

## The Rangeland User Committee

Larry S. Allen

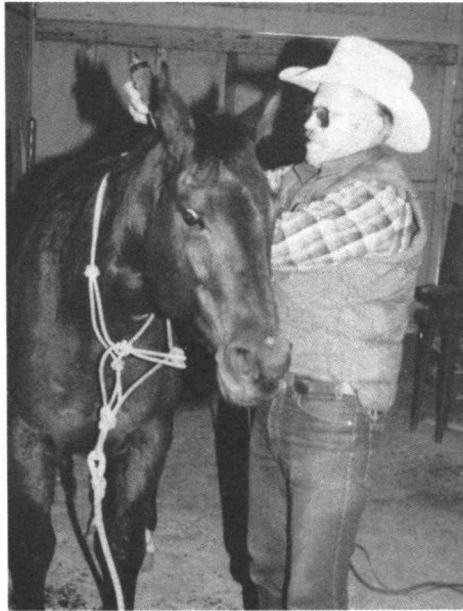
The challenging social and political environment of the 1990's will require increased communications among public land managers, resource users, and environmentally concerned citizens. Livestock producers and other public land users, who derive all or part of their livelihood from public rangelands, as well as many from the general public are seeking more effective ways to participate in land allocation and management decisions. Expiration of the Forest Service's authority to charter grazing advisory boards has prompted several new approaches to improved communications.

The Forest Service has held periodic meetings with grazing permittees, usually at the Ranger District level. Issues and concerns of the users and the agency have been openly discussed, and representatives of environmental organizations and other concerned citizens have been invited to participate. In the Southwest a process known as Integrated Resource Management is used to assure adequate environmental review and public participation in resource management decisions. The livestock industry has perceived a need for a more organized approach to providing input to these processes.

### The Arizona Memorandum of Understanding

In response to this perception, Arizona Cattle Grower's Association (ACGA) and the Forest Service entered into a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) at the Association's August, 1990 meeting. This MOU states the intention of providing for "careful and considered consultation, cooperation, and coordination between these two parties in all matters relating to rangeland management...."

The primary vehicle for accomplishing this cooperation and coordination between the agency and the resource



*Ron Searle, Coronado National Forest Rangeland Users Committee*

users is a Rangeland User's Committee which is appointed by Arizona Cattle-grower's for each National Forest in

Arizona. Each Forest committee has a chairman and a representative from each Ranger District. Issues involving more than one Forest are referred to a committee consisting of the chairpersons of each local committee.

### Coronado National Forest Selected for Trial

ACGA had previously appointed a representative to serve as liaison with the Coronado National Forest. He had worked closely with Forest Service personnel to facilitate communications and had been involved in a number of public involvement situations. This Cattlegrowers representative and the Coronado's Range Staff Officer had discussed various options for improved communications for some time. Because of this smoothly functioning cooperation, Arizona Cattlegrowers elected to establish the first Rangeland Use's Committee on the Coronado. A five-person committee was selected.



*Deputy Regional Forester Forrest Carpenter; Rancher Joe Lockett, Arizona Cattlegrowers Association; and Rancher Bud Webb, Prescott National Forest Rangeland Users Committee*

### Help and Advice to Grazing Permittees

Many livestock operators feel increasingly isolated as the agency involves members of the public with highly varied viewpoints in the planning process. The committee provides an opportunity for a permittee to involve other representatives of the livestock industry in the discussions. Committee members and Forest Service personnel immediately began to inform permittees about the existence of this committee. Ranchers were told that the services of the committee are available to all permittees, regardless of ACGA affiliation. Those receiving assistance will be expected to join ACGA.

Grazing permittees frequently may wish to consult with their peers, when asked for input to an Allotment Management Plan. This allows a sharing of experiences and cautions concerning different range management practices. In cases where misunderstandings or differences of opinion arise between the operator and agency personnel, the committee can often mediate. Although both the agency and the Cattlegrowers wish to emphasize positive aspects of the agreement, it can also be used as a vehicle for advice about appeal, procedures, documentation, etc., when differences cannot be resolved locally.

