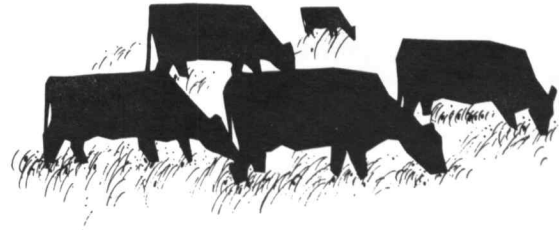


Some Grassroots Talk from a Rancher

J.W. Swan



I want to begin with a statement regarding the Bureau of Land Management and Forest Service. Too many people, especially from the environmental community, criticize the BLM and the Forest Service for their management of the public rangelands. These self-appointed critics do not know nor have they bothered to find out how bad conditions actually were on much of our range.

In 1934 with the blessing of the livestock industry, Congress passed the Taylor Grazing Act and some management was brought onto the public ranges. Anyone who does not agree ranges are in better condition today than they were then is either very young or very uninformed. The time has come when we should stop criticizing the actions of these BLM people.

Many say the bureau has allowed this land to continue to deteriorate and that those people who have dedicated a lifetime to helping manage and revitalize these ranges have been a complete failure. Nothing could be further from the truth.

True—these people may have been lacking in funds, may have lacked staff and expertise, sometimes the management had to be custodial, but by and large they did a good job and their contribution should be recognized.

The following remarks are going to be, hopefully, from a practical point of view, those of a rancher engaged in trying to making a living. Perhaps when we speak of domestic livestock grazing on rangelands we are using a misnomer, as, instead of saying livestock grazing, we might more correctly say "food producing." People should realize that when they recommend a reduction, they are not reducing domestic livestock grazing, but rather are reducing food supply for the world. Some people may go to the world food conference and say, "We have to produce more food to feed this hungry world." Yet these same people may be in the forefront of the movement to remove livestock from the public rangelands. So let us remember when we talk about cutting down on livestock grazing we are cutting down on food production.

There are many ways to improve rangelands. In so doing we must always look to the effect of any particular practice on our basic resource, the soil. Unfortunately, many of our rangelands have been overgrazed by both domestic livestock and wildlife with a resulting erosion of soil and loss of fertility. Our goals should be the restoration of these soils to the full productivity. Where soil erosion has been light and there is an abundance of

top soil, we can expect a rapid improvement; where there is little top soil left, it may take hundreds of years. The most important step is to stabilize the soil and vegetation and start it on an upward trend.

I have heard several speakers talk about increased forage and habitat for wildlife or domestic livestock. I believe that grazing by either wildlife or domestic livestock must be a spin-off of proper range management and that soil and water protection must be our number one priority.

I think there are two main reasons for the continued grazing of domestic livestock on our rangelands.

First, we must use this renewable resource produced on our rangelands for the production of food. Every A.U.M. produced from range releases the equivalent of eight bushels of corn for human use. On the average, about 1% of sunlight energy falling on the earth is captured by vegetation. On rangelands, the ruminant animal, both domestic and wild, through its ability to convert roughage into edible meat, is the primary means of making productive use of these areas. Food production with less use of fossil fuel and fertilizers is one of our greatest challenges if we are to feed our ever increasingly hungry world.

Secondly, it has been soundly documented by range professionals that domestic livestock properly managed is one of the best tools that we have to restore our ranges.

Improving Ranges through Management

Probably the most important method of improving ranges is management. We must learn to satisfy the biological needs of the plant community that we are managing. Periodic rest, season of use, intensity of use, are all important in devising a grazing system. Seldom has reduction of livestock to so-called "proper levels" resulted in improved range conditions. The best lands, the most productive deep soil areas such as meadows, riparian zones, and gently sloping lands close to water will continue to receive the heavy use, while those areas farther from water on steeper sites will be lightly used, or not at all. Those who advocate reduction as the sole solution do not understand the grazing habits of livestock. Reduction without management accomplishes nothing.

There are many grazing systems and modifications of grazing systems that are acceptable. Almost every allotment or ranch is a different unit and must be treated differently.

On some ranches rest-rotation is the basic and a workable system, but to advocate that rest-rotation should be imposed upon every ranch is unrealistic. It is hoped that from this

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symposium and others that might follow, policies can be developed for the use of many other methods of range improvements. I can think of at least six:

1. *Use of Herbicides.* Herbicides properly used provide a good management tool which certainly has to be considered in many areas. Herbicides have many advantages in sagebrush areas where the dead brush protects and adds humus to the soil and stops the blowing snow. Some disadvantages are cost and destruction of some browse species and forbs. There is a need to develop a policy as to where and when to use herbicides and which of them are acceptable.

2. *Controlled Burning.* This method of range improvement can be done cheaply and seems to have a fertilizer effect on the grasses. In our area in southern Idaho, it takes at least two full growing seasons of rest and protection following burning.

