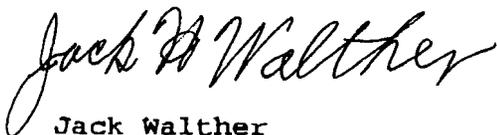
In my estimation, in these areas mentioned, Cliff Gardner has more knowledge than anyone I know. No one has put more time into the study of the history and settlement of this region than he has. Nor has anyone assembled or collected as much scientific information in this regard as he has. Cliff Gardner has the reputation of being one of the best range managers in Elko County.

Cliff Gardner did not hurt the range by putting his cattle out - he helped it. Anyone who has studied and has any knowledge at all of the history of this region knows that the country was improved by livestock grazing. Its a proven fact that the lack of livestock grazing is far more damaging to the productivity of a rangeland than is overuse. Its the mind-set of these people that is the problem. Instead of thinking in terms of improving the range through the management of livestock, the only thought by the agency people has been toward the removal of livestock from the rangelands.

What the government has done to Cliff Gardner and the livestock industry over the last twenty years is wrong. They set out years ago to remove most, if not all, of the livestock from the public lands and they have been successful. Not because the removal of livestock is beneficial - but simply because it has been their goal to do so.

And look at the problems they have caused. Who do you think created all the meadows where the wildlife have been feeding for the last 100 or so years. When the small family ranchers are put out of business, no one ever takes care of, or irrigates the lands the way the small family rancher did. And look at our wildlife - can anyone deny that wildlife increased in the West as livestock increased. And can anyone deny that as the livestock have been removed from the rangelands that the wildlife have also declined. And what of the wildfires that are now raging out of control. Thousands and thousands of acres of wildlife habitat are now being destroyed each year because of excessive fuel buildup. People are losing their homes. The only thing that Cliff Gardner is guilty of is trying to protect his family. If anything, it should be the government people that are prosecuted, if for nothing else, for placing the Gardner family in a situation where wildfire could overwhelm them and a life could be lost when trying to protect their homes and their property.

Respectfully submitted,



Jack Walther

Witness
Irene Walther 2-19-01

COMMENTS ON SAGE GROUSE

BY Jack Walther

February 4, 2012

I am ninety three years old having been born in 1919. I have lived in the Fort Halleck, Lamoille area my entire life. I am writing some of my memories of sage hens.

My first memories of sage hens are that during the hunting season there were always enough sage hens for my brothers and neighbors to hunt. At that time of the year sage hens were plentiful in riparian areas along streams where cattle had fed down the green grass. Sage hens could also be found in the green re-growth near seeps and springs after cattle had grazed off the tall grass.

Around 1926 the Elko Extension Office sponsored a predator and pest contest called the Fin and Feather Club. They gave prizes to the boys who could kill the most varmints. Points were given for different species; this is not entirely accurate but as memory serves me: 1 point for a squirrel tail, 5 points for a magpie head, 10 points for a hawk head, and 15 points for owl heads. My brother and I tried, but were outsmarted by the Lamoille boys. Several of them went in together and piled their squirrel tails and bird heads together and left them long enough that they became rotten and stunk. Then the women of the Extension office would take their word for the number killed rather than count the stinking mess. Those boys would then share the prize.

Most every ranch and family had chickens and gardens; so squirrels, magpies, crows, hawks, weasels, skunks and other predators and varmints were considered to be enemies. When possible these "enemies" were trapped, shot, or poisoned. Coyotes and bob cats were trapped or poisoned for being sheep killers and for their pelts which were sold for money. As long as sheep were run in the area government trappers were hired to trap coyotes, bob cats, and cougars to keep their numbers down. The Shively brothers of Charleston, NV trapped a large part of the country including the Fort Halleck area. They were very good trappers. Many others trapped for a little extra money. My brother, Harold, who was six years older than me trapped coyotes, badgers, and bob cats and was good at it.

My brother Paul remembers that after World War II he hunted sage hens at the Cord ranch in Jiggs where they were plentiful but all had intestinal worms. When he went back to hunt the following year, very few sage hens were found.

Tony Damale tells that at their Tonkon ranch in Eureka County sage hens had what they called "the blue wing" which was pus pockets under their wings. That disease thinned the sage hen numbers sharply.

Around 1926 John Marble bought the Seventy One Ranch, Bill Wright was the ranch manager. They did not allow hunting or trapping for coyotes. Trapping and hunting still occurred along the roads and neighboring properties.

