

SFTR Ranch Security & Safety Presentation
Las Animas County Sheriff's Office - Investigator Martin
March 20, 2021 10:00 MOC

In response to an overall increase in burglaries, including incidents on SFTR, Investigator Martin met with ranch residents to discuss these concerns, and to provide advice on enhancing security for the ranch and private homes. Currently there are only two Las Animas County Sheriff Office (LASO) Officers on duty at any given time, and they cover a very large area. Therefore, an officer could easily be two hours away. However, if you call 911, there may be another officer (e.g. Trinidad Police, CO Parks & Wildlife) who is closer and can respond. Never hesitate to call 911. When you call be prepared to provide your name, contact number and a description of what is occurring and the location (good directions are also very helpful).

Below is a list of suggestions, provided primarily by Investigator Martin, with a few ideas from the attendees, on ways to improve the security of the ranch and private homes.

PERSONAL PROPERTY

1. Inventory your belongings.

- Include serial numbers and descriptions. Keep your inventory list updated.
- Take photos of your belongings.
- Register your bikes, ATVs etc. This will make it easier for them to be recovered if stolen.
- Keep a copy of the inventory in a place other than your home (e.g. with a family member or in a safety deposit box etc)

2. Game cameras and security cameras

- The installation of cameras can greatly improve the security of your home. In addition to deterring criminals, they have been used to solve numerous crimes.
- Choose cameras that store the data in the cloud instead of on a SD card in the camera.
- Cameras out in the open can deter criminals, but there is also an advantage to hiding some of the cameras. For hidden cameras, be sure that the red light is not visible.
- Do not install cameras near bright lights, as the lights can distort the camera images.
- Choose cameras that are capable of taking HD images.
- Don't forget to install cameras on the backside of the house. During several break-ins, the burglars came in via the woods (no tracks down the driveway) and entered the home through the back door.
- Try to set up the cameras so they can capture the vehicle make, model, color, license plate, and an image of the driver, if possible.

3. Timers

- Set timers in your home to turn different lights on and off. This gives the impression that your home is occupied.

4. Lighting & Sensors

- Place bright lights around the home (motion sensor or other). Make sure to include lights on the back side of the home as well.
- The installation of driveway sensors can alert you when someone is coming down your driveway.

5. Inform Neighbors

- Let your neighbors know when you are traveling so that they can keep an eye out.
- Reach out to absentee owners to see if they would like you to check on their home from time to time. With absentee homes it can be months before a break in is discovered. This time delay makes it harder for police to catch the perpetrator.

6. Social Media

- Never post on social media that you are traveling. Wait until returning home to post details and photos of your trip.
- Be cautious of what you post on NextDoor, especially about the ranch's security issues, gate codes etc.
- Double check in your settings that you are only posting to SFTR and not to nearby neighborhoods. If just one person in the NextDoor thread accidentally posts outside the ranch, there is a risk that the entire thread could be shared with other neighborhoods. This would be ok for some posts (e.g. lost dog, or smoke concerns) but people need to be really careful about how they are posting, and what information they are sharing.

SFTR GENERAL SECURITY

- Gates:

Right now Investigator Martin believes it is too easy to access SFTR. He said that, generally speaking, gates are a very good investment when it comes to ranch security. They are an effective deterrent. He noted that gated communities have fewer break-ins than communities without gates. Gates vary in price, with some utilizing a simple key, and more advanced ones using a key fob or sensor. Some gates are even "siren activated". Investigator Martin will check out some of the better gate systems in the area and let us know which ones might serve as ideal models for SFTR. Remember, gates will not keep everyone out, and occasionally one car can follow another car through the gate. So, protecting your personal property and remaining vigilant is still important. He suggested putting two gates on the west side of the bridge to avoid conflicts with CDOT. One gate could be placed just past the guard shack, and the other gate past the mailboxes. This set up would allow people the ability to turn around if they don't have access, or to park and wait. When considering ranch security, in addition to the bridge, Exit 2 should also have a gate. Gates will require maintenance. Carol Smith said that due to the expected expense, the installation of gates would need to be voted on.
- Cameras:

Cameras have proven useful in solving crimes. Investigator Martin has been coordinating with John Sanders on the bridge camera system. Cameras are a powerful deterrent, and when coupled with gates, send a clear message that SFTR ranch is not an easy target and the residents are serious about security.
- Neighborhood Watch

Investigator Martin suggested setting up a Neighborhood Watch. This program creates a network of folks who are paying attention to unusual activity and strange vehicles, and collaborating directly with the LASO to report issues of concern. They can also help absentee owners by routinely checking on their vacant houses. Neighborhood Watch signs can be posted which serve to further emphasize that SFTR is serious about

security. Since SFTR is large, the ranch could be broken into blocks with block captains serving as a point of contact for each block. A signup sheet was passed out during the meeting. If you are interested, please let the communication committee know, and your information will be added to the LASO signup sheet.

OTHER QUESTIONS

- Have the SFTR cameras helped solve any crimes yet?
Investigator Martin will get back to us with an answer (as well as the total number of crimes to date on SFTR).
- Will more signs at the bridge help?
Not necessarily. It is likely that folks are not even reading the ones already posted. Furthermore, in Colorado there is not a requirement to post “No Trespassing” signs. It is up to the individual to know where he/she is, and to take personal responsibility for not trespassing. However, the presence of at least one obvious sign can be helpful to law enforcement when they are prosecuting a trespasser.
- It was noted by a ranch resident that around the time of the most recent break-ins, the gate that leads to the railroad tracks (just below the mission) was opened, with fresh tracks going through it. This will need to be looked into.
- Have the crimes on SFTR been contractor related?
So far there has not been a correlation noted between break-ins and legitimate contracting companies.
- Should suspected trespassers be confronted?
Generally, NO. Only confront during an emergency. Your life is too valuable. Call 911 and let the professional law enforcement folks handle the issue. It is more important to be very observant and to be a good live witness, than to be a dead person.
- How can we get more help for the LASO? Two officers on duty does not seem sufficient. Contact Sherriff Navarette at the LASO and let him know that you support more officers.
- Does LASO ever patrol SFTR?
Sometimes. Investigator Martin tries to get out of the office and visit new places and increase LASO visibility in the different communities. He tries to make at least a few contacts each time he goes to a new place, and has found that 99% of the time folks are grateful for his presence.
- Will the new Fishers Peak State Park create more security issues for the ranch?
It is hard to say with any certainty, but probably not. Most folks just want to recreate and then go home. Trinidad Lake Estates has not experienced many issues from the proximity of Trinidad Lake State Park.
- Is the cabin down by the highway below the Morley Church illegal?
The county planner would need to determine if the structure is legal or not.
- How do we handle squatters?
Within the past two years, the state of Colorado has changed the laws regarding squatters. There is now an accelerated process to remove them and to have them charged with trespass and burglary.
- What do we do about the mountain bikers that park at the visitor parking area and then ride the ranch roads?
If you are concerned, contact the LASO and they will speak with the mountain bikers and let them know that this is private property.

- Does the proximity to I-25 present an additional risk?
While the I-25 corridor has the majority of the narcotics issues, the occurrence of break-ins seems to be sporadic and not concentrated in any specific area.
- What are the next steps? Will the LASO be coordinating with the POA board?
Yes. In the near future the LASO will be reaching out to the SFTR board to discuss security issues and make recommendations.