

BUSINESS

# How 10,000 sheep and their Peruvian handlers trek 300 miles across the hills of Wyoming

By [Hamza Shaban](#) and Alex Benja  
January 19, 2023 at 6:00 a.m. EST

Wyoming may be known as the cowboy state, but for photographer Alex Benja it was the shepherds that caught his eye.

“I was driving down a dirt road,” he recalled, “and suddenly there were 2,000 sheep in front of me, with shepherds.”

These shepherds, primarily from Peru, were accompanying a herd that totals 10,000 sheep on their annual 300-mile round-trip migration as the seasons change — following the greenest pastures.

Since December 2021, Benja has joined this journey.

Benja’s photographs in the deserts and mountains of Southwest Wyoming underscore the hidden costs of the United States’ \$700 million sheep farming industry, which supplies grocery stores’ shelves with lamb and retailers’ clothing racks with wool fabrics.

The industry has declined dramatically since the end of World War II, when U.S. sheep numbered around 50 million. As synthetic fibers grew in popularity and demand for lamb and mutton meat faded, operations dwindled. The USDA estimates there are roughly 5 million sheep now in the United States.

Wyoming is the fourth largest sheep producer in the country. The full herd of 10,000 animals that Benja followed belongs to a family operation that’s been running for five generations, Julian Land & Livestock.

The sheepherders, as they are known out West — nodding to the open land, the massive herds, and to the large ranch operations, as opposed to the smaller shepherd farm flocks of the East — have to be fully nomadic. Working through tough, three-year stints on employment visas, the immigrant sheepherders look over the animals as they follow what's known as the green wave.

As the seasons turn, grass, plants and edible things start to green up, moving higher and higher in elevation. The animals follow the action upward as the snow melts, hanging around the mountain tops in lush green areas with ample streams. Come fall, they make the reverse journey, and climb back down to the winter grazing lands.

Benja made multiple, month-long trips to visit the sheepherders.

The sheepherders, who make about \$1,800 per month, live outdoors in remote environments, without running water or electricity. Solar panels that charge their phones provide the only connection to their families and the outside world.

No permanent structures exist on the grazing route since the herd moves about every three days. The sheepherders sleep on wheeled shacks that can accommodate two people.

“It’s not something you expect, people living three years outdoors, through the winters with few modern accommodations,” Benja said. “It could be 150 years ago and nothing in their lifestyle would change besides their cellphones and solar panels.”

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*Editing by Haley Hamblin and Karly Domb Sadof.*



# BIG SANDY RIVER RANCH

Sublette & Sweetwater Counties, Wyoming



For more information or to schedule a showing, contact Theo Hirshfeld at  
58 E. Benteen St., Buffalo, WY 82834  
Phone (307) 684-9556 | Toll-Free (888) 684-9557 | Cell (307) 217-0562  
[info@pearsonrealestate.com](mailto:info@pearsonrealestate.com) | [www.PearsonRealEstate.com](http://www.PearsonRealEstate.com)



# Big Sandy River Ranch

## Sublette & Sweetwater Counties, Wyoming

*An exceptional low-overhead livestock production ranch  
with numerous recreational opportunities!*

### Property Details

8,573 +/- Deeded Acres  
32,749 +/- Acres USFS Permits  
20,273 +/- State of Wyoming Lease Acres  
981,931 +/- Acres BLM Permits  
1,043,526 +/- Total Acres

