



By Gary Frasier

# Frasier's Philosophy

I recently read an article in the local newspaper about how it is costing about double what is obtained in grazing fees to administer the public rangelands. The opponents of public land grazing use the argument that the only returns are the fees paid the lessee (and sometimes the local economy) and that if the land was not being grazed, then expenses would be reduced. This is an old controversy that keeps bouncing back.

The management costs of public lands are not concerned solely with the grazing aspects. Most of the public lands are the watershed for providing water to downstream users. There are some costs associated with watershed functions. This water has a value that should be included in a cost-benefit analysis. There is recreation on most public lands. The costs for overseeing recreation activities are not always separated from the management of grazing on the lands. There are other activities on public lands, such as timber and mining, that incur costs. A true assessment must include all costs and benefits, tangible and intangible.

This leads me to the theme of this issue of *Rangelands*, "Managed Livestock Grazing." It is recognized that past livestock grazing has been detrimental to the sustainability of the ecosystem in many places. There are also instances where, with the removal of all grazing, there is no improvement of the ecosystem. In other places, proper livestock grazing can assist ecosystem improvement. This is all old news to many range managers. I am "preaching to the choir."

I do this as a reminder that while many of us know these items to be true, there are others, including some of our local neighbors, who do not realize there may be a benefit of "managed livestock grazing" on our rangelands. I live in a "35-acre ranchette developed" area. Over half my neighbors have too many horses, llamas, or other animals for the forage resource on the land. They buy some feed, but the animals have destroyed most of the desirable vegetation. It is a source of weeds and, during rainstorms, severe soil erosion. During the dry, windy spring periods, there is dirt blowing.

There are many areas where we (as a society) need to do a better job of managing the land. As a society (SRM) of range managers, we are missing an opportunity and maybe a responsibility to assist, inform, teach, and lead the way to manage all rangelands, not only the big ranches but also the smaller acreages. This is a potentially much bigger constituent than the present membership of SRM.

I would encourage everyone to read the article by Buckhouse and Williams in the December 2005 issue of *Rangelands*. This article points out what SRM has done in the past and would be a good starting point for the future.

I do not advocate livestock grazing on every acre of rangeland. I do believe that in many areas, properly managed livestock grazing is compatible with other activities on rangelands. Let's get the message out. ♦