



Tim and Krista Brown enjoy a little bit of Wyoming winter at their home.

They're not in Kansas anymore, Dorothy — nor Georgia for that matter!

Property Improvement Project: Focus on the Browns

By Tom Heald

Tim and Krista Brown, their daughter, Morgan, 13, and son, Hunter, 9, are from Atlanta, Georgia – a far cry from the high plains of Wyoming.

On summer vacations out West, they fell in love with its wide open spaces, lack of population, and quality of life opportunities they found lacking in Atlanta. So, Tim, a manager for a national restaurant chain, requested a transfer. Of his choices, they picked Casper, and the family moved to town the summer of 2005.

The couple had always wanted a rural property to call their own, especially with Morgan's passion for having horses and Hunter's passion for having a dune buggy. After extensive searching, they found what they were looking for in the summer of 2008 – a 20-acre property with a house that met their needs 14 miles northeast of Casper. They were awed by the country and the freedom of having property in Wyoming.

They soon learned owning rural property in Wyoming was nothing like they experienced living in Georgia.

Tim and Krista felt overwhelmed by their lack of knowledge about maintaining their rural property. Krista works in the Natrona County University of Wyoming Cooperative Extension Service (UW CES) office, and the couple sought help from me because I help landowners with resource issues.

I visited their property and found natural resource issues that needed to be addressed:

1. Significant cheatgrass invasion of their property and surrounding lands
2. Significant disturbance of the land during construction of the house posed great potential for erosion as the geology of the area is primarily ancient sand dunes. Given the winds, which are some of the strongest in the state and nation (Casper ranks fourth in the nation in average wind speed), a reclamation/replanting program needed to be developed.

This property and another near Wheatland are part of the Property Improvement Project. Readers can view the progress and interact with Small Acreage Issue Team members by visiting www.barnyardsandbackyards.com and clicking on the Property Improvement Project link. There are links to the Facebook page and the YouTube Channel to view informative videos of the project.

The Browns fenced a holding area for their horses but there are no other fences on the property.



**Want to fence?
Contact county
planning department**

Prior to any fencing project, the Small Acreage Issue Team recommends contacting your county planning department. Some subdivisions do not allow certain types of fencing, such as barbed wire. The Brown property lies in a subdivision deemed urban agriculture, and barbed wire perimeter fences are allowed.

3. Twenty acres, no fence, and three horses on the property suggested a need to develop a reasonable fencing/pasture management plan (the Browns did build a holding area for their horses).
4. No landscaping had been done, and there were the following limitations: the property is served by one well, and water conservation will be needed; antelope and deer have browsed what few plants the Browns had managed to establish; the wind blew away the grass seed in their first attempt to

plant a lawn; Tim, and especially Krista, who loves to garden, has no practical experience in gardening methods in Wyoming.

It was perfect timing for the Browns as the Small Acreage Issue Team had recently received a grant for the property improvement project. Team members were looking for common Wyoming problems on a property to share solutions with others through this magazine and online. I nominated the Brown's property, and the team endorsed it.

The Brown's property team formed in late summer last year. Brian Connelly,

Natrona County Weed and Pest Control District supervisor, Rachel Mealor, UW CES range specialist, Martin Curry, Laramie Rivers Conservation District pasture specialist, and Donna Cuin, UW CES Natrona County horticulturalist, were brought together to help the Browns solve their natural resource issues.

The team met with the Browns and worked with them to outline the management plan for the property.

Weed Control

Connelly wanted to immediately address the cheatgrass problem. Cheatgrass, an annual grass that germinates from seed in early

autumn, could be controlled with a pre-emergence herbicide (kills seeds before they germinate) without harming existing native perennial grasses. Connely showed Tim what product to use (Plateau with the active ingredient imazapic) and how to apply it using rented sprayers from his office. This was done in early September.

Fencing

Curry made GPS coordinates (verified by legal survey) of the property to make a map of the land and is now working with the Browns to construct a fence around their entire property. He'll show Tim and Krista how to build the fence this spring. Meanwhile, Curry and Mealor are working with the Browns on pasture management (when and how long to graze) and devising fenced paddocks for the few weeks of the year the horses can graze outside their holding pens. Timing and duration of grazing will be critical to ensure the Brown's prairie pastures are not over-grazed.

Erosion control/ revegetation

Ideally, the disturbed ground around the house should have been planted back to native grasses in late autumn, but winter arrived early prompting the postponement of the seeding until March. Together, Connely and Curry surveyed the native grasses, and the Browns purchased a custom mix from a Wyoming seed company. Native grasses include blue gramma, prairie sandreed, and western wheatgrass. The seeding rate will be approximately 14 pounds/acre, and Curry will bring the district's small planting drill that can be pulled by a 4-wheeler to get the seed in the ground. A small harrow is dragged behind the seeder to cover the seeds. Martin designed an erosion control strategy, utilizing plastic woven snow fence anchored with steel T posts, to reduce the wind's effects and promote drifting of snow over the disturbed ground. Tim was left to do the post pounding.



Morgan and Hunter Brown with their three horses.

Landscape

Cuin and Krista are working to develop a landscape plan. Although Cuin is aware of plants deer don't like, there is no literature on what antelope like or don't like in terms of landscape plants. The landscape plantings will be experimental when it comes to antelope. Krista is rethinking her vision of what a rural Wyoming landscape is compared to her previous gardening experiences in Georgia.

Going Forward

The Browns have been great to work with, says Tom Heald, University of Wyoming Cooperative Extension Service educator. "They have embraced their property makeover and have shown they are committed financially and personally," he says. "As Tim put it, 'We want to leave this property in better shape than we found it.'"



Tim Brown installed a snow fence to control soil erosion and capture snow.

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