Dr Uresk’s Response

By Daniel W. Uresk

My response to comments by Lamar Smith on my article published in the August 2010 issue of Rangelands, “Cattle Weights on USDA Forest Service Lands by State With Cow and Calf Forage Consumption,” are as follows:

Current cattle weights from 30 states with USDA-Forest Service managed lands have, for most states, increased since 1980. Dr Smith referred to Table 1 entries as suspect. However, he presented no supportive data or citations to refute the data in Table 1. I leave it to Rangelands readers to decide which source is more authoritative.

Models based on dry matter forage consumption with cow and calf weights were developed from data cited in the article by D.C. Church, the National Research Council, and Oregon State University. These models, though linear for ease of use, account for metabolic weights and other variables when determining dry matter consumption for both cows and calves.

Dr Smith refers to adjusting for larger cow and calf weights as a “haystack approach” with limited value. I agree with Dr Smith in preferring the “stock and monitor” approach—if effective monitoring actually occurs. In my experience, it does not always occur—for reasons good and bad. My paper addresses only the “stock” part of “stock and monitor” and is meant to encourage range managers to account for current cattle weights in establishing initial stocking rates and adjustments of current stocking. It is essential to adjust up front for larger cows and calves to reduce overgrazing. If monitoring does occur, then only small adjustments in stocking should be required; if it does not, then the likelihood of overgrazing will be reduced.

In summary, increased cattle and calf weights is a serious, not a trifling, issue when it comes to maintaining range quality. Accommodating increasing cattle weights was first recommended in Rangelands by R.T. Hinnant in 1994. Hopefully, I have made it easier for range managers to adopt his advice. It is clear that some adjustment for heavier range cattle is required.

References


Author is Senior Research Biologist, USDA-Forest Service, 231 East St Joseph Street, Rapid City, SD 57701, USA, duresk@fs.fed.us.