### Offering Details

**\$19,500,000**  
(Nineteen Million Five Hundred Thousand Dollars)  
Cash to the Seller

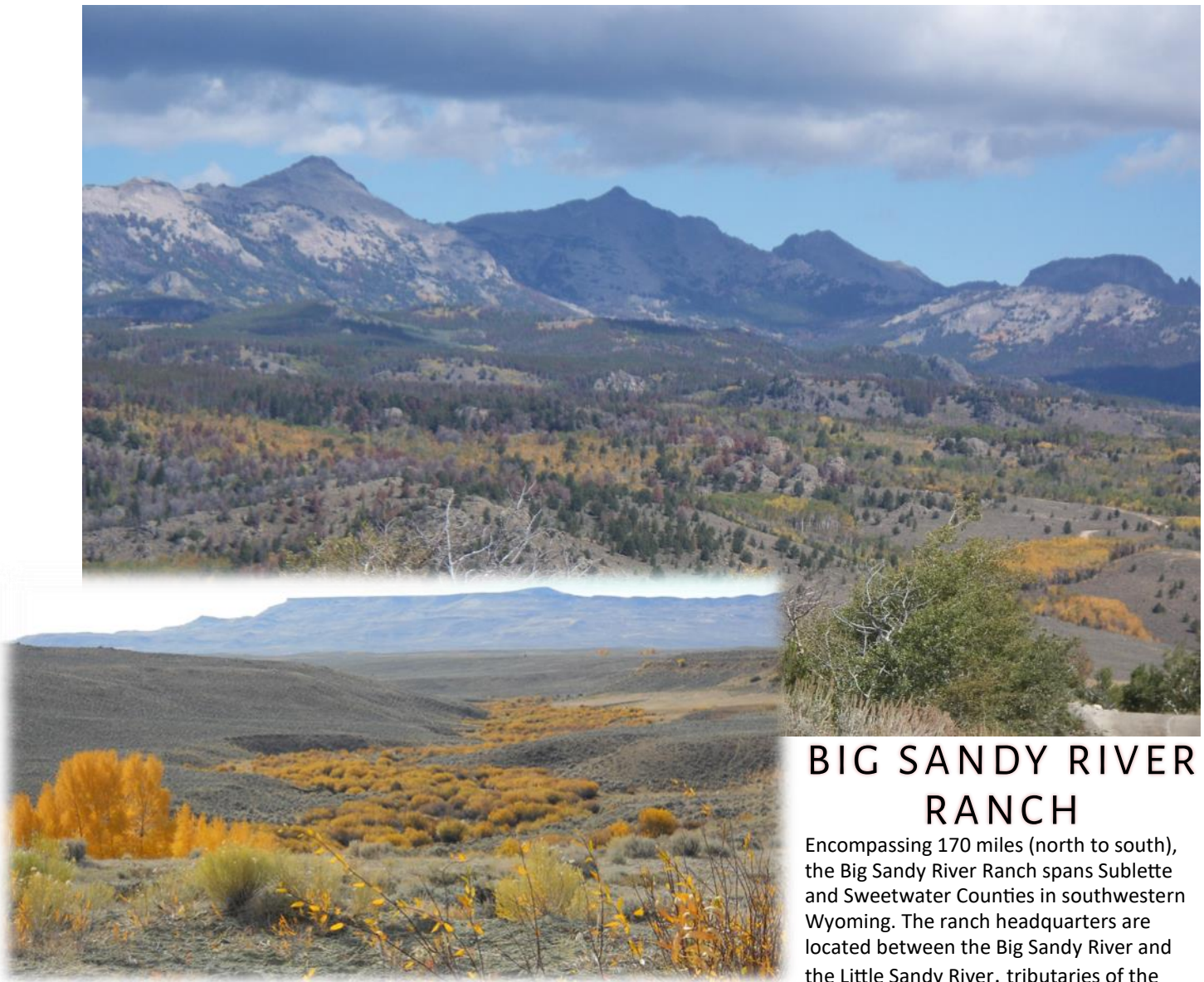
2019 Taxes: \$8,587 (approximate)

The ranch ownership is in four separate entities, two of which are 'C' For Profit Corporations, one Limited Liability Co. (LLC), and a Sole Proprietorship Wyoming Corporation.

*The Seller reserves the right to effectuate a tax-deferred real estate exchange pursuant to Section 1031 of the Internal Revenue Code and the Treasury Regulations promulgated thereunder. The Buyer shall agree to cooperate and shall not incur any additional liability or expense in connection with Seller's tax-deferred exchange.*



View of Big Sandy River as it flows southwest from the foothills of the Wind River Mountains to the plains of the Little Colorado River Desert.



## BIG SANDY RIVER RANCH

Encompassing 170 miles (north to south), the Big Sandy River Ranch spans Sublette and Sweetwater Counties in southwestern Wyoming. The ranch headquarters are located between the Big Sandy River and the Little Sandy River, tributaries of the Green River.

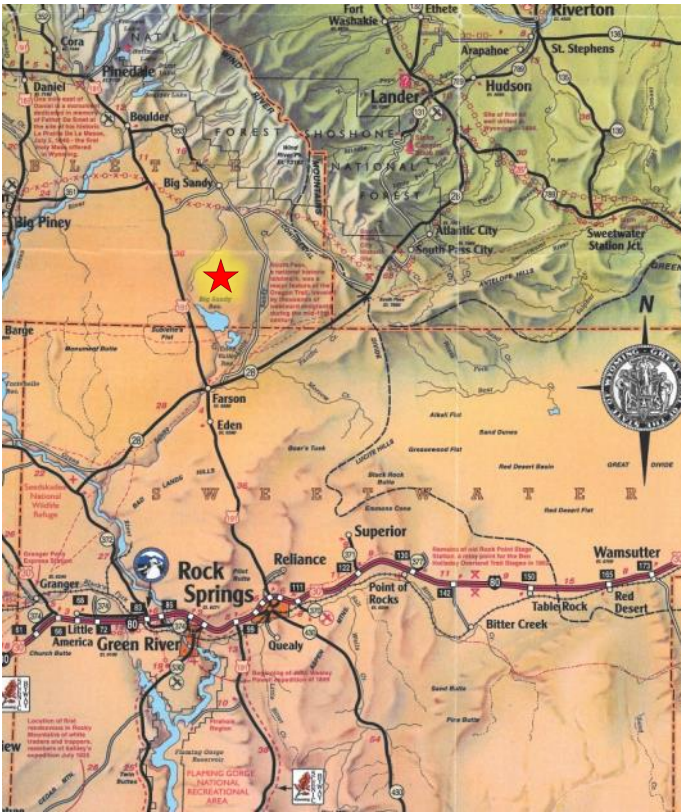
The Big Sandy River (also called Big Sandy Creek) is a 141-mile-long stream that rises in western Sublette County, on the west side of the continental divide in the southern Wind River Range in the Bridger Wilderness Area of the Bridger-Teton National Forest. It flows south, southwest, southeast, then southwest, past the town of Farson and joins the Green River in western Sweetwater County. Whether you're fly fishing or otherwise, chances of getting a bite here are good.

About 15 miles north of Farson, the river is dammed to form the Big Sandy Reservoir. Early immigrants traveled through the area on their journey to Oregon and California passing through an opening in the Wind River Mountains. Emerging from this pass (known today as South Pass), they traveled 25 miles to the Big Sandy drainage, the site of Big Sandy Reservoir, which is also known as the Eden project — this area is centered on the old Oregon, Mormon, and Pony Express trails.

