

# OUTDOORS

## Unlikely group of volunteers builds fence in Kaibab district



Photo courtesy Rich Leightner.

**MEMBERS OF A WORK PARTY** met in the North Kaibab Ranger District last month. Left to right, Terry Walsh of the Arizona Deer Association, Dustin Burger of the National Forest Service, Lyle Walsh, Jeremy, Ethan Aumack of the Grand Canyon Trust and Kari Malen of the Trust.

Environmentalists and sportsmen collaborate to keep cattle out of local lake environments.

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**PAGE** — An unlikely partnership between an environmental group and a sportsman's group has produced fencing that will keep cattle out of riparian areas at two lakes in the North Kaibab Ranger District.

The work party saw members of the Flagstaff-based Grand Canyon Trust and the Buckskin Chapter of the Arizona Deer Association work, eat and joke together in the wilderness on July 22 and 23

near V.T. Lake. The work continued a few days later at nearby Deer Lake.

It was an unusual alliance, and one that was not uniformly popular at first. Some members of the Buckskin Chapter board gave up their seats in protest.

The idea was the brainchild of Rich Leightner, the Northern Arizona habitat projects chairman of the Buckskin Chapter. The chapter, based in Page, Fredonia and Kanab, Utah, has been working in the Kaibab since 2000, repairing water tanks and fencing for

habitat.

But the June fires thinned out assistance from the Forest Service and state Game & Fish, so Leightner turned to the Trust on a whim. Two days later, Leightner, Buckskin president Walt Corn and the Trust's Ethan Aumack met for dinner at the Cliff Dwellers Lodge near Marble Canyon.

Aumack later met with the Buckskin chapter's board and weathered some very pointed questions, Leightner said.

Eventually they organized a party of 22 people, including the Forest Service's Dustin Burger — and built a fence measuring nearly a third of a mile. The parties

built a camaraderie that included good-natured shots at each other.

"He (Aumack) calls us 'The Hook-and-Bullet crowd,' and we call them, affectionately, 'the Huggers', or 'the Greens'. And there were many jokes and jibes back and forth," Leightner said. "It was a wonderful atmosphere. Everybody got along.

"There were questions, 'What do you guys think about this?,' 'How do you guys feel about that?' And it didn't matter. We were there for one issue, and that was to preserve habitat in natural waters, and we're planning on more."

The fence will prevent

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cattle from stomping through the wetlands around V.T. and Deer lakes, damaging plant life and microorganisms.

"Cattle have a tendency to push through what they perceive as a natural bottom and eat plants and leave waste," Leightner said.

V.T. Lake is located about 23 miles south of Jacobs Lake and 4½ miles north of the entrance to the North

Rim. The Trust has a grazing permit at the nearby Kane Ranch. The area was spared by wildfire. A couple other areas the Buckskin Chapter had been considering for this summer's project were not, however.

After finishing at V.T. Lake July 25, crews moved on to install fencing at nearby Deer Lake on July 27.

Also instrumental in the project were Kari Malen, of the Trust, and Steve Chevront, the Phoenix representative for the Buckskin chapter.

"In my mind this was a very

big event," Chevront said in a July 25 e-mail to fellow Deer Association members. "The Grand Canyon Trust is supervised by some very smart folks who are willing to work with us...This group is willing to accept we have differences, and can concentrate on how we can work together for the habitat..."

A Dutch Oven meal cooked by Jay Esplin also helped build the spirit of the new alliance.

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