Survey Results Will Be Shared

Dear Friends,

As this new year began, we were asked by the University of Wyoming to prepare our future programming.

In an effort to better serve Carbon and Albany Counties, we have enclosed a survey. It should only take you a few minutes to complete, and will greatly help in our planning.

The results will drive our future endeavors into areas of concern to you and your operations.

The results of the survey will be shared in a future newsletter.

We would like to thank you in advance for taking the time to help us out!!

Sincerely,

Calvin Strom
Carbon/Albany County UW Agriculture Educator

Sincerely,

Kellie Chichester
Albany/Carbon County UW Agriculture Educator
Sage Grouse Habitat Improvement
by Calvin Strom, UW Educator, Sustainable Mgmt. Rangeland Resources, Carbon/Albany Counties

At a recent sage grouse conference, Terry Messmer, Utah State Fisheries and Wildlife Professor, gave a very entertaining and informative presentation “Improving Wildlife Habitat using Grazing Management”.

Messmer states, “there are, according to Aldo Leopold, four management tools used to manage landscapes: the cow, fire, plow and axe. The cow is by far the most controversial.”

Grazing controversy focuses on the perception that grazing causes:
- Loss of biodiversity
- Lowering of population densities
- Disruption of ecosystem functions
- Changes in community organization
- Change in physical characteristics of habitats

Sources of conflict are:
- Stocking densities
  - Type of livestock
  - Season of Use
  - Duration of grazing
- Ecology and history of the site

This controversy is a result of the lack of a common denominator or common language that will bring wildlife managers and range managers together to work on these misconceptions thru shared research with scientists and the stakeholders.

Research has shown that the general public is most closely aligned with the Conservation Biology & the Wildlife Society on issues involving rangeland management. Most of their knowledge comes from the internet (Google Wildlife Cattle Interactions) - you will find a paid advertisement from Western Watersheds.

Another study was done by surveying local working groups with the question “What are the major threats to Sage Grouse?”

In Wyoming it was energy development, in Nevada fire. Broken down into groups it looks like this:

- Landowners see predators as greatest threat
- Agency folks see development & fire
- Environmental see grazing
- Others see development and energy

Research has shown that non-grazed pastures see very little use by deer and elk. They prefer early season cattle grazed areas. Grazing can also benefit waterfowl populations, sage brush obligates by providing increased cover, and periods free of disturbance during critical nesting periods. The research demonstrates that these populations increased when using a rotational system over a continuous grazing system.

Terry Messmer states, “Under the endangered species act, if the Sage Grouse is listed, could forage removal be seen as a taking?” This statement alone should encourage everyone that grazes to participate in the state’s effort to develop a CCAA for Sage Grouse. There is some good research and practical experience out there that demonstrates how grazing and sagebrush treatments can benefit Sage Grouse, which in turn will benefit all of the other sagebrush obligates. In his opinion “Working Groups” most important task should be learning through “monitoring” if we will continue to do the same thing. There are very few instances of adaptive management as a part of this process. Research in absence doesn’t involve communities or landowners in this process. They don’t read scientific journals so scientists need to partner with landowners to get them involved.

His research in Utah used three sagebrush treatments and a control. They treated 5000 acres in 2003 with spike, Dixie harrow, and a Lawson aerator. Sage Grouse showed preference for the spike treatment that opened up patches in the sagebrush canopy over the other treatments that reduce the canopy height. 45% of the grouswe were in the spike, 22% in the Dixie harrow, 23% in the Lawson aerator and 105 in the control. Initially the spike treatment had great use, but as time passed the mechanical treatments kicked in. The grouse population in the study area has grown enough that they are capturing birds and shipping them all over Utah. By 2008 the treated areas are losing the benefits because the management was not changed; the sagebrush canopy is closing from 20-40%. He recommends treating no more than 20% of the breeding habitat every thirty years in areas of Wyoming big sage and don’t treat entire landscape—treat 13-26 foot wide strips because sage grouse like edges.

You can use several species to achieve results, but have to have a common language to achieve the desired results. Messmer believes there is still a schism between wildlife managers and range managers which needs to be overcome this. This responsibility lies directly on the scientific community.

