

Award-Winning Range Management in Montana

Vern Taylor, Chris Hoff and Sandy Brooks

Montana's C & B (Chalk Buttes-Box Elder) Grazing District has been recognized nationally for taking something good and making it better. The C & B Grazing District received one of six national "Partners in the Public Spirit" awards for 1990 by the U.S. Department of Interior Bureau of Land Management. This prestigious award honors those who are authorized to use public land resources and have gone the extra mile to enhance the public lands.

According to Mike Penfold, Assistant Director of BLM's Division of Lands and Renewable Resources in Washington D.C., "The members of the C & B district have clearly maintained the land in a better state than they found it." Through a cooperative decision-making process, the C & B district has improved, stabilized and mitigated threats to resource values in all sections of their district.

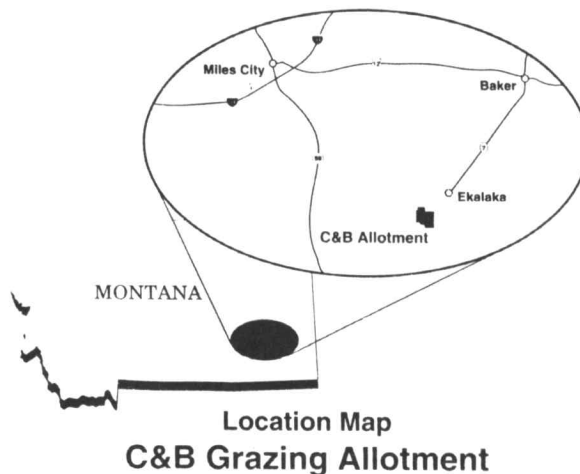
Partnerships and cooperation are essential ingredients for multiple use range management. The C & B district covers 125,000 acres including 54,000 acres of federal land, 8,000 acres of state land and 63,000 acres of private land located in southeastern Montana 20 miles south of Ekalaka. The different ownerships add to the need for cooperation and partnerships. The group began with 40 members in 1934 and now has 27 members.

Initially open range practices were prevalent and overgrazing was the rule. Jim Carrol, president of the C & B, sums up the history of grazing management on the district this way:

For range improvement, one of the first things to do was get rid of the horses (they had been abandoned by homesteaders). Then homesteaders' wells were expanded to create a water source. Over the years, fences were added until what was once one huge pasture was broken into individual allotments. Fencing, water improvements, and range treatments have accelerated since the 1950's.

The C & B district is not noted for having productive soils. The ranchers have been careful to maintain its limited productivity and in some cases they have improved it. The soil is described as pierre shale deposited from an ancient shallow sea. The soils have a high salt content and low potential. Even so, forage production on some areas has doubled in recent years due to proper livestock management.

Grazing schemes vary from two pasture deferred rotation to six pasture short duration grazing. The pasture deferred rotation involves grazing in one pasture for part of the season, and then switching to the other pasture. This allows one pasture to rejuvenate while the other is



Contour furrowing is one range management method used by the C & B allotment. It is shown here in the beginning stages.

being utilized. Six pasture short duration grazing is similar to the two pastures deferred rotation; however, it moves the livestock more often. The livestock graze in each pasture for approximately 20 days. Both schemes have the goal of improving vegetative conditions.

Waterspreaders and contour furrowing have been used extensively on the C & B district to enhance water penetration into the heavy clay soils. This has doubled the vegetative production on some sites. The contour furrows are approximately four to six inches deep and 18 inches wide. They are deep enough to penetrate through an



Results of one and a half years of contour furrowing.



Typical nest site of ferruginous hawks.



Rest-rotation grazing has created excellent shoreline vegetation, providing nesting habitat for waterfowl.

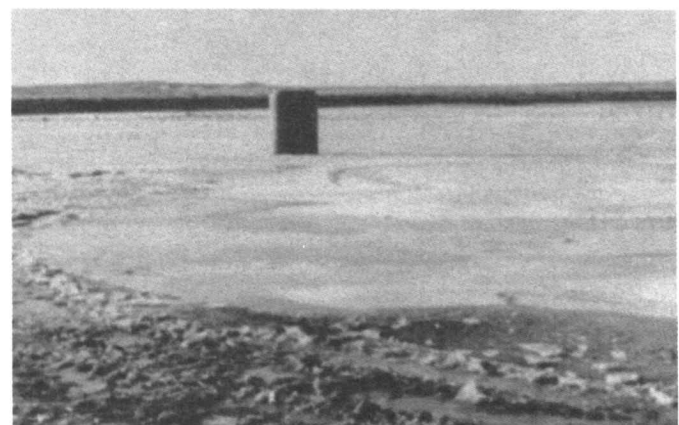


Ferruginous hawk nestlings in ground nest.

impermeable subsurface layer and allow moisture to penetrate the soil. Waterspreaders are used to divert water to several areas. Several large reservoirs were constructed to slow the rate of water traveling through the watershed.

