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LONGHORN CATTLE INCREASE UNDER FEDERAL PROTECTION

From a point close to extinction less than 25 years ago to a herd of more than 500 animals today, is the record of increase in Texas longhorn cattle in the United States under Federal protection, Secretary of the Interior Douglas McKay said today.

Although a few longhorns are held in private ownership today, the majority of these animals are to be found on national wildlife refuges, administered by the Fish and Wildlife Service. The largest herd, numbering 376, is maintained at the Wichita Mountains Refuge, near Cache, Okla. At the Fort Niobrara National Wildlife Refuge, near Valentine, Nebr., the herd totals 146. Four steers are located at the Malheur National Wildlife Refuge, Burns, Oreg., and two bulls are on the National Bison Range, Moiese, Mont.

Less than a quarter of a century ago, the Texas longhorns had all but vanished from the Western Plains where the herds once numbered in the thousands. It was difficult to find more than one or two animals in these widely scattered locations. Had it not been for the crusading efforts of a few individuals who were reluctant to see this symbol of the pioneering era disappear, it is doubtful that there would be any longhorn cattle left in the United States today.

The saga of the longhorn goes back to 1521 when the first cattle were brought to American shores by Gregorio Vallalobos, a governor-general sent to "New Spain." The late John Hatton, of the United States Forest Service, and probably the outstanding authority on longhorns, stated that "these Spanish calves were the progenitors of the millions of longhorn that spread from Vera Cruz northerly over the coastal plains of Texas and the plains region of the Far West. ... They became the pioneers of our western cattle industry."

After the Civil War these cattle were still numerous. Then livestock breeders began raising heavier and beefier cattle and by 1920 it became apparent that only prompt action could save the Texas longhorn from extinction.

One of the men who forcefully called attention to the fact that the longhorn was dying out and should be preserved was the late Will C. Barnes, public official, author, and one-time cowman. Probably to him more than to any other one man should credit be given for the preservation of the longhorn. The present Wichita herd is a living monument to Barnes' efforts to save a remnant of his hard breed.

Working for the Forest Service, Mr. Barnes and Mr. Hatton began a long trek in July 1927 in search of longhorns. The trip was financed by a Congressional appropriation made at the behest of the late Senator John B. Kendrick of Wyoming. Not until the quest began did livestock breeders realize how close to extinction was

the longhorn. The two foresters traveled more than 5,000 miles and examined more than 30,000 head of Texas cattle before they collected a herd of suitable specimens of the longhorn type.

Little by little, a herd of 20 cows, 3 bulls, 3 steers, and 4 calves was collected and shipped to the Wichita Refuge in August 1927. From this nucleus of 30, the herd has now increased to 376. Animals showing undesirable characteristics are weeded out each year. To improve the herd and breed out foreign characters, typical longhorn bulls were purchased after much searching in Central Mexico on two occasions.

Longhorns may be described as leggy, hardy, active animals with long keen horns and an aggressive disposition. In color they range from black, brindle, dun, spotted, buckskin, red, roan, and white to various combinations of these colors. Coarse hairs about the forehead and in the ears, and a fish-shaped prominence of the bone along the top of the rump, just back of a line across the hip bones, are special characteristics.

In size, longhorns have seemed to vary with the locality. In Florida, 400 to 700 pounds was an average weight; in Old Mexico they were not much larger. In Texas, however, the animals weighed from 500 to 1,200 pounds. On the Wichita Refuge the longhorns weighed from 800 to 2,000 pounds, and two of the longhorn steers tipped the scales at 2,045 and 2,035 pounds each.

Longhorns are well suited to the arid conditions of the Southwest. These cattle will graze on rough hills where domestic cattle will not go and will travel greater distances to water than will the modern beef breeds.

Being susceptible to the dread Texas-fever tick, the strain began to disappear when ranchers in the Gulf Coast and lower Rio Grande regions began crossing their longhorns with Hindu, or Brahma cattle. The Brahma acquired its place in the Southwest through its resistance to mosquitoes, flies, and the Texas-fever tick.

Longhorns are not a scrub breed, as many people think. Under favorable conditions, these cattle will develop into large, often fat, animals. Ranger William E. Drummond, an old time cowpuncher who cared for the Wichita herd for many years, claims that longhorns will butcher out as much meat to the 100 pounds of live-weight as domestic cattle.

Slow of growth, a longhorn requires two or three more years to attain maturity than do more desirable breeds. It keeps growing until seven or eight years old. As long as the animal grows, the horns continue growing. On record are horns with spreads of six, seven, and even eight feet from tip to tip.

While the Texas longhorn cannot be classed as a game animal, its preservation is considered desirable because this type of cattle was so prominently identified with the early history of the West and the settlement of the country.

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(Note to Editors: Pictures of longhorn cattle are available, on a loan basis, upon request to the Fish and Wildlife Service, Division of Information, Washington 25, D. C.)