

\$ @ * & % DROUGHT IS HERE AGAIN!

By Dallas Mount

The dry winter and spring brought back drought conditions in a big way. If your land consists of rangeland or rain-fed pasture, this drought is going to affect the plants.

Be aware of several considerations and management options that accompany drought. If grazing animals depend upon your land for forage production, immediate attention is required! Waiting too late to act can have long-lasting, detrimental impacts to the land.

Importance of Spring Precipitation

Why such a big deal about a couple of dry months? After all, most of the summer is still ahead, right? This may seem reasonable, but the fact is most rangeland grasses and planted pastures in Wyoming have the majority of growth in a 45- to 60-day period in the spring. Precipitation during April and May have the greatest effect on forage production. Not receiving moisture during these critical months means there likely won't be much forage. Summer rains can green up the grass but usually result in little forage production. A dry spring means it's already time to plan for reduced forage.

Impact of Drought on the Plant

Lack of moisture means the plant will produce less forage, but it also is a general stress on the



plant. Reducing or eliminating other stresses on the plant will help recovery from drought. Grazing, mowing, grasshoppers, prairie dogs, and fire are examples of stresses landowners may have control over. If desirable plants are hit with multiple stresses during a single year, they may die and create bare ground that weeds can use to establish on the property.

To help desirable plants survive the drought, allow plants to fully recover next year before allowing additional stressors, such as grazing, to occur.

De-stocking Your Land

If there are grazing animals, the first and most important response to drought is to remove grazing animals from the land so the plants are not grazed. Depending on the situation, horses could be kept in a corral and fed hay, cattle or other livestock could be sold earlier than planned, or pasture could be rented from a neighbor who may have more pasture or irrigated land. None of these options are appealing to the pocketbook, but leaving animals to overgraze the land will cost more in the long run.

Whatever your chosen response to drought, the important thing is to do something soon! Too often, landowners wait too long to respond to drought and, by then, the damage is done!

HAY, PASTURE AVAILABLE AT WYOMING WEBSITE

The Wyoming Hay-Pasture-Seed List has listings that provide:

- Hay type, location, bale weights, and number of bales available;
- Pasture type, county, city of listing and whether available or needed
- Seed type, county, city of listing and percent pure seed
- Other services, and
- Wyoming hay marketing opportunities.

See www.wyomingextension.org/haylist

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