



Hay is cheap, land is valuable

Why do you live in the country? Clean air? Open space? Great views? Animals?

These are all good reasons, and likely you enjoy some if not all of these benefits of rural life. Another benefit of rural living can be the value of your property. With a growing interest in rural living, property values in many areas have seen steady and notable increases the past few years. Many of the values of rural land are bound to the aesthetics of that land. Landowners need to maintain these aesthetics not only for the benefit of their enjoyment but also to protect the investment in the property.

Low Productivity:

Many Wyoming regions that have great beauty and make desirable home sites have very low forage productivity and therefore have a low carrying capacity when it comes to livestock. The photos with corresponding estimates of carrying capacity may provide some point of reference for the production potential of your land. When estimating carrying capacity, it is always better to error on the side of caution. You will not do

any damage to your land by not grazing it enough, but you can severely and quickly damage it by overgrazing. Your management system, the distance to water, and the timing of grazing will affect carrying capacity. Good grazing management does not mean grazing every blade of grass that is growing on the property. It means managing grazing so that the land is either maintaining or improving in condition.

Hay is Cheap:

A common sustainable production level for an upland, non-irrigated site in Wyoming is eight acres to produce enough forage to sustain a horse or cow for one month. (However, carrying capacity in Wyoming varies from eight to 50 acres to sustain a cow or horse for one month.) This same cow or horse would eat about 0.2 tons of hay in that month. At \$80 per ton for hay, this eight acres could be replaced with \$16 of hay. Therefore, the gross productive value of many land sites is around \$2/acre/year. Is it really worth saving a little bit on hay to overgraze your land? Keeping the animals in a corral

and feeding hay is a much better solution for the health of your land and to protect the investment in your property.

Other Factors:

If you are still not convinced it is cheaper to buy hay than to overgraze a pasture, there are still other factors to consider.

Weeds – The number one enemy to weeds is competition. A good, healthy stand of perennial grasses and other vegetation will prevent most weed problems. Getting rid of weeds is expensive and time consuming. Prevent weed problems by managing for the health of native grasses and other plants.

Soil – Wyoming has a reputation for being a bit windy at times. Wind can carry away valuable topsoil. This is something that will not be replaced in your lifetime. Protect topsoil by maintaining a healthy rangeland ecosystem.

Animal Health – Horses and other livestock will generally avoid eating poisonous plants if they have a choice. Overgrazing increases the chance your animals will eat something harmful.

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