Continued page 3…….
Rick Danvir, wildlife manager at the Deseret Ranch in Woodruff, Utah, delivered his presentation focusing on the ranches’ grazing system of periodic herbivory and rest (12 months +) for improving wildlife habitat. He has been there since 1983 and the ranch has doubled its cow herd to 5000 head. It also runs 3000 sheep (for targeted grazing), 3500 mule deer and 2300 elk. The ranch took a lesson from the elk and bison and selected small cows that calve easily and moved the calving date to April. They quit weaning in November and started weaning on September 1 and still get the 400 lb calves they were getting on November first. They have reduced their winter feed to a half ton per cow - the average in Woodruff is 2 tons per cow. The cattle are run in a rotational system resting 25-30% of the ranch each year. They manage for diversity across the landscape by early season grazing for short periods with high stock densities through 60 pastures the smallest being 1000 acres with the larger 5-8 thousand acres. Most of the ranch is resting during the fast growing season. This system creates heterogeneity because the cows don’t use the pastures evenly which meshes with multiple species of wildlife as some species prefer overgrazed areas or some dense cover. This also reduces selectivity, increases diet selection and maintains a diverse forage base of forbs, grasses and shrubs. If you remove the cattle from the system the shrub density increases and forbs decline. Large herbivores when managed properly are a necessary component for wildlife habitat. Disturbance (fire, spike, grazing) keeps early seral species in the mix which are plants that sage grouse prefer. The sage grouse population on the Deseret has increased since they began treatments; time controlled grazing and creating early seral patches. So they doubled the cow herd and increased the number of sage grouse leks and are removing more AUM’s than they were in 1925. Management works.


Announcements

**Medicine Bow Conservation District**

**invites you to their Annual Winter Workshop**

It will cover:  Garrison Creeping Foxtail  
Meadow Foxtail  
Haying-Grazing-Controlling-Improving Production-Etc.

**February 27**  
**Medicine Bow School**  
10am to 3:30pm  
Contact: Todd or Linda at 307-379-2221 or mbcd@carbonpower.net

**Unit Cost of Production Workshop**

Have you ever asked yourself, “Exactly how much does it cost to raise a calf.” This will be the topic of discussion hosted by the Carbon County Extension Service with Dallas Mount and Calvin Strom.

**March 5**  
**Carbon Building, Room 368**  
10am to 2pm  
Reserve your spot now - Contact the Carbon County Extension at 328-2642
WASHINGTON -- The Obama administration is calling for stricter labels on fresh meat and other foods that would show more clearly where an animal or food came from, a move favored by U.S. Sen. Mike Enzi, R-Wyo., and some Wyoming ranchers.

Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack told consumer groups, farm groups and meat industry leaders Tuesday that he will ask the meat industry to voluntarily follow stricter guidelines for new package labels designed to specify a food's country of origin. The Agriculture Department abruptly canceled a scheduled announcement of the decision Wednesday morning, with little explanation.

The move comes as Obama prepares to visit Canada -- a longtime opponent of the so-called "country of origin" labels -- today (Feb 18). Both Canada and Mexico have protested the labeling in a complaint to the World Trade Organization.

In calling for the stricter guidelines, the Obama administration would be breaking from rules announced by the Agriculture Department shortly before President George W. Bush left office.

Supporters of the labeling law -- first enacted in a wide-ranging farm bill last year -- were not happy with the Bush administration's version of the rules, which they said allowed meat companies to be vague about where an animal was born, raised and slaughtered.

In a letter to Vilsack Jan. 22, Enzi and Sen. Tim Johnson, D-S.D., said they were encouraged by his direction on the issue.

"Ensuring that consumers throughout America have the opportunity to identify 'U.S. origin' exclusive product is a priority, and we are very pleased to see this discussed by the Administration...," the senators wrote. "We look forward to working with you in the upcoming months and continuing to work with farmers and ranchers to ensure the program is implemented properly and as Congress intended."

If the industry does not comply with the stricter guidelines, the administration will write new rules, according to those who spoke with Vilsack on Tuesday.

The labeling requirements, which would apply to fresh meats and some perishable fruits and vegetables, have long been debated in Congress. While the meat industry and retailers responsible for the labels have protested the changes -- saying they are burdensome and could lead to higher prices -- consumer groups and northern state ranchers who compete with the Canadian beef industry favor them.

All sides worked out a compromise during debate over the farm bill last year, but much of the law was left open to interpretation by the Agriculture Department.