3. *Reseeding.* There has been much criticism of crested wheatgrass and its so-called resulting monocultures to the point that crested wheat is considered "exotic." Often small acreages of this grass can provide enough early season grazing to allow rehabilitation of other depleted ranges. However, as we go along, we may find that many of the grasses of the future may come from Russia or Mainland China. Let's not knock the exotics.

4. *Riparian Zones.* One of the most pressing problems we have is management of our riparian zones (streambank areas). Probably many of you attended the symposium by Trout Unlimited in Denver on "Riparian Habitat." It was a pre-determined symposium. It had already been decided that grazing by domestic livestock was the sole reason for the degradation of the Riparian Zone. That conclusion had been reached before we came to Denver to appear on the panel, and it seemed the only thing we panelists were to decide was "how high they were going to hang us." Little effort had been made to study these Riparian Zones, and Trout Unlimited seemed to have come to the conclusion that there were only two things that could happen; one was season-long use with no management, and the other was complete exclusion. These alternatives are not acceptable to the livestock industry. These zones are some of the most productive areas we have.

At our ranch we feel that our rest-rotation system is solving the problems. We must develop more off-stream watering facilities and use other management techniques to protect these areas. Apparently little has been done in research to solve this problem.

5. *Research.* Last year I attended a conference on "Research on Forest and Associated Rangelands" conducted by the Forest Service. It said *Forest* (and in small print) *Associated Rangelands*. Now believe me, they did not get "and associated rangelands" small enough, because after you've heard of nothing but trees for a week with little or no mention made about the research needed on rangelands, you find that in the scheme of things we don't stand too high. Certainly we must insist on increased budgets for research into such things as the management of our riparian habitats, the effects of controlled burning, the use of herbicides, and the development of new grasses that might have greater production along with increased nutrition and palatability. We need a tremendous amount of research if these rangelands are to produce to their potential.

6. *Private Money.* The use of private money to implement range improvements should be encouraged. Given the proper "climate," much can be done without relying on federal funds. Certainly there are adequate safeguards in every law that has been written that say "in no way shall this create a vested interest in the permittee." Many of us have spent thousands of dollars in improvements on the public lands which we immediately turn over to the government. Then we sign an agreement to

maintain them. Much more work could be done, given the proper climate and the assurance that we will be on that land long enough to reclaim at least part of our investment.

Allocating Forage

Unfortunately, many people who are not range scientists have become involved in making decisions involving range. The scientist has given way to the lawyer, the judge, and the environmentalist. Many simplistic terms have been developed. For example, we speak of "proper use." How could you be against "proper use?" It implies that if you are against proper use, you are for *improper* use. Yet, proper use comes from an old soil conservation term or a system devised in areas of season-long grazing where the forage was going to be defoliated to a certain percent every year. We hear people using "proper use" in reference to deferred grazing and rest-rotation systems where the concept no longer is applicable.

Allocation of forage. What could be easier? We go out, "throw the hoop," measure the amount of forage we have. We get out the computer and allocate it. That would be very simple if forage grew that way and if livestock and wildlife grazed that way. Unfortunately, the only thing we can control in this whole forage allocation process is domestic livestock. You can build a marvelous "hotel" for wildlife, but if they've decided they don't want to come, you've allocated for nothing.

We must recognize that forage production may vary two or three hundred percent in any given year. Forage production is based on vigor of the plant, the amount of moisture during the growing season, the season of use, temperature, and many other factors. How then, can we "allocate" when the only absolute control we have is domestic livestock. We cannot control wildlife, wild horses, or production.

Forage inventory is very important but only as one factor in determining range trend and condition. Certainly it cannot be the sole basis upon which decisions are based to establish stocking rates. It is not likely that this factor will stand the challenge of the scientific community or the courts. Historic use by both domestic livestock and wildlife must be considered. Trend is more important than conditions.

Allocation as an exact measurement for either production or consumption is at best an approximation and should be viewed in that light.

Many tend to view the Public Lands as though they were a separate ecosystem with little or no relationship to private lands that join or intermingle with them. Much of the critical habitat for wildlife is found on our private lands. Most cattlemen have accepted this and, historically, have furnished this forage for wildlife. But now the rancher is being told that he must keep his own domestic livestock off that part of the public land that is considered critical for wildlife. Don't expect him to accept this. Don't force him to manage his private lands to the exclusion of wildlife. When the pioneers settled the West, they naturally picked the best land with the most water for their farms and ranches. This still furnishes much of the forage for both domestic livestock, wildlife, and fisheries. If ranchers are forced from the public lands, they have two alternatives: to manage private lands for domestic livestock only— or—to sell to the "developers." Ranchers don't want this, so please don't force them into it.

