

Early Allotments in South Dakota Revisited

Dave Wester and Teri Bakken

It was billed as a range tour, but it turned out to be a reunion of sorts. And the guest list included some familiar names.

The Bureau of Land Management invited range scientists, ranchers, and others to check the progress of allotment plans they had helped develop more than 20 years ago. They gathered on the green and lonely hills of western South Dakota in June 1991 to tour the Crago and Moreau Allotments.

In the late 1960's, the BLM worked with the Crago family and the newly formed Moreau Grazing Association to develop allotment management plans (AMPs) covering nearly 64 thousand acres of federal, state, and private lands. These Crago and Moreau AMPs were among the first in the nation.

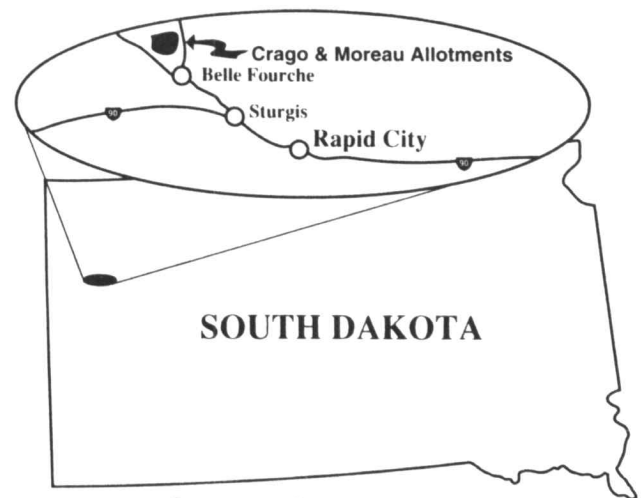
Prior to the development of the AMPs, many drainages in the two allotments were devoid of the plant species needed to impede runoff, increase water absorption, provide wildlife habitat, and control erosion. Large pastures with few water sources resulted in poor grazing distribution. Areas adjacent to water sources showed excessive use, reduced productivity, and in some cases, reduced ecological condition. The condition of the watersheds, along with design flaws in some of the dams, resulted in reservoir failures that further compounded the erosion problems.

The plans sought to reduce erosion, improve forage for livestock, and improve wildlife habitat through better management of vegetation and livestock. The main feature of both plans was the establishment of rotation grazing systems. Watering facilities and cross fences were planned and constructed where they were needed to implement the rotation systems. Each plan had specific objectives for plant cover, species composition, and productivity improvements.

Flexibility was built into the plans to accommodate the needs of the livestock operators and to make necessary adjustments for unplanned conditions such as drought, fire, or hail. For example, while the plans included maximum livestock numbers and specific periods of use, they also included provisions for ranch managers to deviate from those limits during emergency situations. Deviations were not to exceed ten percent of surveyed or authorized carrying capacity.

Today, range managers have concluded that the range has improved from the standpoints of productivity, watershed condition, and vegetative characteristics. Permanent photo points, transects, and observations of users indicate that productivity has improved as much as 25

percent in some areas. Head-cutting erosion is markedly decreased, barren areas have become re-vegetated, and forage condition, density, and vigor is improved. Fences and additional stock-water reservoirs, in conjunction with the rotation grazing system, have improved livestock distribution, have produced more uniform forage utilization, and have resulted in better condition of watersheds and riparian areas on both the private and the federal lands.



**Location Map
Crago & Moreau Allotments**

Photographs taken in 1970 and 1991 provided evidence of the erosion reductions cited above. The photographs were available for viewing during the 1991 tour.

Among the people who came to South Dakota for the tour were Gus Hormay and Rex Cleary. Hormay is well known for his development of the rest-rotation system that was used when the AMPs were prepared. Cleary, a retired BLM range conservationist, was instrumental in developing the Crago and Moreau plans. Cleary also served as SRM president following his career with BLM.

Hormay remembered that many range managers once thought that the key to improving the range was to reduce the number of livestock. "Simply reducing the livestock won't do it," he said. "You have to give the plants a rest. You have to allow them some time to make and store food. The question is how long to graze and how long to rest, and that depends on the kind of vegetation and the season of use."