According to those on the call, including Jean Halloran of Consumers Union and Patty Lovera of Food and Water Watch, Vilsack said he would like to see labels that would give consumers a clearer idea about the origin of the animal or food.

Vilsack also said the law should cover more foods, Halloran and Lovera said. Many foods that are defined as "processed" -- roasted peanuts, for example, or cured bacon -- are exempt from the law, but Vilsack proposed narrowing that definition.

Lovera said she was encouraged by the proposals, which Vilsack said he would lay out in a letter to the meat industry.

"The bottom line is we think people have a right to know and they can act on it based on their own opinions and preferences," she said.

Enzi's press secretary, Elly Pickett, said Wednesday the senator was waiting for details from the USDA, but the administration's plan "appears to be in Senator Enzi's favor and along the lines of what he and (Johnson) have been asking for."

"But until we have actual details, I can't say for sure," Pickett wrote in an e-mail. "We plan to make comments once the USDA releases the information."

One industry group, R-CALF United Stockgrowers of America, issued a press release Wednesday praising Vilsack's statement.

"We hope that industry participants will honor the requests of Secretary Vilsack to provide accurate COOL labels to consumers at the earliest date possible," said the group's CEO, Bill Bullard.

Some of the law's leading opponents have been grocery stores and large meatpacking companies -- many of which mix U.S. and Mexican beef -- and other businesses involved in getting products to supermarkets.

Source: Mary Clare Jalonick, Associated Press writer, Wednesday, February 18, 2009
If you are over the age of 18, please complete the following survey. There are no identifiers incorporated in this to ensure that your answers remain anonymous; unless you choose to provide your contact information. By completing this survey you are acknowledging: “My participation is voluntary and my refusal to participate will not involve penalty or loss of benefits to which I am otherwise entitled and I may discontinue participation at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which I am otherwise entitled.”

Please take a moment to provide feedback. Your input will help direct the future of our programming and information provided. It does not require an envelope – just fold, tape, stamp and mail. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact Calvin Strom at 307-328-2642 or cstrom@uwyo.edu or Kellie Chichester at 307-721-2571 or kellic@uwyo.edu.

Do you find the newsletter articles relevant to your operation?
Yes ____ No____

Have you changed anything after reading the newsletter?
What: ________________________________________________________________

What type of information needs to be covered in the future?
____________________________________________________________________

How can we make the newsletter more helpful?
____________________________________________________________________

What are the pressing issues on your operation at present?
____________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________

What day of the week? What time of day?
___Monday ___ Morning
___Tuesday ___ Afternoon
___Wednesday ___ Evening
___Thursday
___Friday
___Saturday

If not, why not? __________________________________________________________

Please mark the topics/programs below in which you are interested
__Monitoring  __Master Cattleman  __Master Gardener
__Small Acreages __Ag Software Programs __Unit Cost of Production
__Alternatives to Fertilizer __Windrow Grazing __Managing Hay Meadows
__Pasturing __Irrigated Pasture Management __Prevent/Minimize Cattle Disease
Demographic Information:
The following information is optional. Its purpose is to help identify the characteristics of the general audience completing the questionnaire. Please circle your response.

County: Carbon  Albany  Other
Age: 18-24  25-34  35-44  45-54  55 or older
Gender: Male  Female

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Do you wonder how the majority of our urban population receive their information about issues involving “Public Lands”? One such source is www.wasteofthewest.com a website that vilifies ranching on public lands.

There are two major issues that are confronting the BLM, USFS and ranchers - “Sage Grouse and Wild Horses”. There is a bill being introduced by Nick Rahall to prohibit the BLM from killing horses in lockup and provide sanctuaries on “Public Lands” for horses. We all need to write to our congressional representatives to outline our thoughts on these measures. Get your friends and families to write to interior Secretary Salazar, President Obama and their congressional representatives.

There has been a lawsuit filed in Portland, OR by a ranch family who lost their allotment due to “Riparian Conditions”. They contend that horse numbers may be 5 times the 100 limit established by the Forest Service. They lost their allotment due to a lawsuit filed by the “Oregon Natural Desert Association” that the cattle had damaged the riparian zones thereby threatening endangered Steelhead in two creeks on the allotment. They graze for 12 weeks and use herding to keep cattle out of the riparian areas, contending in their suit that horses and elk are the culprits.

This story was published the Oregonian on February 8th 2009. Below are a sample of the comments posted about the article.