The C & B district provides a diverse array of wildlife species. It is home to one of the highest densities of ferruginous hawks in eastern Montana, a species currently on Montana's list of species of special interest and concern.

Waterfowl concentration is high due to the creation of large reservoirs. The various grazing systems have created excellent shoreline vegetation around the reservoirs. The shoreline areas are used as nesting sites for many waterfowl species including ducks and Canadian geese. Other wildlife that can be found in the district are antelope and sage grouse. The area provides good winter habitat for



A concrete culvert is placed on the ice during the winter. During springtime ice melt, the culvert drops several feet into the water and provides a secure long-term nesting site for Canadian geese.

the sage grouse.

In order to maintain its prestigious ranking as one of the nation's top groups in the BLM's Partners in Public Spirit program, the group is continuing to cooperate with BLM and other agencies. In the future, they intend to further improve the range condition; enhance livestock forage; sustain and stabilize vegetative production; sustain or

improve watershed conditions; improve wildlife and waterfowl habitat; and provide high quality riparian areas. Through cooperation and various grazing techniques, the C & B district has made, and will continue to make, a commendable effort to improve the land for its resource, wildlife and recreational values.

Ranchers and Resources Reaping Benefits of CRM

Norman R. McClure

Individuals concerned about the management of our nation's publicly and privately owned lands should be pleased to hear that Coordinated Resource Management (CRM) is "alive and well" in Washington and other Northwest states. Coordinated Resource Management Plans (CRMP's) are developed by landowners, public land managers and land users who come together to resolve conflicts. A second and equally important goal is to bring about a high level of sustained-yield productivity for all renewable resources present on the management unit involved (small watershed, livestock grazing system, etc.).

The *Washington Farmer-Stockman* has provided excellent coverage of CRM in recent years and months. Two articles about specific CRMP's conveyed a highly favorable picture of this planning process. A third article raised serious questions about participating in CRMP's, especially when initiated by federal agencies. These apparent contradictions have understandably led to some confusion and concern on the part of Washington ranchers.

The following information sheds light on these contradictions and also reports on exciting and positive happenings regarding CRM in Washington and throughout the West.

A cover story in the August 1989 issue of the *Washington Farmer-Stockman* entitled "CRM Working on Lick Creek" reported one of many such success stories in Washington State. Through the application of this CRMP in Asotin County, ranchers, Forest Service, and Department of Wildlife personnel were able to develop a grazing system for domestic livestock which significantly improved grazing for elk. This was possible because the more "fastidious" elk avoid coarse forage and actually prefer to graze areas where this less palatable material has been removed by cattle.

More recently (November 1991), the *Farmer-Stockman* featured the Stokes & Stokes CRMP in Okanogan County.

In this Methow Valley plan, water developments and changes in stocking rates and season-of-use on a series of pastures have increased the amount of forage available for livestock. These elements of the plan also resulted in significant improvement of critical spring and winter range for mule deer on both rancher-owned and Department of Wildlife lands. Such an increase in benefits accruable to the private landowner involved *and* to the public is typical of what can be accomplished when all parties with interest in a particular area agree to participate in the development and implementation of a CRMP.

The third article noted above appeared in the June 1991 issue of the *Washington Farmer-Stockman* and the *Farmer-Stockman* magazines of many other western states. It painted a very different and less favorable picture of Coordinated Planning. In that article entitled *Ranchers Grazing Plans Influenced by Non-Ranchers*, Cheyenne, Wyoming, Attorney Karen Budd cautioned livestock permittees to be "wary of the CRM process and its use in planning efforts initiated by public agencies." She asserted that the Forest Service is using the process to allow persons "not directly affected" and having "little or no expertise in resource or forage management to write and/or revise" Allotment Management Plans (AMP's). Ms. Budd also stated that additional problems are created because livestock grazing permittees are "ordered to submit to the process" and are "exposed to potential liability" from other participants who bear no responsibility for implementing the resulting plan.

Through an exchange of letters with Ms. Budd and follow-up calls to some of her clients, it was possible to confirm the validity of her concerns. There clearly have been instances in which overzealous agency personnel, with their own agendas to promote, have misused the CRMP process. One case of note which occurred in Montrose, Colorado, resulted in a significant setback for coordinated planning in both Colorado and Wyoming. Problems have also surfaced with a plan being developed under BLM auspices in Southern Idaho. Range management professionals in the region are working hard to

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