

Proper planning will help rejuvenate this bare ground and spotty grass area.

LIKE DRIVING IN A BLIZZARD LOOKING FOR DELINEATOR POSTS!

Educator describes how to achieve property management goals

By Dallas Mount

Managing your property can be a lot like driving in a blizzard and looking for roadside delineator posts to stay on the right path. Having a well-thought out property management plan can provide a clear end goal and make those delineator posts easier to spot.

My family recently purchased the 78 acres of subirrigated pastureland that surrounds the home where we've lived for 11 years near Wheatland. We were thrilled to have a larger piece of the earth to call our own, but we soon wondered, what now? We had many ideas of what we could do with the place and what it could do for us. As

a University of Wyoming Cooperative Extension Service (UW CES) educator who works with landowners on land management issues, one thing I preach is to develop a written plan for your land.

I'd better practice what I preach, right?

This article will discuss the process of developing a property management plan using my property as an example. This is one of the properties being profiled in the Property Improvement Project run by the team that develops *Barnyards & Backyards*. Full descriptions of the property and the others can be found under the Property Improvement Project link at www.barnyardsandbackyards.com.

Google Earth makes a great planning tool!

Google Earth is a free, downloadable application that allows users to create and manipulate aerial and satellite image maps of anywhere in the world. Visit <http://Earth.Google.com> and install the free version. Once you have found your place, you can add place marks, polygons, and paths to identify water tanks, fences, and pastures, or other features such as ditches and planned improvements.



A map of the property created by using Google Earth assists in planning water supply locations.

Why develop a plan?

Knowing what you want is key. When you ask for management perspective from friends or professionals, you need to share your property goals; otherwise, they might make faulty assumptions. Maybe you want habitat for deer or elk, or a well-manicured pasture that's attractive to passers-by, or perhaps you are interested in providing forage for horses or other grazing animals. Each goal is reasonable, but each requires a different approach and different management decisions.

Developing a plan also provides an opportunity to talk about what your property should be with all interested parties. Maybe you and your spouse or children have differing priorities for use of the land. This is an opportunity to get all the cards on the table and decide the end goal for particular pieces of the property.

What does a plan look like?

A good plan answers a few simple questions:

- What is the current state of our property?
- What do I want our property to be?
- What steps need to be taken to get from the current to the desired state?
- How will we know we're making progress?

Answering the questions on the property plan worksheet (page 7) will walk you through this.

Sounds simple, right? It really is, but writing this

down and getting agreement from everyone involved is where it gets interesting.

So, let's get to it using my family's property as an example.

A brief description of the property: 80 acres, about 80 percent is either flood irrigated or subirrigated; dominated by tall wheatgrass and other wet-area grasses; only one livestock watering location at the far southeast corner of the property.

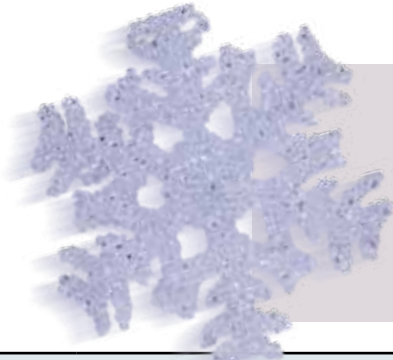
Now look at the property plan worksheet. The first section challenges you to think through what you want the property to be and what challenges you are facing. The second section considers strategies to move the land from where it is to the desired state and to articulate the milestones along the way you expect to see. Blank property plan worksheets are available on the Property Improvement Project Web site at www.barnyardsandbackyards.com.

Once the plan is written and has agreement by all parties, it's time to go to work. This can include consulting with various resource people — from neighbors to UW CES, conservation district, and Natural Resources Conservation Service personnel. Look at the plan at least annually; update it and make note which goals have been met and any new ones created along the way.

Now that there is a plan, you have delineator posts to help find your way and keep you on the road to making the property be what you want it to be.

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Property Plan Worksheet

Management Objectives Section

Global vision/directive

(Multiple statements allowed/encouraged. Example statements: attractive to passers-by; keep my horses fat and happy; room to train my bird dog; place for my family to play soccer; store my equipment; beautiful!; a wildlife haven.)

We believe this property should be ... (examples) productive grass-land pasture, income producer, place for recreation, healthy land, low maintenance, wildlife habitat.

Assessment of the property

(Multiple statements should be linked with global vision statements. Example statements: a weed patch; a junk pile; needs some improvements; is starving my horses; has too much bare ground; is blowing away; is a hazard in wildfire.)

Currently, the situation that is undesirable is ... too much bare ground and weed patches and too many mature, ungrazed grass clumps. Areas where Russian olive trees were removed are bare or less productive than areas with a good grass population.

Desire for the property

(Example statements: get rid of weeds; support three horses; protect the stream; good scenic values; alter snowdrift location; decrease bare ground; increase forage production/quality; see wildflowers)

We have agreed we want to ... increase vigor of desired forages in problem areas, decrease bare ground and weed patches, irrigate property, support grazing animals, develop livestock water, encourage cottonwoods.

Management Strategy Section

Strategies identified to accomplish desired state

(Example statements: building horse barn and corral; weed control work; land shaping and reseeding, fencing; managed grazing; tree windbreak; new driveway.)

Some strategies we can use to accomplish the things we desire are ...

managed grazing – change to less damaging season of use (when grasses are dormant), reduce grazing duration, increase grazing intensity on ungrazed areas, start irrigating, research water development options and cottonwood establishment options, increase amount of long-term (trend) monitoring.

Predicted outcome and how the outcome helps achieve objective(s)

(Example statements: decrease erosion; increase productivity and help my horses get fat; encourage wildflowers that attract butterflies.)

These strategies will ... decrease bare ground and weeds, improve vigor of desired vegetation, increase overall productivity, increase income potential, improve water quality, reduce wind erosion

The milestone(s) are

(What indicates achievement? Example statements: when my horses are fat; the water is clear; the weeds are gone; my neighbors are envious; etc.)

I'll know I'm successful when ... monitoring sites indicate positive change, weed patches and bare ground reduce in size, cottonwoods appear.

Responsiveness

(The time frame you expect)

We would anticipate achieving objectives by ... two years to see positive response – drought could delay progress.

Note: Creating simple "before" and "after" maps of your property may help clarify your thoughts during the planning process.