



By Gary Frasier

Frasier's Philosophy

It is generally acknowledged that the early settlers took from the land with their farming and ranching practices. Is this occurring today? Have we changed our range management philosophy? Are we “giving to the land” today or are we still “taking from the land”?

Every day when you open the paper or hear the news there are various stories about managing the resources on our rangelands. The stories might be about increasing a ski area on public land, or drilling for oil and gas next to an exurban area, or controlling prairie dogs. There is frequently an adverse impact on the people living on or next to the affected areas. In most instances the stories could be rated as “taking from the land.”

Today as you travel across the West and talk to the people who make their living from the land, you find that most know that they must manage the land for long-term sustainability. Otherwise, they will soon be out of business. Ranchers are embracing the idea of rest rotation, controlling access to riparian areas, controlling noxious weeds, and other resource management tools. Would they have done it without being forced by “outsiders”? In some instances the answer is no. In other instances the answer is yes. Many of the managers of working ranches and rangelands have at least one college degree in some aspect of range or natural resource management. The pioneering members of the Society for Range Management did a good job of showing that proper range management was the way to go. The new managers of the land are truly devoted to “giving to the land.”

Are we done? The answer is no. There is an increasing number of people who do not know that they are taking from the land or do not care. They are the owners of “ranchettes” or extended acreages next to our urban centers. These people for the most part derive their livelihood from jobs away from the land. They use the land for their recreation and “solitude.” We frequently see 2–6 large animals, usually horses, on land that cannot support one animal. These people buy feed and grain to keep their animals alive so they can use them a few times a year. The soil surface often ends up either bare or covered with unpalatable weeds. These people are abusing the land in a manner that can be rated as the worst that has ever been done. Do we hear about it in the local newspaper? In most instances the answer is no. Why not? Most of the time when you point out the problem, the response is, “It is my land and you have no right to impose upon what I should do.” Yet at the same time our working ranches are facing an onslaught of criticism for abusing the land.

The theme of this issue is “giving to the land.” We have the tools for proper management. We need to pass this knowledge on to our neighbors who either don’t know how to take care of the land or don’t care. Let us give credit to the land managers who are taking care of the land, “giving to the land,” and let us work with the people who are still “taking from the land.” ♦