The Big Sandy River Ranch has been owned and operated by the same family for over 100 years. Historically, the ranch has run both Rambouillet sheep and Hereford cattle with the genetics from original stock. The Ranch has been a proponent of transhumance grazing practices for many years. This practice, i.e. moving livestock from one grazing ground to another in a seasonal cycle, typically to lowlands in winter and highlands in summer, has been implemented throughout the world for millions of years and has proven to control invasive species and reduce the need for chemical control of weeds. This form of livestock management works well with wildlife migration corridors that are becoming a part of present-day rangeland use. The Big Sandy River Ranch lies in both the "Mule Deer Migratory Corridor" as well as the "Antelope Migratory Corridor". Protection of the Sage Grouse Leakes are also an important part of the ranch management practices.



# LOCATION



Approximate driving distances from the ranch:  
Jackson, WY..... 117 miles  
Salt Lake City, UT ..... 234 miles

Access to the ranch headquarters is via Road 108 (Big Sandy-Elkhorn Road). Roads are a mix of all-weather graveled county roads and 2-lane U.S. and State Highways.

The ranch headquarters are located between the Big Sandy River and the Little Sandy River, some 30 miles northeast of Farson-Eden, a small farming community offering basic needs and limited services.

Most of the deeded acreage is located 25 miles northeast of Farson, 75 miles northeast of Rock Springs, and 40 miles southeast of Pinedale.

Pinedale, the county seat of Sublette County (population 1,878), is a progressive community offering many town amenities. Employment is tied to the mineral industry, the U.S. Forest Service, the Bureau of Land Management (BLM), the school district, local enterprises, service industry and out-lying ranching operations. Pinedale has an up-to-date airport with a 7,100-foot runway and complete FBO services with instrument approaches. There are commercial flights to/from Denver via United Express in Rock Springs.

Little Sandy River

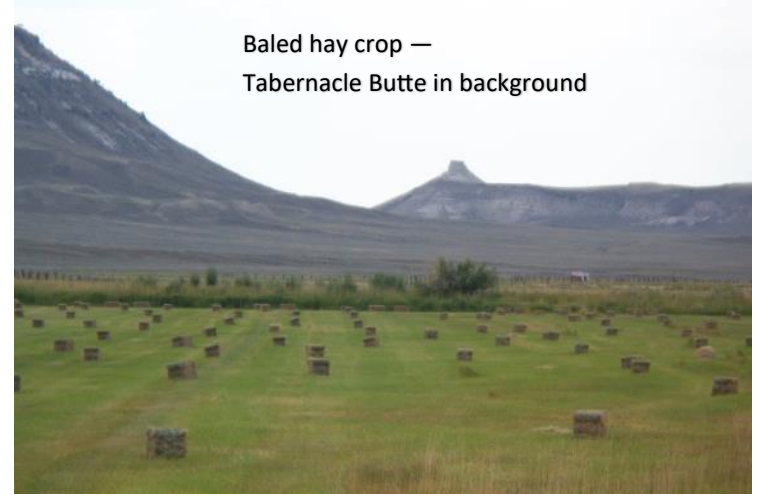




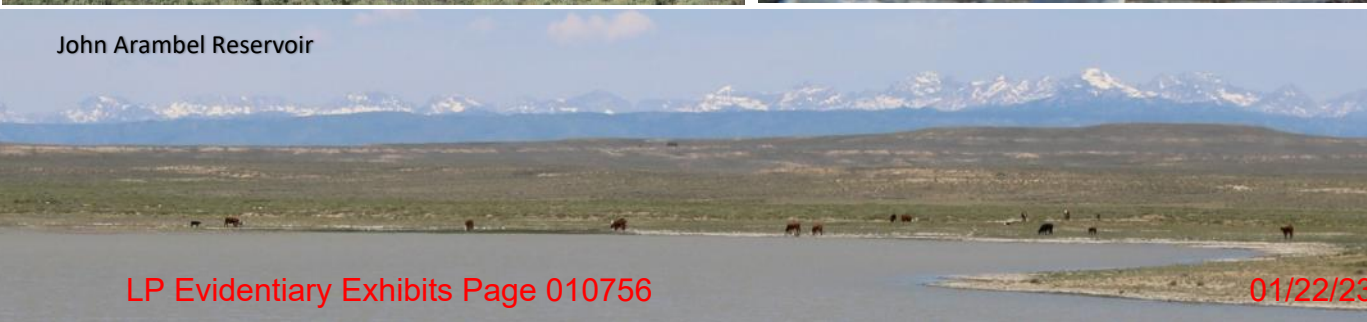
# A DIVERSE LANDSCAPE



Independent Mountain



Baled hay crop —  
Tabernacle Butte in background



John Arambel Reservoir





The ranch headquarters are situated between the Big Sandy River and the Little Sandy River in the Midland Unit — the headquarters are accessed via Road 108 (Big Sandy-Elkhorn Road), approximately 30 miles northeast of Farson-Eden.



There are two residences at the headquarters — the owner's home and the manager's home.

