

Livestock Grazing—A Competing Use of Public Lands

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Ecological condition, watershed quality, wildlife habitat, recreation, forage production, and practical livestock grazing systems which help produce these values are concerns in the use and management of rangelands and grazed forests, both private and public. In respect to public lands, turmoil often exists from trying to assess and allocate these values under the obvious need to be realistic and equitable, consistent with a given set of circumstances. One result has been the development of a controversy over livestock grazing on public lands. The apparent status of this issue on one hand seems to be the development of a movement to eliminate or drastically reduce the livestock grazing on public lands. On the other hand, it appears that the range livestock industry and its individual ranchers are being forced into a defensive position, which is a situation that might lead to unfortunate actions and reactions that could erode their position.

Several factors have contributed to this situation. The general public has been effectively subjected to propaganda featuring wilderness and wildlife in a so-called Bambi setting that is distinctive from other productions which are excellent educational presentations on Nature. Some universities are turning out resource-trained graduates who have been indoctrinated with a strong back-to-Nature philosophy by their instructors. These graduates become employees of public resource management agencies and occupy influential positions but they have little, if any, understanding of or practical experience in the real world of resource management. And it is imperative to recognize that the numerous examples of livestock overgrazing that have existed historically, irrespective of the reasons, are equally contributory. Factions on both sides of the issue, therefore, are basically involved in the underlying causes of this controversy and this must be considered in searching for a solution.

There is evidence that, among those who have generally been adverse to livestock grazing on public lands, there are individuals who have recently backed off a bit. Many ranchers, too, are displaying a more thorough understanding and appreciation for other uses and values of public lands. This is the result of efforts on the part of both groups to resolve issues through which both parties become more knowledgeable about other viewpoints. These signs of progress, however meager they may appear locally, indicate that a stage is being reached where the leadership may be sincerely looking for reasonable solutions to the confrontation.

At the risk of being accused of preaching, which is not my intention, the following suggestions are submitted for helping reach a reasonable solution.

These competing values of public lands are not going to go away. Rather, the pressure likely will become greater on all sides. There is a need to accept this philosophy in order to live with the issues, work effectively toward our own goals, and survive economically and socially. Strong leadership and judicious action are needed, especially among ranchers and responsible resource organizations.

There is an urgency for all users and managers of public rangelands and grazed forests to reduce whatever tendency exists to take a tunnel-vision single-use stance on the subject of livestock grazing and other uses and values. Disciplinary loyalty can be carried too far and become detrimental. All factions, however, need to maintain a strong, rational position supporting their own viewpoints so that all concerned have the opportunity to learn and understand the options and trade-off values that exist. Use *with* preservation, not use *versus* preservation is the real challenge. There is no alternative to rational use of resources for man's benefit with a minimum of environmental impairment.

Basic research and many on-the-land examples show that improved ecological condition of rangeland is beneficial to livestock, wildlife, and other values. Wildlife species and livestock have certain habitat requirements seasonally for satisfactory performance, and these can and must be provided on a reasonable scale according to the capabilities of the resource. Proper livestock grazing is beneficial and often required as a tool to maintain desirable forage conditions for certain wild herbivores. The mere presence of livestock on the range, however, is not enough. There must be adherence to such basic principles as range readiness, safe degree of use, practical grazing systems which take into account the needs of the resource and the management objectives, and proper installation of needed range improvements—all based on the capability of the resource. It is usually true that livestock grazing can be compatible with, and even beneficial to, other uses and values of the resource. However, if this fact is to be conveyed to the general public, compliance with these basic principles must be demonstrated on block after block of public rangelands and grazed forests and on more than just an occasional ranch. Concurrent special effort by public land managers and ranchers is needed.

Technical and managerial problems related to livestock grazing and other uses and values of public lands vary from location to location yet they involve essentially the same principles no matter where they occur. By synthesizing research, workable procedures and practices have been developed which can be applied in a practical way under local conditions to help solve most of these problems. The need for research is as great as it ever was, but there is an even greater need to put into widespread use the huge amount of resource management knowledge, both research and practical experience, that is

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already available. Too much resource management is being or has been designed on a fragmental foundation as far as basic principles and practicality are concerned. And progress is often measured only by a backward look comparing the present with the miserable, unacceptable conditions that previously existed without also taking a forward look comparing the present with the approximate potential that can be achieved.

Good resource management involving quality livestock grazing, wildlife habitat and watershed values is easy to talk about but not so easy to achieve. Established habits and some agency philosophies and procedures need to be changed. Strongly biased opinions, often based on erroneous concepts, are not easy to overcome, either. This is further complicated by the variety of user groups usually involved on public lands and the several resource agencies dealing with forestry, grazing, wildlife habitat, recreation, and watersheds. Such complicated situations provided one of the basic reasons for devising the process known as co-ordinated resource management (CRM) planning¹ since they were not being resolved sufficiently by individual agency planning.

CRM planning, when properly done, is a simple, informal, and effective decision-making procedure; so much so that "planners" invariably want to formalize it, which adds complications. In addition to involving appropriate renewable resource agencies and user groups that are concerned with the planned area, CRM planning also has the advantage of involving the public beginning with the inception of the plan. Organizations, such as wildlife federations, and individuals who are more or less directly concerned with the planned area normally are the most effective reviewers and critics. This is especially true if they participate in the development of the rationale on which decisions in the plan are based. When the CRM plan is completed, the process of

obtaining agency and public input and review, which the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) requires, has essentially been accomplished. The environmental impact statement, when required, could be streamlined and made less voluminous and expensive than usual by merely documenting this involvement in discussing alternative approaches and the bases for the decisions made. Time and man-power saved could be used to help put CRM plans into action out on the land, monitor progress, and make necessary adjustments as time goes on. Adequate time and man-power to follow through on plans the first few years after development is especially important and needed because lack of follow-through is a primary cause of resource plans becoming inactive.

Complicated planning procedures, voluminous environmental impact statements, time-consuming referrals, the retinue of planners and reviewers, resulting litigations and conferences, albeit encouraged by NEPA and accepted as an integral part of the land use planning process, have been injected into the resource management planning process in some instances. One result has been that the major objective of some of those involved seems to be compliance with procedural matters and the successful completion of the paperwork involved. They seem to have lost sight of the real objective of resource management planning, which is to make decisions that will result in an action program of use with preservation out on the land.

CRM planning is not a cure-all. It is especially effective for planning the specific management of resources on a designated area after the land use or allocation decisions have been made. However, concerned non-governmental organizations should join together to influence resource agencies and others to make CRM planning a part of their standard resource management planning procedure as one means of accomplishing a degree of simplicity, practicality, and efficiency. The result could be the achievement of more on-the-land resource improvement without increasing over-all costs. ●

¹ Anderson, E. William. 1977. Planning the use and management of renewable resources. *Rangeman's J.* 4:99-102 & 144-147.

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