Hormay's system allows the livestock and wildlife to have their forage and eat it too. "With rest-rotation grazing we can re-vegetate this land with livestock use," he said.

During the late 1970's and early 1980's, the Crago and Moreau allotments were changed from rest-rotation to

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Photographs of a drainage in the Crago Allotment taken in 1970 (above) and 1991 (below) were displayed at the June tour of the South Dakota Allotment (1970 photo by Rex Cleary; 1991 photo by BLM).



deferred rotation systems. Both systems prevent the deterioration of rangeland often seen with continuous seasonal grazing.

The June 1991 tour was the second time that Rex Cleary had returned to the South Dakota allotments to examine the results of his earlier efforts. His first trip was in 1984, and the improvements he saw in the range at that time made an impression on him.

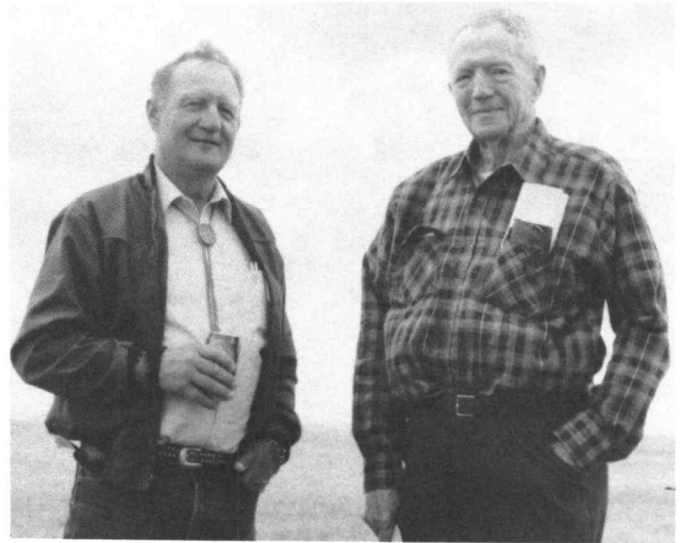
Mike Penfold, BLM Assistant Director for Lands and Renewable Resources, complimented the group for its history of cooperation and provided insight on the success of the Crago and Moreau AMPs. "People getting together out here on the ground is what makes things happen," he said.



One participant made his arrival at the South Dakota range tour by personal airplane (BLM photo).

Just as cooperation has been a key to the past success of the projects, it may also be a key to the future, according to Mark Stiles, manager of BLM's South Dakota office since 1988. "Demands on the public lands by non-traditional users have increased over the years, and coupled with deepening environmental concerns, they've brought multiple-use and resource management to the attention of the general public," he said. "These past 25 years have shown good results in stewardship of public lands and resources, and that provides incentive to continue the partnerships between government, ranchers, and other interests."

An additional incentive for ranchers to provide good land stewardship was offered by Jim Johnson, current lessee of the Crago Allotment and a member of the Moreau Grazing Association. "If we're going to keep



Rex Cleary (L) and Gus Hormay, both of whom helped in development of the Crago and Moreau management plans in the late 1960's, were among the guests at a 1991 tour of the two South Dakota allotments (BLM photo).

using these public lands," he said, "we're going to have to show the public that we're taking care of them." Johnson helped the BLM organize the tour, and he and his wife, Joan, provided a tailgate lunch.

Agreements between the ranchers and BLM on how to graze the land didn't always come easy. "We had some lively discussion," said Bill McIlvain, who managed the South Dakota BLM office in Belle Fourche from 1974 to 1987, "but one thing I appreciated about this group is that they weren't afraid to try new things."

Vince Crago, a local rancher who helped develop and implement the Crago AMP provided the ranchers' perspective of the early discussions. "The old-time guys didn't like to take orders from anybody, but people saw the benefits of rotation and accepted it," he said.

Johnson drew a chuckle from the crowd when he summed up the history of communication between BLM and the ranchers. "The relationship with BLM has been interesting and a lot of fun," he said, "but it hasn't always been smooth!"

The tour provided an opportunity to renew relationships and to examine the condition of the range. It appeared that both the relationships and the range have benefited from more than 20 years of hard work.