

Resource Value Rating: Definition, Determination, Application, and Use

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Resource value rating is the term used in the Range Inventory Standardization Committee (RISC) report to the Society for Range Management to denote value of vegetation or other features of an ecological site for a particular use or benefit. Not only would the concept apply to ecological site, but also to the ecological status of a site. On the surface, the concept appears to be highly applicable. To some degree range managers have been using the RVR concept, but often not within the ecological site framework.

Thus, an examination of the concept and its applicability was undertaken via a panel discussion at the 1985 Pacific Northwest Range Management Short Course held in Boise, Idaho, January 25-27, 1985. Following are written forms of the four presentations made by Bob Wagner, Bureau of Land Management; Bob Kindschy, Bureau of Land Management; Wendall Hann, U.S. Forest Service; and Bill Anderson, Certified Range Management Consultant. It was my privilege to be panel moderator. I trust you will find the ideas challenging and useful.

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Resource Value Ratings in Relation to Livestock Forage Values

Bob Wagner

Resource value rating is defined as the "value of vegetation present on an ecological site for a particular use or benefit" (RISC 1983). The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) believes that resource value ratings can be a tool to aid the manager in the decision-making process. BLM emphasizes the need for standardization of terms and guidelines to acquire consistent range condition data so that reliable estimates can be made of changes (trend) in range condition and other resource values. This is required by the Federal Land Policy and Management Act (FLPMA) of 1976 (Public Law 94-579) and the Public Rangelands Improvement Act (PRIA) of 1978 (Public Law 95-514).

FLPMA, Section 201(a), requires the Secretary to prepare and maintain an inventory of the resource values and other

values on the public lands on a continuing basis. The inventory must be current, reflect changes in resource conditions, and identify new and emerging resources and other values. The PRIA Section 4(a) is more specific. This section requires the Secretary to "update, develop (where necessary), and maintain on a continuing basis an inventory of range condition and a record of trends of range conditions on the public rangelands. The record shall be kept current on a regular basis so as to reflect changes in range conditions and shall be available to the public."

The BLM is mandated by law to manage public lands for a variety of uses. The vegetation production on these lands has a variety of uses, i.e., livestock, wildlife, watershed stability, or aesthetics. Of course, a particular constituency supports a particular use, and all these desires in the aggregate usually outdistance the public land production. Consequently, a manager must make decisions about these possible resource outputs. Some of the various constituencies are happy, while some are not happy with the decision that sliced the pie. A relative value for these resources and uses might better illustrate and explain why a decision has been made.

A resource value rating is an interpretation. If the resource changes or the use or user changes, so might the resource value rating. A common reference point or plant community needs to be used for rating the variety of values. These ratings can then assist the manager in identifying management schemes, alternatives, predicting direction of change, and monitoring accomplishments.

Utilizing value ratings of the vegetation for specific uses, the manager can better analyze and display the tradeoffs of various management alternatives to the public. The actual rating of the vegetation should be accomplished by someone knowledgeable in that specialty. There needs to be agreement on the unit and vegetation community that the rating will be applied on. This might be each seral stage of the ecological site or perhaps more than one vegetation community in a seral stage.

Managers need resource value rating interpretations of the present vegetation and the vegetation of the other seral stages. This information could improve management of public lands, improve Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) impact projections/analyses, assist Annual Management Plan (AMP) economic analyses, and possibly help develop crosswalks between earlier range condition reports and future reports of the resource status.

Most of BLM vegetational inventory methods in the past were more livestock oriented as to forage species condition and site rather than ecological site community concept. Prior to 1978, BLM inventory methods closely followed a functional livestock forage desirability classification that paid specific attention to the kind of livestock and the season of use. Quality and quantity of available vegetation determine the livestock forage value or resource value rating, but quality might be different for different kinds of livestock. This classification indicates the grazing value of each important plant species for specific kinds or mixes of livestock. It is based on palatability or preference of the animal for a plant

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