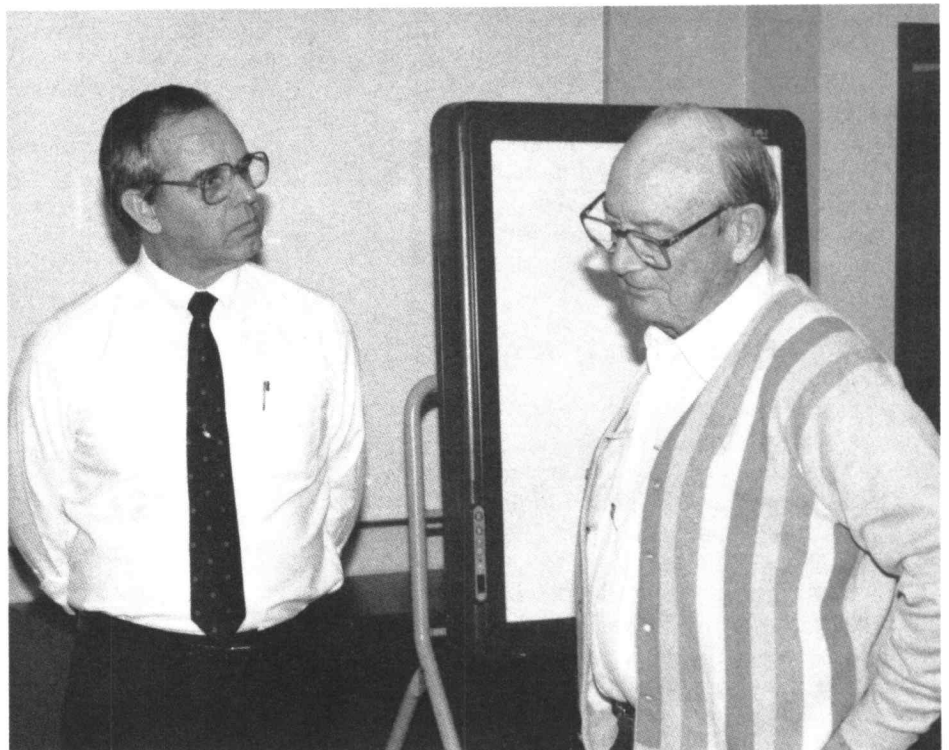
### Help and Advice to Forest Service

Forest Supervisors will rely heavily on the committees to provide a sounding board for opinions within the livestock industry, and to try out new ideas, a function previously filled by Grazing Advisory Boards. Such sharing of perspectives has been more difficult in recent years because of the need to select representative permittees for each individual issue. Now the committee chair can assign input on various projects to any or all members.

Forest Service Range Conservationists have varying amounts of background and understanding of animal science and agricultural economics. They will rely on the committees for input in these important areas. At times Forest Administrators may wish to call on the committees for conflict resolution.



*Forest Supervisors Coy Jemmet (Prescott) and Jim Abbott (Coronado)*



*Regional Forester Dave Jolly and Rancher Bud Webb, Prescott National Forest Rangeland Users Committee*

### Integrated Resource Management

The Forest Service's Integrated Resource Management model utilizes interdisciplinary input from Forest Service specialists, sister agencies, universities, and local experts, coupled with public comment from a variety of viewpoints to arrive at both planning and project decisions. It is essential that forest users, including grazing permittees, have an effective voice in the process.

Permittees and other representatives of agricultural interests will be asked to participate in the development of issues, concerns, and opportunities; development and selection of management alternatives; and implementation of resulting plans. Rangeland Users are being encouraged to involve themselves in all integrated processes, not just those dealing directly with grazing issues or allotment management plans.

### Some Examples

The Coronado National Forest Rangeland User's Committee hit the ground running with three reviews in the first month of their existence. A brief discussion of each will serve to illustrate the value of the committee.

*An Allotment Management Plan-Douglas Ranger District.* The grazing permittee and Douglas Ranger District personnel had been discussing the need for a new Allotment Management Plan on the Price Canyon Allotment for several years. Planning was scheduled for 1990 and a great deal of preliminary work was accomplished by the rancher and the District Range Conservationists.

A cordial environment exists between the rancher and present Douglas District personnel, but this permittee has been around for a long time and this has not always been the case. Several years ago disagreements over stock numbers, and the location of a division fence resulted in a strained relationship. Remembering past difficulties, the permittee requested a review of the new AMP by the Coronado Committee.

The Committee reviewed all public input and the environmental assessment. They then jointly inspected the allotment and discussed management options. These discussions resulted in minor fine tuning of the AMP, and a

product that both the permittee and the Forest Service are comfortable with. The result of this effort will be improved productivity of the range, a more stable watershed, and improved wildlife habitat. This will also furnish an opportunity to demonstrate responsible range stewardship to the many concerned members of the public who provided input.

*An Allotment Management Plan—No-gales Ranger District.* Squaw Gulch Allotment has had a management plan for a number of years, and it was scheduled for a rewrite in 1990. Issues and concerns developed through the IRM process included a concern for watershed condition due to a less than optimum litter cover on the soil, and concern that riparian areas were being damaged by current grazing practices.

When the ranch foreman reported these concerns to his employer, an out of state corporation, they perceived a serious problem and called on the Rangeland Users Committee for help. The committee chairman suggested an on-the-ground inspection and discussion of management by the committee, the foreman, and Forest Service Range Conservationists.

After a thorough inspection of the allotment, a management strategy involving rotation grazing with emphasis on riparian and watershed conditions was agreed upon. The resulting AMP is expected to meet the resource needs as well as the ranch goals, while providing another opportunity to demonstrate proper management, without significantly impacting the economics of the ranch operation.

*Greaterville Land Acquisition.* A 3,057-acre parcel of land was recently acquired by the Forest Service through land exchange. The area is in gently rolling terrain in the oak woodland, with significant values for Montezuma quail and Coos whitetail deer habitat, historic and cultural resources, and grazing. The Montezuma quail is a much prized game bird which is relatively rare in the U.S. He is dependent on thick grass cover for nesting and hiding and quite sensitive to grazing practices. The Forest Service is currently engaged in determining which land uses will be permitted, and allocating the forage. At least three adjacent ranchers are inter-

ested in obtaining the grazing permit.

Management alternatives and selection criteria are currently being developed by representatives of the Rangeland User's Committee, Arizona Game and Fish Department, Quail Unlimited, the Sierra Club, several neighbors, and a Forest Service interdisciplinary team. The experience and expertise of the committee is proving invaluable in devising a way to harvest the forage resource, without adversely impacting other important values of this new parcel of National Forest.

### Outlook for Rangeland User's Committees in Arizona

The Coronado National Forest experience to date would indicate that Rangeland User's Committees, as defined in the Arizona Cattlegrowers-Forest Service Memorandum of Understanding, have a bright future in Arizona. The Forest Service, the grazing permittees, and the general public stand to gain from improved communications.



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