“Check out the conditions of Dairycreek, Honey Creek and other overgrazed spots like the Sycan Ford or the headwaters at Withers Lakes. Some have fenced the creeks and it has had positive affects, with the exceptions of where the cattle have access and down stream for some distance. Even run off from the fenced out cattle will wind up in the streams. There have to be more limitations on grazing rights. The lower reaches of the Sycan Ford have all but been destroyed. Water that 25 years ago was 5-6 feet deep and crystal clear are now less than two feet deep in mud and poo. The fish are gone and I have no reason to ever want to return there. It makes me sick! Read “sacred cows at the public trough” by Denzel and Nancy Ferguson. It carries us from the sage brush rebellion to the Reagan years and the James Watts legacy. It’s based on facts of scientific studies by professionals in erosion and land use issues from 1800s to present. It foretold the problems we face today and will continue to face till the government subsidizes farmers to fence out miles of creek beds from the cattle. It’s all doable but the farmers won’t reach into their own pockets to do it, but they’ll sure reach for yours and mine! Compare Withers Lake to Slide Lake and you’ll see the real impact. Not far from one another, Slide has no cattle influence while Withers has cattle grazing in the headwaters. It’s a muddy frog pond in comparison. This is within our control but we don’t approach it correctly. DENZEL AND NANCY FERGUSEN WERE 30 YEARS AHEAD OF THE TIMES AND NO-ONE WAS LISTENING!”

“Stewards of Public Land” and by doing so will deflect most, if not all, of the misconceptions portrayed on “www.wasteofthewest.com”. Stockgrowers need to reach out to conservation groups and show them the good work done by the majority of “Public Lands” ranchers by having open houses and tours of well run operations that showcase the healthy ecosystems that result from well managed grazing systems. The ball is in our court whether we like it or not. Actions always speak louder than words.

Rotational Grazing on Rangelands: Reconciliation of Perception and Experimental Evidence
by Calvin Strom, UW Agriculture Educator, Sustainable Mgmt. Rangeland Resources, Carbon/Albany Counties

The Oregonian newspaper created a fire-storm of controversy due to its interpretation of this situation; “This synthesis demonstrates that continued advocacy for rotational grazing as a superior system of grazing is founded on perception and anecdotal interpretations, rather than on the preponderance of experimental evidence. Rotational grazing as a means to increase vegetation and animal production has been subjected to as rigorous a testing regime as any hypothesis in the rangeland profession, and it has been found to convey few, if any, consistent benefits over continuous grazing.”

When I attended the Colorado Section of Society for Range Management meeting in Fort Collins last December the Oregonian was a hot topic and continues to be so.

The speakers were university professors, research scientists and practitioners (ranch managers, owners and wildlife managers). The debate over season long vs rotational grazing was center stage the second day of the conference. Two notable university professors’ (Richard Teague, Brien Norton) presentations focused on the benefits of rotational grazing and the fact that most research experiments are done on a very small scale. They have yet to investigated at ranch scale under management aimed at rotational grazing outcomes of vegetation, habitat, animal performance, quality of life and profit over an adequate time frame that demonstrate the benefits of rotational grazing. Ranchers need to receive training, coaching, and practice and continue to learn how to manage for episodic events, manage now for rain by improving litter and plant density or increase water infiltration. So what kind of system will address those issues?

John Welch, CEO Spade Ranches, uses a rotational system on his ranch which has led to reduced feed & fuel inputs through grazing management. You still have to destock if it doesn’t rain and it gives you time figure out when you have to pull the trigger. He has seen an increase in plant diversity and the majority of the ranch is rested for 340 days every year. These changes take time, so you have to be in it for the long haul.

Jim Howell, Cimarron, Colorado, finds rangeland and pasture environments are more complex than we can understand. You need a dynamic planning process that can effectively and practically account for this nearly overwhelming level of complexity – human values, economic goals and needs, ecological considerations, management logistics and challenges, topography, animal performance, etc. So assume the plan is wrong, continue to monitor, adjust and adapt as conditions dictate! This does not lend itself to reductionist research or neat tidy statistical analysis, variables or uncontrollable factors and are unique to every operation. He is grazing four and a half months with outside cattle using a one wire high tensile electric for pasture division. He then uses poly wire strung through the brush to

“Change is the only constant and herbivores are made to move!”

