

Barber County Grasslands Award – James Colborn

For over 20 years James Colborn has been fighting cedar tree encroachment. He spent countless hours cutting trees that were in easy to reach areas leaving out trees in the bottom of canyons or on the edges. With the flint hills in the back of his mind he knew he needed to do something about all the woody encroachment on his land. Even with the cutting James was fighting a losing battle. With the help of GPGI James and his son started to work. James said that having a game plan and sticking with it is why they were able to get over 400 Ac of tree encroachment cut in just a little over a year. James is already seeing the plus sides of cutting all the woody encroachment - first, being able to find his cows. It wasn't unheard of for a pair to split from the herd and go missing for 3 days, now they can only hide in tall grass. Secondly and most importantly he is seeing water return in his low areas saying that even in times of drought there were areas that may not have standing water but would be muddy. Finally, the financial burden. James knew the bill to hire a contractor to cut trees would be large, but he also knew the bill keeping trees on site would be larger. Every acre that trees grew on were grass acres lost. Every hour spent chasing cattle out of dense tree stands were hours of other work not getting done. At the end of the day James said it was all worth it. Being able to sit atop a hill and look over a tree free rangeland and the pride that comes with it, has made him keep working on all his other ground, even reaching out to his neighbors to clean up more trees along the fence line, effectively reducing the amount of rangeland he no longer has to monitor for tree recruitment.

Barber County Grassland Award – Phil and Mary Lou Hinz

Although this year's recipients hadn't planned on being ranchers when they married, they quickly adapted to the challenge and have spent over 50 years working to maintain and improve the family ranch for future generations. They have always been willing to assist neighbors and have allowed their property to be used for equipment demonstrations to help educate others. Following the Anderson Creek fire, this year's recipient met the challenge of standing eastern red cedar carcass removal by logging over 4,000 hours in his skid steer piling and pushing carcasses. This work was followed by hand cutting of scattered live trees, ball and chain work on standing carcasses in the draws that couldn't be reached with the skid steer and finally a prescribed burn to remove debris and refresh the grass. Although they know their work isn't complete, their dedication to restoring a healthy, open, "tree-free" prairie is commendable.