Range Management Pays at the Scales

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The cover photo on this issue is one of a series—a picture story of how Bert Mannix, Helmville, Montana, has increased the efficiency of his 375 cow ranch. The author’s entry was awarded First Prize in the Picture Story Contest, held for the first time this year at the ASRM Annual Meeting in Las Vegas, Nevada.

In 1956, Mannix’s range was in poor condition. The average calf crop was 82 percent and yearling steer weights were only 605 pounds. The ranch had an excess of hay, a shortage of pasture, and too many cattle.

Using the help of a Soil Conservation Service technician, Mannix worked out a long-range management plan. The photos tell the story.

Mannix says, “Balancing land use to provide for proper amounts of native range, tame pasture and hay and then gearing the basic size of the herd to these resources takes planning, but it sure pays off. I’m producing as much beef as before at a greater net return.” At the same time the condition of the native range has improved from poor to good.

Proper stocking and a system of deferred grazing has improved nearly all of Mannix’s range to good and excellent condition. Yearling steer weights are over 700 pounds and the calf crop averages about 94 percent.

Mannix converted 200 acres of excess hayland to irrigated pasture. He says “Those old cows can harvest it cheaper than I can. And besides it gives me a chance to rest my native range during the growing season while the cows are on the irrigated pasture.”

After adjusting the stocking rate and three years of deferred grazing during the growing season, Mannix (above) proudly shows off vigor of bluebunch wheatgrass (Agropyron spicatum) and rough fescue (Festuca scabrella). The short grasses and weedy plants were being crowded out by the taller, high-producing grasses.
Mannix states, “This low-cost spring development has made it possible for cattle to graze about 80 acres that were grazed very little before.”

Spraying big sagebrush (*Artemisia tridentata*) followed by two years of rest has improved the range condition and greatly increased the amount of forage.

**BOOK REVIEWS**

**Native Vegetation of Nebraska.**

By J. E. Weaver. *University of Nebraska Press, Lincoln, Nebraska.* 185 p. 1965. $4.75.

This new book gives adroit treatment to an important subject and the quality is similar to that of numerous other writings by Weaver. His classic publications on American vegetation include a standard ecology text on North American plant communities, books on roots of native and domesticated plants, and many others.

*Native Vegetation of Nebraska* is an intimate scientific evaluation of important Nebraska plants and plant communities in the variable physiographic regions and micro-climates in the State. Weaver has presented the material in his clear, easy style, bringing it within reach of high school as well as college and other interested students. His remarkable photographs illustrate and animate the text.

Lying in the heart of North America, Nebraska is known largely as a grassland, with the true prairie community in the more humid east and the mixed prairie in the Great Plains section of the state. But growing conditions are not uniform in either of these great grasslands. Weaver’s information on the effects of soil, exposure, elevation, drainage and grazing on the growth and development of plant communities became the foundation works for modern procedures used in determining range site and condition. His identification of numerous plants found in wet lowlands, high dry uplands, deep mature soils and sandy lands have provided the range manager and range producer with a wealth of practicable information. The descriptions and illustrations of numerous forbs that add beauty to the landscape and richness to the animal diet provide usable facts about this great body of plants whose economic value is often overlooked and little appreciated.

The unique Sandhills come in for a special chapter. Bonanza of the ranching country, the cutting winds blasted out the Kinksiders who long ago plowed the dunes and were starved out. In time grasses healed the plow scars and again the land was safe for moderate grazing.

The reader will learn about Nebraska forests, which few people know about. The hardwoods are found in eastern Nebraska and along river courses, north slopes and draws. Eighty-three different species are found in the southeastern part of the state and the number diminishes westward. Yellow pine woodlands occur in the northwest along the breaks of Cheyenne River at elevations of over 5,000 feet.

This book has much to offer the reader and a few quotations from Dr. Weaver’s summary provide some clues to the text.

“The prairie crop is a mixed stand. Various forbs are blooming or ripening fruit from April until October. The same is true of various species of grasses. There is a time for flax, another for mints, and still another for roses. Not all of the crops are beautiful each year. How unlike the more delicate, annual crops of man. Neither is there a critical time for drought as in wheat or corn or..."