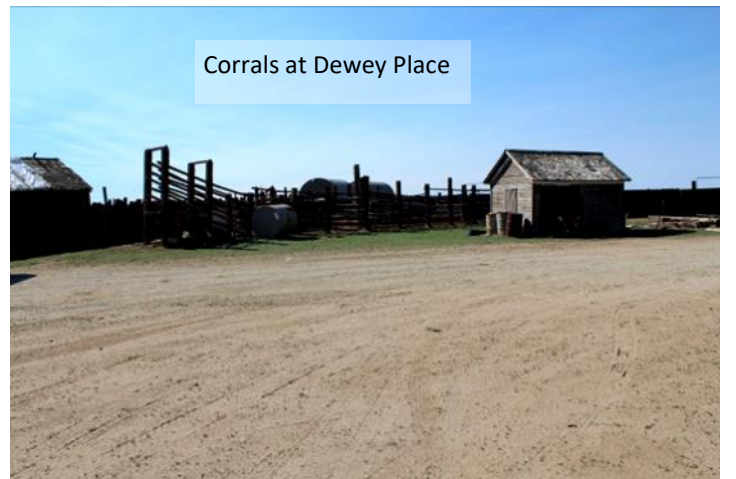


Midland Unit Owner's Residence.



Midland Unit Manager's Residence.





Corrals at Dewey Place



Sublette Well #3

A typical set of ranch outbuildings are located at the headquarters including two bunk houses, barns and corrals.

Sheep shearing sheds and several working corrals and scales are found throughout the ranch.

Fifteen wells, of which twelve are artesian, are strategically placed throughout the ranch.



Sheep sheds & corrals at headquarters



# PHYSICAL & OPERATIONAL DESCRIPTION

## SIZE

8,573.00± Acres Deeded  
20,273.00± Acres State of Wyoming Lease  
32,749.00± Acres U.S. Forest Service Permits  
981,931.00± Acres BLM Permits  
1,043,526.00± Acres Total

*The Big Sandy River Ranch is a low-overhead, eco-friendly operation that currently runs both Rambouillet sheep and Hereford cattle as well as a small goat herd. It is a working ranch with few fences and the belief in the transhumance practice of conserving the rangeland pastures.*

The ranch is rated at 2,800 animal units and runs approximately 1,200 mother cows from the original Hereford stock, 800 yearlings and 8,000 Rambouillet ewes. At present the ranch crossbreeds cows with Angus bulls and calves are in great demand by the local ranching community. It should be noted that the stocking rate on the ranch is influenced by the weather and availability of feed as well as the livestock market and state of the economy.



*The sheep operation has been the life of the owners and pillar of the ranching operation.*

Marketed ewes have been in demand by many of the sheep ranchers in the area. The Arambel family has developed a reputation of quality production lambs.

The sheep winter on the Vermillion Creek BLM Allotment where their feed is supplemented with shelled corn. In the spring, the sheep are trailed north to the Farson area and the ranch headquarters for shearing and are then trailed on to the summer pastures. The ranch has achieved 135% lamb crop which is exceptional for an extensive operation. This is attributed to the management and crew.







Cattle are summered on the Forest Service lands. Preference is to run the yearlings on USFS lands and on the foothill allotments of BLM. The cows and bred heifers are trucked south to winter pastures on the Vermillion Creek BLM Allotment in the late fall after weaning. Weaned calves and bulls remain at the headquarters. First-calf heifers are trucked to headquarters for spring calving. Calving begins April 1<sup>st</sup> and in May the cows and steers are transported from the Vermillion Creek winter pasture to the Farson BLM Allotment pasture where the calves are branded. Soon after branding, cows and calves migrate north to their summer range.



Trailing cattle on USFS summer pasture.



Cattle grazing near mountain cabin.





# WATER RIGHTS

The ranch has surface territorial water rights to irrigate 1,600 acres. 435 acres are harvested for hay (primarily grass hay) while 1,168 acres are utilized as irrigated pasture. There are 17 wells of which 12 are artesian; 6 are located on State lands. All head gates are ranch owned. A complete record of the water rights will be made available upon receipt of an offer by a prospective buyer.

Two main rivers, the Big Sandy River and the Little Sandy River, flow through the ranch and provide excellent water for both livestock and wildlife. These rivers boast some of the best fishing found along the western slopes of the Wind River Mountains.

In addition, there is a design for a center pivot irrigation system from the Big Sandy River which would bring water by gravitational flow to three circle center pivots and seven windshield circles. This endeavor, when completed, would further the productivity of the ranch.



*Hay crop at headquarters*



*Spillway at Big Sandy Reservoir*



## ALLOTMENT DESCRIPTIONS

MIDLAND LIVESTOCK, DUNTON SHEEP CO., PRETTY WATER LLC, SOUTHFORK SHEEP CO.

### Sweetwater County

#### Reservoir Allotment

##### **Pulley Place**

- 720 acres deeded, mostly irrigated with some trees.
- 3.75 miles contiguous river
- Water fowl and trout fishery
- 1,000 acres sheep right fenced allotment
- Historical buildings and corrals
- Significant fossil deposits
- County road access

##### **Dewey Place**

- 160 acres deeded
- Fully developed for flood irrigation
- Potential to apply for additional water rights pending reservoir enlargement
- Artesian well with continuous 40-gpm flow/pumps to 1000 gallons/minute.
- Cattle working corrals & feed storage
- Sheep tight fence
- Country road access
- 800 acres State lease—contiguous

### **Hudman Place**

- 235 deeded land w/9 BLM permitted AUM's. This is a custodial allotment — dates, species & numbers are at the permittees discretion
- Sub irrigated
- Sheep tight fence
- Reservoir spring-fed
- Potential for irrigation

