

*Friends of Sonoita Creek*, as you may remember, has an ongoing project to support AZ Game and Fish (G&F) and AZ State Parks (SP) in surveying all the fencing around the Sonoita Creek State Natural Area, including the G&F and State Land Trust lands under their purview around Coal Mine and George Wise Springs. The goal is to collect hard data in a uniform format to help the agencies secure the funds necessary to repair the fencing where needed to keep cattle and horses out of the Natural Area and the Springs areas. These areas were designated to protect rare and endangered species, such as the Gila Top Minnow, but because of state budget cuts to the agencies, there has been no regular oversight. Cattle are big critters and capable of breaking down the fencing if 1) they are thirsty or hungry and 2) the fence is weak. Once that happens – and it certainly has – protection of these sensitive areas is seriously compromised.

A group of FOSC volunteers, occasionally accompanied by G&F and SP personnel, has been able to complete the survey of about half the Natural Area and about 2/3rds of the Springs areas. Two rough areas around the Springs were surveyed in October, but it was too hot so we decided to postpone the completion of the surveying. We expect to pick up where we left off sometime in December.

So far, the team, led by our fearless leader Zay Hartigan, has found fencing in places to be in excellent condition, in others to be quite wobbly and old, and in others to be completely down. In one place, the wires had been cut clean through. [See pic for an example of the NW fencing around the Springs areas.]

Cattle in the Natural Area are now common, but seem to be more rare around the Springs areas now.

[See the picture provided by Lynn Davison of a rancher herding cattle within the Natural Area.]

Ranchers have been cooperative on this project, meeting with us at Patagonia Lake State Park before we began the project and helping us gain access through the remote and private lands to the north of the Springs and Natural Areas, for example. We'll all continue working together to solve this problem, but it will take time. Please stay tuned for regular updates, or call Anne Townsend at 520-394-0173 for more information or if you have questions.