



Hidden Issues on Pasture Land

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In the property assessment field the term “pristine pasture land” while often assumed is not always the case. In the early 1900’s most of Florida and a large portion of the southeastern U.S. were used for agricultural purposes, specifically cattle farming.

During this timeframe, landowners and farmers across the region dug thousands of pits where cattle could be dipped so that ticks would be killed and removed from the cattle. These ticks could carry diseases that could kill the cattle so the process was necessary. One negative effect of this process was that the chemicals used to perform the cattle-dipping process contained Arsenic. The problem that can still be encountered in today’s Environmental Assessment market is that these former pits can pose significant environmental issues. Arsenic, if allowed to migrate into potable wells or other drinking water supply sources has been proven to cause cancer. Another negative effect as far as development is concerned, is if a developer discovers after the fact that a former cattle dip vat is located where the slab for a new home or building is to be constructed, work delays and removal of contaminated soil could be very costly.

As environmental professionals, it is our job to investigate and research any property to the greatest extent possible. The fact that cattle dip vats are no longer used and in most cases buried

below the earth makes this task very difficult. That is why one of the best attributes an environmental professional can possess is that of an investigator. Knowing what to look for, what questions to ask, and where to get information in an efficient fashion are all key. Good Environmental Consultants can not keep a cold-case file; we have to make decisions quickly and in many cases while in the field.

Recently, **FER, Inc.** interviewed researchers at the University of Florida who are conducting several projects regarding cattle dip vats and determining their locations. There are many tools which can be used in this process, some of which are personal interviews, aerial photo review, tax record review and state database review. Bill Todd, a graduate student at UF stated “cattle were often dipped before they were shipped, so the vats were often not far from a railroad depot”. Ground Penetrating Radar (GPR) is another tool used to check the sub-surface for buried vats or other environmental concerns such as underground storage tanks (UST’s), or subsurface voids which can lead to sinkholes.

A full version of a separate article written concerning the University of Florida cattle dip vat study can be found at:

http://www.napa.ufl.edu/2004news/cattle_vats.htm



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Please feel free to contact any of our branch offices if you have any questions about cattle dip vats or other potential past property uses that may affect you or the area where you live.