### **Square Pit**

- 305 Acres
- Artesian well—40 gpm, pump to 600 gallons/minute
- Substantial fossil deposits near surface
- 80 acres sub-irrigated bordering Big Sandy Reservoir
- 400 acres State land — contiguous

### **Big Sandy Reservoir Data**

- 320 acres deeded land
- 1.5 miles river delta
- Water fowl rookery, elk and moose summer and winter habitat



## Sweetwater County (cont.)

### **Tentrees**

- 160 acres deeded
- 1 mile contiguous river
- Historical river ford
- 1240 acres State lease contiguous river frontage and an additional 640 acres upland
- 

**Reservoir Allotment Summary:** consists of 1857 AUM sheep, cattle and horse from May 1-December 30. The allotment is fenced with four wire fencing on the north and east with sheep tight fencing on the south and west. The allotment is accessible by Highway 191 on its west boundary and several county roads on the south and north boundaries. The allotment contains sage grouse core areas, mule deer migration areas, winter habitat for large game and an important water fowl rookery. BLM standards and guidelines have been met and all range monitoring is trending upward.

### **Vermillion Creek Allotment**

The Vermillion Creek Allotment consists of 137 acres of deeded land with the Salt Wells Creek running through 120 acres. There are 3200 acres of State land in the Allotment. There are 3266 BLM AUM's permitted from November 1—May 1. These are sheep only AUM's. There is permit renewal in process in Vermillion Creek and application has been made for dual use sheep and/or cattle.

### **Rock Springs Grazing Association (RSGA)**

The ranch has trailing rights through RSGA to the north in the spring and south in the fall.

## Sublette County

### **Sublette Allotment**

- 80 acres deeded land which contains the north Sublette Springs — the only year-round natural water source in 10 townships.
- 6 State Sections, each with its own well including 3 artesian wells.
- 95-acre John Arambel Reservoir is fed by one of the artesian wells. This well pumped 11,000,000 gallons of water in 2011.
- Total of 5,040 State lease acres in this allotment.
- 6,004 BLM AUM's in the allotment. May 1—January 30, sheep and cattle.
- Accessed by Highway 191 on its eastern boundary which is sheep tight fenced.
- Several oil and gas access roads throughout allotment.
- Year-around elk in this allotment.

## Sublette County

### **Sublette Allotment (cont.)**

- Sage grouse core in the northern and western parts.
- New oil and gas development proposed for the western 50% of the allotment which could bring additional water sources.

### **Prospect Mountain Allotment**

- Approximately 2,040 acres deeded
- 6.25 miles of deeded Big Sandy River frontage and 1.25 miles of Little Sandy River frontage.
- The rivers contain abundant sports fishing including rainbow, brook and brown trout.
- All land is sub-irrigated.
- 7 springs on deeded land with water rights.
- 3 artesian wells with water rights — one on federal and 2 on state land.
- Zembo Reservoir is in the allotment.
- This reservoir and the Long Draw have an irrigation water right connected to the Midland Ranch.
- 2,299 BLM AUM's May 1 — December 30, sheep and/or cattle.
- This allotment is within core sage grouse area and forms the center of the Mule Deer Migration Corridor.
- Major wildlife area.
- The Lander Cut-Off Road Access to north part of allotment. This is the access to Big Sandy opening.
- A county road dissects the western part of the allotment and a BLM road on the eastern side. The allotment is fenced on the south by four wire and on the north by sheep tight fencing.
- Borders on National Forest. Our company holds all contiguous national forest grazing permits. The eastern and western boundaries are unfenced but are bordered by rivers.
- We hold subleases on all other permits in the allotment.
- This is our most important BLM allotment because of its high carrying capacity and abundant water. The Midland Ranch borders the eastern boundary of this allotment.
- There are seven 40-acre tracts all deeded right-of-way's.

### **18-Mile Allotment**

- 425 AUM's — sheep only — October 16—January 3.

### Sublette County (cont.)

#### **Midland Ranch**

- 321 acres of water righted land that produces an average of 1.3 tons of native grass hay per acre.
- Territorial water right
- Controls the head gates in the Little Sandy River.
- 5 artesian wells and 2 pumping wells.
- One well is adjudicated to irrigate 220 acres. 160 gpm and can be pumped to 1100 gallons per minute sustained.
- Well servicing the homes on the ranch — tested and is potable.
- All wells have recorded water rights.
- 2 homes on the ranch.
- Cookhouse and sleeping bunk houses for hired hands certified by Dept. of Labor for HOA program.
- Numerous outbuildings and corrals.
- Ranch of off-line and has a fully functional solar system with pressurized water to homes.
- All field and pastures fenced w/sheep tight fences — 13 pastures.
- Hay certified scale and loading facility is north of the ranch on the allotment boundary.
- 890 deeded acres — all acreage is sub-irrigated or irrigated.

#### **Long Draw**

- 240 acres deeded sub-irrigated land, 40 acres of hay.
- Completely fenced.
- 200 acres of State land — 120 acres can produce hay.
- 208 AUM's — custodial allotment — all numbers, species and dates controlled by Midland Livestock Co.