Although many of the groups in the conservation movement opposed the Rangeland Bill, and even intervened at the White House to obtain a veto, we cattlemen are willing to let bygones be bygones. We have suggested to the Department of Interior that we should be willing to join them and other interested groups in

presenting a united front in obtaining the funding authorized in the bill. Cattlemen feel it is necessary that a precedent be set, that we expect the appropriation to be made as authorized so that we might get on with the program of rehabilitating some of these rangelands.

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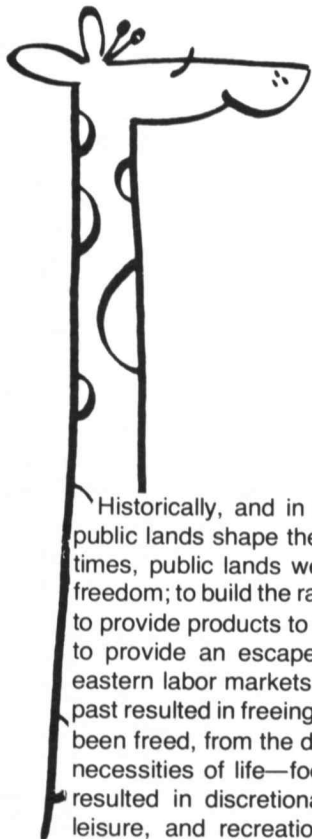
At the end of the talk, Pricilla Grew, Director of the Department of Conservation for the State of California, asked this question: How do you convince urban voters that grazing land has a higher priority for funding than they have considered before? Bill Swan, author of this article, answered:

From 1934 until 1976, the basic policy for the management of our public lands was the Taylor Grazing Act which stated that the Public Lands would be managed under this act until its final disposition. It was contemplated in this Act that the Public Lands would eventually be turned over to the various states or to private ownership.

When the BLM Organic Act was passed 1976, Congress said that the policy of the federal government was for this land to remain in federal ownership. This changes the position from one of custodial management until disposition to one of permanent management.

I compare this to an old home. It has gone through the ravages of time. It has had tenants who have stripped the wall paper and damaged the plumbing. Some of it is in pretty bad shape. Now you've decided you are not going to sell it, but you are going to keep it. If you are going to keep it, you have an obligation to restore it. You have an obligation to put on a new roof, put in new plumbing, and a new heating system.

If you are going to charge the tenant of these Public Lands, which in our case is the rancher, then you have an obligation to these lands. I think this is one approach we can take to our urban neighbors. "You've decided you are going to be our 'landlords'; now assume your responsibilities as 'landlords.'"



Let's take a long look

Laird Noh

Historically, and in the future, forces far removed from the public lands shape the allocation of range resources. In earlier times, public lands were used to pay soldiers for winning our freedom; to build the railroads and highways; to settle the nation; to provide products to feed the industrialization of America; and to provide an escape valve for immigrants who flooded the eastern labor markets. Basically, land allocation policies of the past resulted in freeing our people, as no other people have ever been freed, from the daylight-to-darkness struggle for the basic necessities of life—food, clothing, and shelter. These policies resulted in discretionary income and unprecedented wealth, leisure, and recreation. It is a great irony that the efficient employment of our lands for the production of food, fiber, and other products, has led directly to a growing demand to employ that same land for leisure.

The world is smaller now. To an even greater extent, events beyond our shores will affect the allocation of natural resources. Oil, shifting international alliances, inflation, distrust of government, tight budgets, and, above all else, declining American economic productivity will affect rangeland policies far beyond our poor power to add or detract. The new Chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, Frank Church, a key man in public land policies, has recently and forcefully emphasized that America's greatest threat is the declining productivity of our

economy. He notes, quite rightly, that it is our economic might that allows us to protect the interests of freedom throughout a world in turmoil. And the sobering facts are coming into focus. During the past decade, all the way across the board, government actions have caused the over-allocation of resources to nonproductive ends. Who can disagree, for instance, that BLM employees have become managers of papers—mountains of paper—not lands.

The bloom is off the environmental rose. For the first time in a decade, there was no mention of the environment in the State of the Union Speech. James Jeffords, Congressman from Vermont and Co-Chairman of the Congressional Environmental Study Conference, recently told a *Wall Street Journal* reporter: "We've got to regroup. The environmentalist has come to be viewed as an obstructionist rather than a savior." In most states, making the environmentalists' list of the Dirty Dozen is a stroke of good luck for a Congressman seeking re-election. Even the moral argument is changing. For awhile some were able to convince the public that wildlife and leisure time activities were somehow a higher moral or ethical use for our resources than food or energy production. To work in the private sector on Public Lands was somehow a narrow interest which didn't serve the public nearly so well as did play and leisure. That line won't wash in the years ahead, particularly with sharply rising meat prices. Signs abound that the backlash is here.

Environmentalism is viewed as a primary cause of the nation's economic ills. Increasingly, it is viewed as a threat to the nation's security, especially in matters of energy production. Unless

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