

loped without significant interference by humans or by their use of natural resources).

Specifically there are three program objectives for RNA's:

1. They are examples of important and/or unique undisturbed terrestrial and aquatic ecosystems, which provide baselines against which the changes caused by people on similar communities can be measured.

2. They serve as gene pool reservoirs for rare, threatened, or endangered plants and animals and also provide an unaltered gene pool for common organisms.

3. They provide natural, undisturbed areas for research and educational use.

The 13 new RNA's range in size from 227 acres to 11,930 acres, and include a variety of ecosystem communities (cells or elements). Ten of the RNA's are on the Burns BLM district, three on the Vale BLM district, and one is an enlargement of an already existing RNA, Jordan Crater. A wide array of terrestrial and aquatic features are represented. Aquatic cells include vernal ponds; a high elevation lake; a large, relatively undisturbed stream drainage; and a low elevation pond. Many high elevation plant communities are also represented: alpine plant communities on Steens Mountain; aspen groves, an extensive mountain mahogany stand, and black sagebrush/fescue grasslands. The lower elevation plant communities include a winterfat stand; narrowleaf cottonwood; big sagebrush/Indian ricegrass-needlegrass; big sagebrush/bunchgrass communities; western juniper/big sagebrush/bunchgrass communities; and a small silver sage community.

The RNA's will serve as benchmarks for monitoring the recovery of nearby disturbed areas; for example, overgrazed plant communities, disturbed riparian zones and wildlife habitats, unhealthy aquatic habitats. Monitoring the various

successional stages of range plant communities, studies on forage production, nutrient cycling and availability, wildlife behavior and habitat characteristics, and fire history can be carried out under natural conditions on Research Natural Areas. Evaluation of the natural distribution, population dynamics, and habitat requirements of many sensitive plant and animal species can be done without interference for other management activities. The new RNA's will protect important seed sources for native grasses and shrubs. Finally, RNA's are sites where long-term research may progress undisturbed by roads, vegetation management, or other human activities. Permanent sample plots safe from other management activities can be established. Research can be concentrated and easily coordinated in designated RNA's.

Each Research Natural Area not only provides opportunities for research but also can be used as an outdoor classroom and research laboratory for secondary and higher education classes. The only restrictions state that destructive sampling must not occur, and use must not impair the naturalness of the area.

The Pacific Northwest Region Research Natural Area scientist, along with land managers and other scientists, continues to locate and evaluate suitable lands needed to complete the full array of undisturbed ecosystems to serve as ecological benchmarks.

More information for these 13 Research Natural Areas can be obtained by writing to the District Managers of the various Bureau of Land Management districts or to Sarah Greene, Research Natural Area Scientist, 3200 Jefferson Way, Corvallis, Oregon 97331. ●

VIEWPOINT: Winter Grazing

Hugh Barrett

This is with reference to the article "Historical Aspects of Winter Grazing" by James Young and Raymond Evans, *Rangelands* 6:206-209 1984. The authors did a good job of warning us of the hazards of winter grazing. Unfortunately, the perspective they offer on the subject was very limited and not what I would call illuminating.

Winter grazing on native or seeded ranges, where weather and resources permit, can have considerable economic and environmental benefits. Nowadays the herd loss in Ruby Valley could have been predicted, snow depths and its tendency to crust being what they are in that area. The decision to graze open range in winter must take into account snow depths, snowfall frequency and the duration of the snow-pack. These factors, as we all know, vary considerable by area.

There is great potential for winter range use if we look at specific areas in the northwest. Take for example the Lovelock, Fallon and Yerington areas of western Nevada. Here the duration of snow pack may be relatively long but snow depth is normally small. A haystack, however, is certainly recommended. Hay can be purchased well in advance of need

during the time of year when prices are down. Emergency or panic buying is unnecessary. The Boardman area of north central Oregon and the Columbia Basin of Washington are ideally suited to winter grazing. Elevations range from about 800 to 2,000 feet, winters are open and relatively mild and site productivity is high. Once again, an emergency hay supply is good business.

The authors very wisely reminded us to consider the need to reserve forage for winter use in spring and summer grazing plans. But let's not overlook opportunities for bringing irrigated pasture or high elevation ranges into the picture.

The article's emphasis seemed, with exception of basin wildrye, to be seeded wheatgrass. Don't underestimate the ability of bluebunch wheatgrass or needle-and-thread to provide ample, high energy feed. The opportunities to improve range condition and increase productivity, the positive effects on animal health and production and economic benefits to the operator are substantial where conditions are right.

Please don't slam the door on winter grazing because of past mistakes. Learn and go on. ●