#### **Buckskin Sandy Allotment**

- 360 acres of deeded land and 1160 acres of State land.
- 2.25 miles of deeded river frontage and 2.25 State land river frontage.
- All deeded land has been leased out to fishing. This is a prime trout stream.
- 320 acres of deeded land is sub-irrigated.
- Cross-fenced into 4 pastures with sheep tight fencing.
- 3 reservoirs.
- 687 BLM AUM's sheep and/or cattle from May 1— December 30.

### Sublette County (cont.)

#### **Mac Flat**

- 1720 deeded acres (800 ac irrigated; 920 ac dry pasture).
- 1440 acres State land
- Exterior sheep tight fence; County road 23-118 crosses through the property and is fenced on two sides creating a two-pasture system.
- It is a custodial pasture and has 77 BLM AUM's — dates, numbers and class of livestock are at the permittee's discretion.

#### **Buckskin Crossing**

- 480 acres along Big Sandy River.
- .75 miles of river — presently rented for fly-fishing — outstanding fishery.
- Large deposit of gravel with 40 acres having been mined. 740,000 yards of this product was used for WYDOT project on Highway 191.
- Accessed via the county road with passes through its western boundary.
- Numerous historical sites with the Oregon Trail crossing present.
- Electrical power brought to the property in 2016.
- 27 +/- irrigated acres.

#### **Grass Creek Ranch**

- 880 acres deeded
- 2000 acres completely fenced; next to National Forest.
- 3.75 miles of Grass Creek on deeded acres.
- All but 80 acres are sub-irrigated or irrigated.
- Historic set of corrals.
- Historic rustic cabin.
- 3 pasture system is permitted 220 BLM AUM's — custodial allotment.
- Brook trout fishery in the creek — begins in the National Forest and is augmented by a cold spring in the deeded land.
- Good staging area for entering and exiting the National Forest.
- All access roads have secured right-of-way's with the BLM.
- 40 acres are zoned recreational services/commercial (allows for anything except trailer parks).



# TRANSHUMANCE

Transhumance is the practice of seasonally moving livestock from winter pastures in the lowlands to summer grazing in the mountains – an ancient intangible and cultural tradition practiced all over the world. Cowboys and shepherds have moved their herds along the ‘Green River Drift’ for over 120 years. Transhumance in Wyoming is invaluable to the landscapes, the livelihoods, and the cultural traditions of the American West. Traditional transhumance is also an inherently environmentally sustainable practice and necessary for the continued health of mountain forests and marginal use lands.