For several years during the mid 1940's I fed cattle in the winter at the Red House on the Seventy One Ranch. One winter, every morning there were six or eight coyotes on every feed ground. I carried a 25-20 rifle and shot several of them for their pelts which were worth about \$10.00 a piece. After "10-80" poison came into use we never saw a coyote all winter. Evidently "10-80" was very effective in cutting down on predator numbers. That condition likely had a positive effect on the sage hen population.

Sage hens were in the largest numbers when cattle numbers were up. No one thought of running fewer cattle to help the range and as there were no allotments each cattleman turned out all the cattle they could. Before the Taylor Grazing Act came into being anyone could turn out cattle or horses with the exception of range controlled by the Forest Service. There appeared to be more sage hens where heavy grazing occurred and they seemed to best like riparian areas where cattle had grazed the grass down.

In the part of the Ruby Mountains that I knew, many more cattle were grazed than are presently run. In Ross Creek cattle were run by Sharps of Ruby Valley, Pete Scott of Star Valley, and later, Bill Glaser. My father, Joe Walther and later I, ran cattle in Soldier Canyon. In the Cold Creeks and above Lamoille, cattle were run by Dutch Coffin, Lloyd Blume, Dan and Lois Mackey, Chach Evans, Ken Jones, and Joe and Jess Sustacha. Now only Sharps, Ken Jones, and Bill McKnight run cattle there and their numbers have been drastically cut. There were many horse permits on the Forest back then but none exist in the Rubies today.

In the Ross-Soldier Creek areas the McBride Sheep Company ran three bands of around 1,000 sheep each. Later, Loyd Sorensen cut the number down to one

band while running in that same area. More sheep were run across the mountains above Lamoille by Gordon Griswold who later sold his holdings to Loyd Sorensen. Now there are no sheep run in that part of the Rubies.

When large numbers of livestock were present sage hens were plentiful and deer prospered.

During that time when sage hens were so plentiful, I would travel to Elko by way of the Lower Lamoille road. Going over the Hog Tommy hills there would be hundreds of sage hens along the road.

We had two heavy winters in 1948-1949 and again in 1951-1952. In each of those years we had about four feet of snow. The snow in the winter of 1948-1949 was cold, deep, light snow which a team or saddle horse could go through even though it was chest deep. The snow in 1951-1952 was just as deep but was heavy and wet which horses could not travel through. I could not see that those heavy snow winters decreased sage hen populations.

Sage hens seemed to be getting more plentiful each year until in the early 1950's. It was during this time period about 5:00 one afternoon that I remember turning from the Lamoille road through the White House gate on the Seventy One Ranch. To my left was a ditch that carried water to the meadows; to my right were alfalfa fields. Each day sage hens would go to the ditch to water and rest in the shade of the brush. Just as I made the turn towards the White House, the sage hens seemed to fly up all at once and hundreds of hens filled the air for over a quarter of a mile long and about half that wide as they flew back to feed on the alfalfa fields along Secret Creek. They flew low over a fence that paralleled the road only a few feet away from it. I never saw a dead sage hen along the fence or heard anyone say they had seen one killed by flying into a fence.

At that time we would see lots of them in the hay meadows. They liked to come in after the hay had been cut and stacked, I believe to eat bugs and re-growth.

In the mid 1950's sage hens began to decrease. I was employed by the Seventy One Ranch from 1954-1972. During those years I saw a decrease in sage hens. When I left the employ of the Seventy One a few could be seen along Soldier Creek meadows in the summer and in the hills north and east of the

highway to Ruby Valley. In the summer as we rode for cattle we could see quite a few in what we called the Big Pasture.

I am not certain why the sage hens have decreased in numbers but some factors should be considered: more predators, disease, housing development, and a decrease in cattle and sheep numbers.

Around 1956 my wife, Irene, and I bought over a section of land near Rabbit Creek (Boyd) Reservoir and planted it to crested wheat grass. There was a strutting ground on a hill in the crested wheat area. We used to see sage hens off and on during the summer. Since the "Last Chance fire", five or six years ago, burned over the mountain onto our property we have seen no sage hens there. I do not know if any survived on Elko Mountain.

It would be my thought that studies should be made of existing thriving sage hen populations along with studies of past history. These studies should be made by unbiased persons if any such people can be found.

Cliff Gardner of Ruby Valley, NV has collected a lot of data on sage hen history. His findings should be given careful consideration.

/s/ Jack Walther

