

lands left unused or possibly reforested. Of course, this would mean hardship not only for those individuals directly involved but would alter the economy of the area significantly.

Without a firm grasp of potential future events, it is difficult to initiate policy discussions. As yet, neither the research required nor the necessary policy discussions have been undertaken. All those concerned with rangeland management should observe the ongoing process carefully for the insights it may provide in the event there are similar accidents in the future. As yet there are more questions than answers.

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Once Upon a Time...

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In the mythical kingdom we'll call Sheldon, there once was a king that favored antelope. Genuine prong-horns really were the delight of his eye. So the king issued a decree that hence-forth the kingdom was to raise an abundance of antelope.

He conferred with his Chief Soothsayer and asked him how to go about it.

"Well," said the Chief Soothsayer, "the first thing we ought to do is get rid of those darn cows. Everybody knows that."

"Look into it," spake the king. "See how to do it."

So the Chief Soothsayer wandered about and thought for awhile and came back and told the king what he'd figured out.

"Over on the east side, in the Province of Dufferina, we have about a hundred head of antelope. There are only a couple of stockmen over there. If you wave your magic wand and smite the cows, surely food and water in abundance will grace the land."

"But our big antelope herd is over on the west, in the Province of Susanville," objected the king. "How many antelope do we have over there?"

"Oh, near five hundred head of the beauties," smiled the Chief Soothsayer. "But there are a bunch of ranchers over there and they say they'll go to war if you smite their cows."

"Hmmm," mused the king. "Well, let's do the Dufferina first then. Once the antelope herd gets up to two hundred head, we'll have a good reason to smite the cows over west. By the way, why should we rid the land of cows?"

"Competition," asserted the Chief Soothsayer soothingly. "Everybody knows the darn cows are eating all the spring

forbs so the antelope can't get enough. That's why the herd hasn't increased the last few years. So once we rid the land of cows, the mama antelopes can get lots of forbs and give lots of milk and the babies will grow up swift and strong."

"Hot dog!" said the king. "Sounds perfect. Stand back, here we go!"

The king reared back and waved his magic wand smote every cow in the Province of Dufferina. SHAZAM!!

The following year the king summoned the Chief Soothsayer and inquired about the antelope.

"Oh, the west side bunch is doing very well," spake the Chief Soothsayer.

"And how are the east-side bunch doing?"

"Not so good," admitted the Chief Soothsayer ruefully. "Must be the darned drought. We raised very few fawns."

Two more years passed. The king summoned the Chief Soothsayer again.

"Hey," said the king. "Is this report right? We only got thirty mature antelope left in the whole Province of Dufferina?"

"Yep."

"How come?"

"Darned drought," shrugged the Chief Soothsayer. "Must be the darned drought."

The king thought for a day, then put forth a proclamation asking all the Wise Men to assemble unto him and tell him howcome his east-side antelope herd had gone plumb to hell. And forty-seven Wise Men gathered from far kingdoms like Yale and Minnesota, including the Kingdom of Washington. They conferred for three days and then reported to the king.

"Must be the darn drought," they agreed. "Everybody knows that removing the cattle is a good thing. All the cows do is eat up all the forage so the antelope starve."

"Unless maybe it's poachers," hinted one darkly.

A scowl creased the countenances of all present.

"Nope, we patrol all the time," said the king. "I done looked into that. Maybe it is the darn drought." But he wasn't sure, at all.

Well, the king disguised himself as a cowpuncher and left the capitol for the first time. He'd been so busy doing paperwork that he'd never had time before. He wandered over east and made camp near the few remaining antelope. Pretty soon he heard a hail and the king invited the man to light and eat. The visitor turned out to be a weather-beaten, sure-enough cowman, who we'll call Buster. The king had been a pretty fair camp cook back when he was just a lowly Soothsayer so he bustled around and made a stew in one dutch oven and some biscuits in the other.

After they had partaken and were sitting leaning on their saddles, coffee cups in hand, the king cleared his throat. He'd told Buster that his name was George, and as far as I know, maybe it was.

"I hear tell," said George, "that there used to be quite a few antelope around here."

"Yep," ventured Buster. "Over a hundred head."

"Wonder what happened to them?" speculated George.

"They say the king waved his magic wand and smote all the cows."

"Reckon the king kinda missed and smote the antelope, too?"

Buster looked at George pityingly and snorted.

"Shucks," said George. "I'm puzzled."

"Hell, it's real simple," said Buster. Then he rolled up in his saddle blanket and went to sleep.

The king had a hard time getting to sleep, he was thinking so hard, and when he awakened the next morning Buster had already pulled his freight.

"Durn!" said the king. "I was gonna make him tell me howcome whatever it is that's so simple, too."

He went back to the capitol and the Chief Soothsayer started dinging on him again to smite the cows off the Province of Susanville. The king sent the High Sheriff

over to talk to the cowboys over in that Province but the High Sheriff returned carrying his head so the king backed off for awhile.

"I sure wish I could find that Buster guy," he thought. "I've had all the Wise Men out to tell me why the antelope are practically gone from over the Province of Dufferina and all they tell me is that it's the darn drought. But we've had two good springs and good fawn crops, but even the grown antelope are vanishing. I better go look some more."

So he told the Chief Soothsayer to take over and saddled his horse and rode to the west side of his kingdom and sat around on various hills for a couple of weeks, watching the cattle fang off the grass and immersing himself in deep thought. The cattle drifted here and there, happily chewing the big coarse grass. Most of the precipitation came as winter snow and the grasses grew mostly in the spring from the snow-melt. It was hot and dusty now in July and the king cared not when a rare thunder-storm got him wet.

As he was headed back toward the capitol, the king tarried near an antelope herd which was walking in the old cow tracks. He snuck up with his field glasses and watched them. All of a sudden his head went 'Boing!' and he sat up, scaring the heck out of the antelope.

The king went back to his horse and there was another rider there.

"Howdy, Buster!" as they shook hands warmly. "By golly, it is simple isn't it?"

"Sure," grinned Buster. "The spring competition wasn't what was bad for your antelope. Most springs are so short they's durned few weeds anyway. It's the long hot summers when the baby antelope die, unless they can follow the cows and eat the tender regrowth of the big tough grasses. Antelope just can't eat the big grasses on account of they are too darn study for an antelope to digest."

"I finally figured that out," admitted the king. "I sure wish I could figure some way to put cows back in the Province of Dufferina, but once the magic wand is waved, that's it, buddy."

MORAL: When people start saying 'Everybody Knows', you better go take another look.