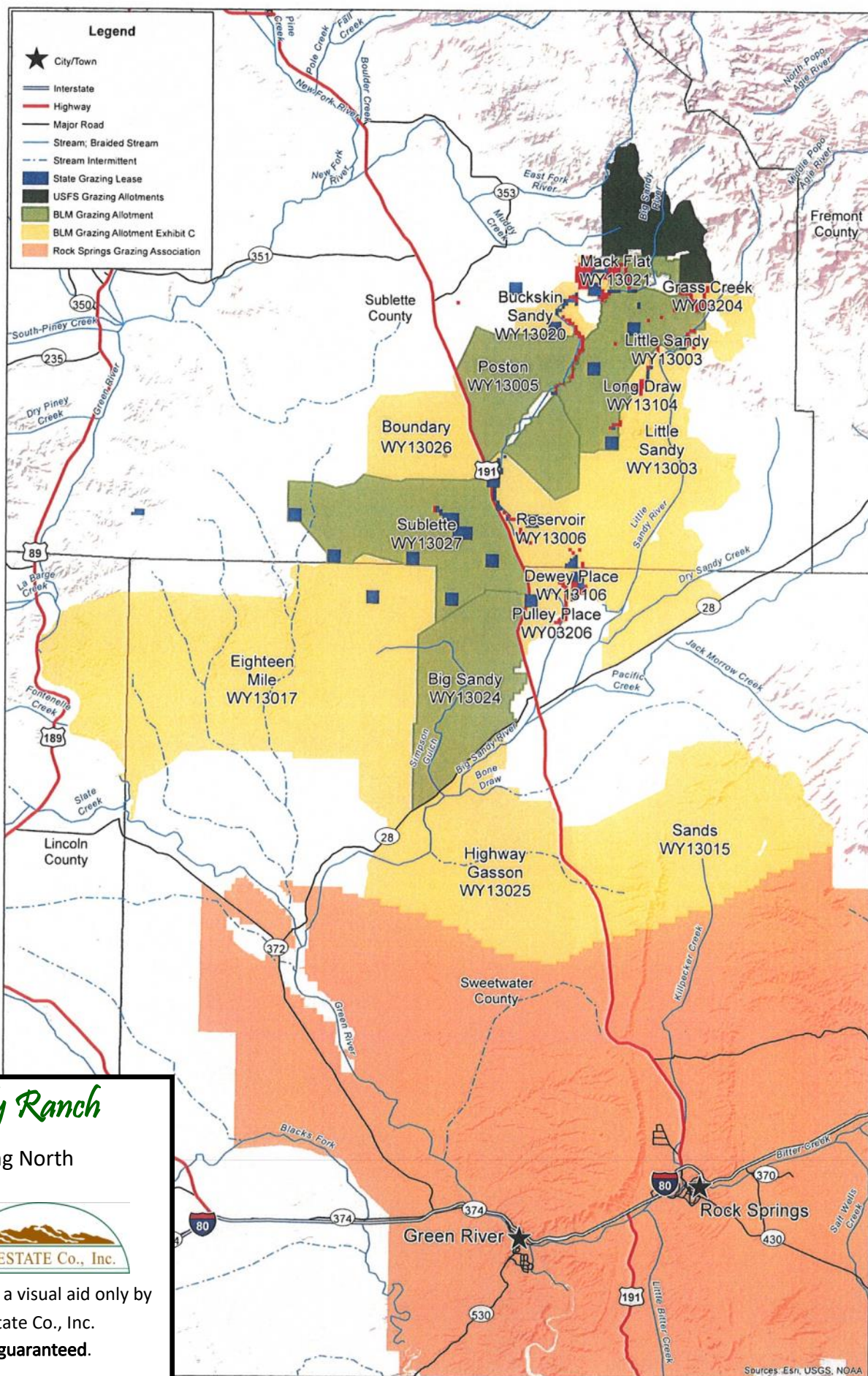


*For decades, guard dogs have helped protect sheep herds in Wyoming and other Western states from coyotes and other predators. Together with their ever faithful shepherd, they follow the herds through miles of sagebrush plains to and from summer pastures in the higher elevations of the Wind River Mountain Range. Working cattle dogs are also ‘man’s best friend’ when it comes to keeping cattle herds moving along in the right direction..*





Larger,  
detached maps  
will be available  
with a showing.



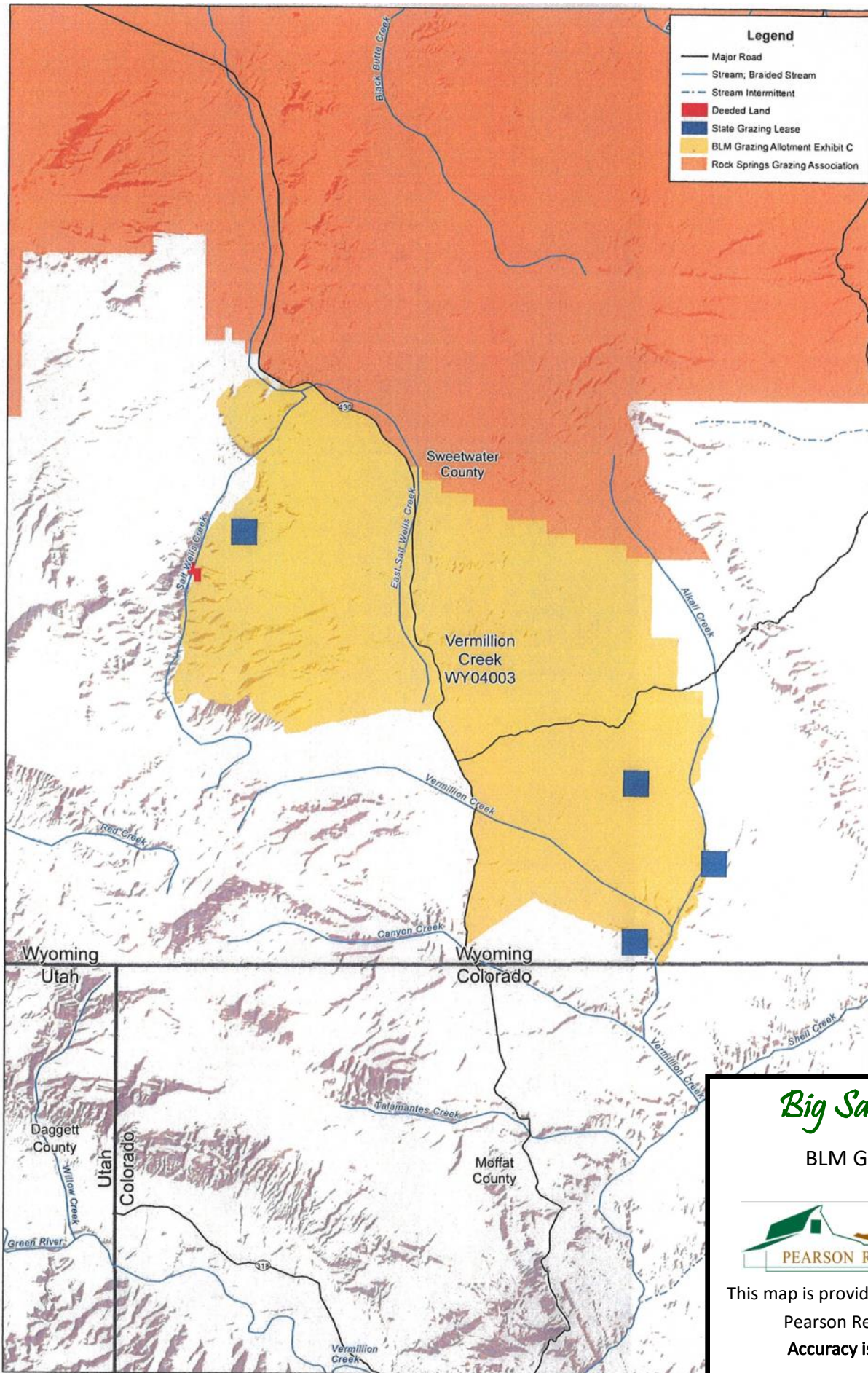
## Big Sandy Ranch

BLM Grazing North



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Accuracy is not guaranteed.





## Big Sandy Ranch

BLM Grazing South



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**Accuracy is not guaranteed.**





## AREA HISTORY

The Big Sandy River Ranch is one of the few historic ranches in the area and has been in the same family for over 100 years and is located in an area rich in history.

