

A Rancher's Idea on Range Capacity Determinations¹

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First of all, my grazing background began with the operation of cattle in irrigated pastures in the Kamas Valley of Utah. We had the problem of determining the grazing capacity there, just as we have since then on various other ranges. We have also operated along the Green River and the White River in the Uintah Basin, where we had winter range and summer range of the desert type. We also had another ranch east of Price in the Nine Mile country. That was very rough range. Nearly all of the latter two ranches was Bureau of Land Management ground, and, of course, the size of the permit determined the maximum grazing capacity. However, we found that in the Nine Mile country the grazing permit did not adequately measure the grazing capacity and we could run only approximately two-thirds of what the permit allowed. So it seems that everyone has a problem in determining grazing capacity, no matter where he operates.

I believe the remarks that I make on grazing capacity on private lands will be the opinion of about 90 percent of the ranchers, although obviously there are some who are not of the same opinion that most of us are. There are always some who feel that they should get all they can. It is just like some alleged sportsmen who go out into the ranges and mountains and cause all the damage and the ill feelings between the true sportsmen

and the landowners. In the same manner, there are some Forest Service officials who believe that all stock should come off all the forest, in spite of the effect on the users and the small communities and equities involved. Also there are some Bureau of Land Management officials who act as though they own the property they administer. So we have extremists in all camps.

We acknowledge that in some years we overuse our ranges, but through necessity—as in the drought last year—where we went for 6 months without recordable precipitation. There is just no way that you can hold stock in your lap. They must be fed and they must be cared for.

So it becomes a problem, in my opinion, to coordinate our range management and our animal husbandry. Once you get a top-producing herd that has been bred up through possibly two lifetimes and is one that knows the range, you cannot realize enough from its sale to compensate for its loss, nor can you turn around the next year and replace it.

The Bible says, "Man shall have dominion . . . and over the beasts of the field." By inference this also gives dominion over the natural resources, which would include the grass. I believe that means that, when we have dominion over the beasts of the field, we also have the obligation to care for them properly. Also these natural resources in a wilderness, without the hand of man, are a sterile thing and are of no force or value whatso-

ever. It is not until man makes use of these things that they become a factor in our world.

When the pioneers first came to this country they found untold grass. But at the time it was more of a problem what to do with it, so in many cases they merely set fire to it so they could get through it easier, just as the Indians did.

The herdsman from the beginning of time had to care for his herds if the herds were to take care of him. Most cattlemen regularly stock their ranges at a level to properly use the feed in a below-average year. In extra good years they may carry over calves and possibly go out and buy additional steers so that if it turns out that the year isn't too good, animals can be taken to market in a hurry and prevent damage to the range. However, most men allow the feed to build up. It reminds me of an old cattleman I knew who died at 82, after putting in a good ride the day before. He once told me, "Always leave some feed and you will always have some feed to come back to." I believe that expresses the feeling of most cattlemen that I know.

Drought is the greatest problem we have to face. When it is dry most men cull their herd more heavily by selling more old cows; or maybe they sell earlier and they may even supplement their range feed. All of us are watching our ranges and our range use more today than ever before.

We are also trying to improve our ranges. I believe nearly every rancher is doing something along the line of reseeding to crested wheatgrass for early feed. We have all tried railing and burning because this is one of the cheapest means of improving sagebrush ranges and we are doing the best we can with that. Now the new possibility of improving our ranges

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by spraying the brush is offering good opportunities. We have been doing quite a bit on water development, placing troughs by springs and piping the water to where it could be better used. One of the biggest things that has been done lately is hauling water so the stock will utilize the range more evenly and get the full benefit of what range we have. Also we are controlling the stock better by herding and salting. We know that we must take advantage of what feed we can raise because, after all, any rancher is merely selling the feed from his range, and whether he grazes cattle or sheep it is still essentially this feed that he is selling.

Year in and year out, experience on that range tells us how many head we can run. It is the history of the range that guides us. Nearly all of the ranges that we are using now have been used for a great many years, so our experience and the experience of our predecessors means a great deal in determining how many cattle or sheep we run. Actually, few cattlemen judge their ranges by the cow condition alone or by just one year's forage residue. For instance, my wife's grandfather has run cattle

on the mountain above his ranch for fifty-seven years. He showed me some grass up there and said, "Look at that—look at that grass! It's called Stipa. Look at the way it stands there. That grass has been built up there for years and they tell me it's not worth a thing—no good at all. Why, I've been on this range for fifty-seven years and this range has never looked better." The point is, it seems to me, that maybe that range is better than it was fifty-seven years ago. When someone else comes in and tells him that the range isn't as good as it used to be, maybe it was pretty well run down at the time he started running there, and there wasn't even any Stipa then. So experience on that range is important and, if the range is improving, there is no need to reduce numbers. That is why the history of the range means so much.

Also, the rancher judges his range a great deal by whether there is brush invading or whether he has any erosion starting. But I never saw a rancher throw a hoop over his shoulder and count the blades of grass within that hoop. Actually, it's the cumulative effect of all things. Nowadays it seems

we hear a great deal about so-called "problem areas." Maybe there are 10 acres of range that are being abused, and around it there are 10,000 acres that are being correctly used. Well, the average rancher will go ahead and use that range. But Americans are a conniving, scheming, thinking bunch and in most cases that rancher will figure some way to protect that 10 acres so that it can recover too. So it seems to me that these problem areas are merely a challenge and, even if some small acreage has to be sacrificed, that should be done in order to utilize the greater amount.

Now, maybe our fathers sat back on these old hills, free and independent. But the son realizes now that he must be more progressive and join with his fellows in trying to improve things for himself and to keep up with the world on the newer research and discoveries. I believe that man is sincerely trying to do a job to the very best of his ability—to make a living for his family and build a good life. I think that he is trying to build up a better ranch—to leave a better outfit for his children and thus to achieve some measure of immortality.

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