continued page 7
divide the pasture into strips for grazing. He also has a lease with a neighboring ranch to improve elk habitat. He divided 2 pastures into 11 pastures and uses poly wire to strip graze the pastures. He strings the poly wire across the canyon from ridge to ridge allowing the 400 pairs 300-400 yards of access to ridges and riparian areas the cattle stay on the narrow riparian zone for the first day and by the third and fourth days they are on top of the ridges. The areas that are grazed this year will receive two years rest before they are grazed again. In any given year he is grazing only half the ranch. His monitoring data shows a significant change in ground cover over the previous season long system in place previously. The bare ground was 20% in 1997 and in 2008 it is only 7%, litter and plant basal cover has increased from 79% to 93% and the distance to nearest plant has decreased from 95 to .67 inches and he is grazing 4 times the livestock that previous lessee (100 pairs) did in a season long system. He never grazes any of the pastures at the same time or intensity from year to year. The elk have moved onto the ranch in significant numbers. His own ranch is also stocked thirty percent higher than it was under the previous season long system.

Jim travels the world working with ranchers on grazing systems and makes it a point to find ranchers that are doing innovative and profitable grazing on their ranches. One such rancher in New South Wales Australia owns 62,000 acres runs 3000 cows and 2500 yearlings with 1.5 full time laborers with no tractors, pickups or hay machinery and follows two to three day grazing periods constantly moving cattle. His cost of production is 10 cents per pound which includes interest and wages and he is selling 900 pound grass finished yearlings for 80 cents a pound netting $630 per head.

He has worked with a ranch in Montana to reduce their winter feeding costs (traditionally fed 25lbs a day for 120 days) through an improved grazing planning. Last winter they grazed until February 25th from February 26th to May 1st cows were supplemented with nine pounds of hay per day per head saving the ranch $121,000 in hay costs based on $85 a ton price.

Grady Grissom, manager of Rancho Largo east of Walsenburg, Colorado, is in a 10-12 inch precipitation zone at 5400-6000 feet in elevation. He was hired as manager in 1995. After the first three years the ranch was experiencing a negative 10% ROI on cattle performance. They were essentially using a continuous grazing system stocking rate was maximized to offset overhead costs, breed back was 85%. The breed back was not sustainable, so he decreased stocking rate. As stocking rate declined, ROI began to rise. He was focused on production for the first five years using nine pastures which was essentially continuous grazing. The ranch was 80% Blue Gramma, 15% Western Wheatgrass, some Galleta and other species. He attended a grazing management seminar that covered cool & warm season grasses and their response to grazing. He discovered that Blue Gramma increases with intensity and cool season species decreased. He started observing what his cows ate and when. From mid-February to May they ate Western Wheatgrass, which was only 20% of the forage, so his stocking rate increased by 50 and declined to 10 in March and 5 in April. These plants were being defoliated two and three times with no chance to recover and by July they were dormant. He implemented a rotational grazing system that would give the Western Wheatgrass a chance to recover. The pasture he started in February was hit hard early, but had time to recover after he left in March. The next pasture had more growth, so the grazing was not as severe. By mid-May the Blue Gramma comes on and the cows quit the Western Wheatgrass. All the pastures he has not used rested the full growing season for Western Wheatgrass which ends in late May to mid-June. By being observant and getting some education Grady has been able to increase the Western Wheatgrass component of his pastures to 50%. He is now, in effect, resting most of his cool season species for two growing seasons. It has been an 8 year iterative process which is on going. There have been some unintended consequences, such as Vine Mesquite, Silver Bluestem, Sideoats Gramma and Green Needlegrass (all desirable species) showing up. Grady says “think about drought, rainfall events and set yourself up to manage. Fences and rotation do not equal effective management or homogenous landscapes, adaptive management is what works. What ranchers or land managers need from scientists is the underlying principles of plant growth above & below ground and basic ecological principles and let managers use them.” His ROI on his cattle is around 15% after figuring out what works on the landscape to improve ecological processes that produce more forage.

All of these systems described above have a common thread - long rest periods between graze periods which is key to the improvements they are seeing on the ground.

So which system would you choose season long or a managed grazing system? Based on the evidence provided by the presenters, my preference would be the managed (rotational) grazing system.
Cowboy Logic: A fine is a tax for doing wrong. A tax is a fine for doing well.

“If you have seen the new Wyoming State Butterfly—you are one of the lucky ones!”