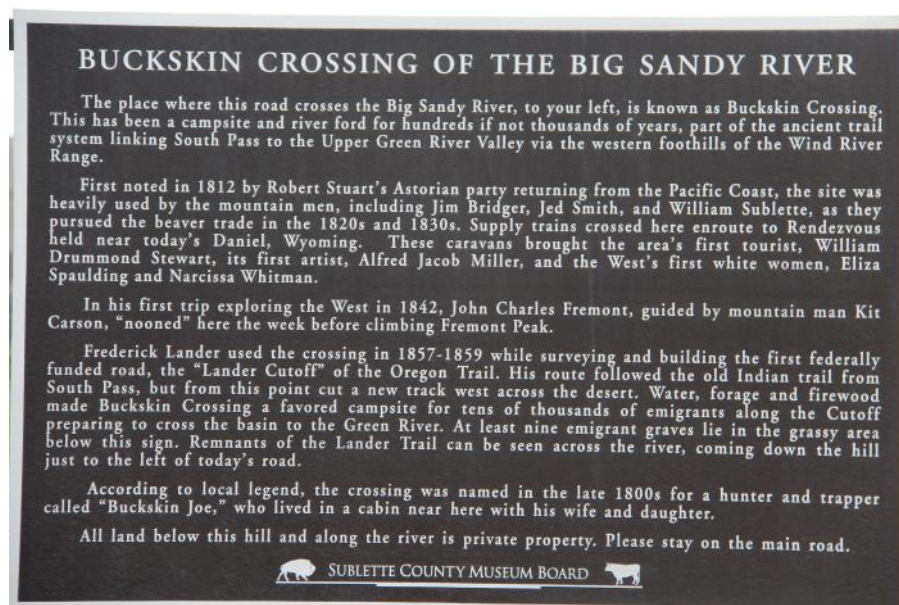
The Shoshone Indian tribe traveled plains below the western slopes of the Wind River Mountains during the summer months and are known to have hunted in the area some 700 years ago. With the introduction of the modern-day horse, other tribes began arriving in the area. The first documented Euro-Americans to visit the area included a party of fur traders from the John Jacob Astor's Pacific Fur Co. in 1811.

Beginning in 1843, immigrants began traveling west over the Continental Divide on what would become known as the Oregon Trail, aka the California Trail and/or the Mormon Trail. In 1858 the Lander-Cutoff Road became an immigrant road and was the first road to be financed by the government.

The 1860's saw a reverse migration from the west coast east along the Great Sheep Trails as sheep and cattle were trailed to markets in the Midwest. By 1900 the railroad became the mode of transportation for both settlers and livestock.

Following the sheep-cattle wars of the late 1800's and early 1900's settlers began to establish permanent home sites and The National Forest Service was created in 1905 and later in 1934 the Taylor Grazing Act was passed which brought regulation and an end to over-grazing and the free-for-all on the rangeland.

Farson is the site of the Big Sandy Pony Express Station where Jim Bridger and Brigham Young met in 1847.





### Wyoming—A Tax Friendly State

The Tax Foundation currently ranks Wyoming first in its State Business Tax Climate Index. This ranking takes into account the impact on business of corporate taxes, individual income taxes, sales taxes, unemployment insurance taxes, and taxes on property (residential & commercial).

Wyoming has no individual income tax, no corporate income tax, a low sales tax, low property tax, no inheritance tax, and estate tax is limited and related to federal estate tax collection.

Sources: The Tax Foundation ([taxfoundation.org](http://taxfoundation.org)), Wyoming Department of Revenue ([revenue.wyo.gov/](http://revenue.wyo.gov/)), Retirement Living Information Center ([retirementliving.com](http://retirementliving.com)).

#### Important Information for Prospective Buyers:

***Seller's Notice to Potential Purchasers: Fences vs. Boundary Lines:*** The fence lines on the subject property may or may not represent the actual boundary lines of the property. It is the Seller's intention that where fences deviate from the actual boundary lines, such fences are fences of convenience, only, and not the actual boundary lines. Seller is selling the property in "as is, where is" condition, which includes the location of the fences.

***Notice to Buyers:*** Wyoming Real Estate License Law requires that the listing Broker and all licensees with the listing Broker make a full disclosure, in all real estate transactions, of whom they are agents and represent in that transaction. All prospective buyers must read, review and sign a Real Estate Brokerage Disclosure form prior to any showings. *Pearson Real Estate Co., Inc.* with its sales staff is an agent of the seller in this listing.

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This offer is subject to prior sale, price change, correction or withdrawal without notice.





***The Big Sandy River Ranch —  
an exceptional low-overhead livestock production ranch  
with numerous recreational opportunities!***

### **CONDITIONS FOR SALE**

The Big Sandy River Ranch is owned by multiple entities, two of which are “C” corporations. Title may transfer by means of the sale and purchase of 100% of the stock in these entities. Buyers will be asked to qualify themselves as appropriate for the transfer of these securities. Pearson Real Estate Co., Inc. is not licensed for the sale of securities, so the parties will be asked to work with attorneys to complete this portion of the transaction. Those assets that are not owned by corporations will transfer in the normal manner by warranty deed.



## This image shows a full page of handwriting practice paper. It features multiple sets of horizontal dashed lines spaced evenly down the page, providing a guide for letter height and placement. The background is white, and the lines are a light gray color. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the page.

