

Society Members Develop Grazing Plan

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The 13,000-acre "One Slash One" ranch owned by Milton D. (Bud) Webb, ranch broker, long-time rancher, past-president of the Arizona Cattle Growers' Association, and a member of the American Society of Range Management, is located 20 miles west of Prescott, Arizona, in Ferguson Valley near the old Tonto Springs Ranger Station. The vegetation is mostly turbinella oak brush intermingled with blue, hairy and side-oats grama grasses. There are scattering amounts of mountain mahogany and Apache plume browse in the higher hills, with some squirreltail and black grama grass. The flats support a small amount of shrubby buckwheat, along with three-awn and dropseed grasses.

Late in 1957, Henry E. (Hank) Wall, Soil Conservation Service Range Conservationist and member of ASRM, began working with Webb, a cooperator of the Triangle Soil Conservation District, and his foreman, Fred Patton, to develop a range conservation plan for the ranch.

Wall helped Webb and Patton determine range sites and range conditions. Range sites are areas with similar kinds and amounts of vegetation. Condition indicates the degree to which the sites are producing to their maximum potentiality or capacity.

Rancher Helps With Survey

While the range survey was being made, either the rancher or the foreman or both were with Wall all the time. By combining the ranchers' practical experience and the range technician's knowledge they developed a sound, practical range

conservation plan for the ranch. Webb called it his four-year, four-pasture plan.

It is a rotation-deferred grazing plan scientifically developed specifically for this ranch. One or more pastures are rested during the growing season, and use of the other pastures is rotated so that any pasture is grazed not more than half of any one growing season, or at the same season in any two successive years. It really isn't complicated once the data are gathered and tabulated and the objective made clear.

Ferguson Valley has an elevation of approximately 4,500 feet, average annual rainfall of 14 inches, and a growing season extending from July 1 to September 30.

Before the rotation-deferred plan was developed Patton kept

four breeding herds, one in each pasture yearlong. Now he has only one herd, aside from replacement yearling heifers and bulls that are run by themselves when not with the cows.

After two years Patton is convinced that rotation-deferred grazing is a good grass management plan. Having the cows all together makes them easier to look after and it cuts down on riding.

"Our plan," grinned Webb, "has made Patton an outdoor student. Since he has the cattle together in one herd, he is able to watch them graze and see what they are eating. At the same time, he can study the forage plants and see how they are doing."

Salting is a Part of Range Management

When asked what kind of salting plan he uses, Webb chuckled: "Hide and seek. We hide it and the cows seek it." Literally that is true. Salt is placed away from water and locations are changed frequently to get uniform distribution of livestock.



FIGURE 1. Range grasses have improved under rotation-deferred grazing on the One Slash One Ranch. Photo by Matt Culley.

After only two years, it is noticeable that perennial grasses, mostly dropseed, are growing near the watering places. On some of the hillsides, blue grama plants have doubled in size. Salting away from water encourages cattle to graze away after they have had their fill of water. At first salt was put about one-eighth mile from water, now it is a half mile or farther.

A meal-salt mixture, usually at 2 to 1 ratio, is fed in the winter primarily to provide vitamin A and protein. Feeders are placed away from water. At first, Webb and Patton were advised by friends not to place feeders away from water because a cow might eat too much and die before she could get a drink to dilute the salt solution. So to start, the feeders were placed at the water but have been gradually moved out. After each move, the cattle were given close attention. When no ill effects showed up the feeders were moved further out and now are one-half mile from water.

Grass Management

Webb says a little facetiously that he never had any grass on the One Slash One ranch until the new grazing plan was started. He now manages for grass (Figure 1) and this makes ranching more interesting. Grass management is more effective than erosion control measures in getting new grass established. In two years with management he has been able to get grass started in all the gullies.

Webb is an old-time rancher with long experience in the Globe, Arizona country where he still manages his folk's ranch.

He didn't take to the new-fangled ideas readily. He had to be convinced they would pay.

The ideas sounded reasonable to him except for one, moving cattle in the dead of winter. He thought this would cause weight or even death losses. The first move under the new plan was made in March 1958. This gave Webb nearly a year to try the plan before the next winter, plenty of time to change his mind if he wanted. By the first winter, everything was going so smoothly that he decided to go ahead and move his cattle in the middle of the winter, and he has been doing it ever since.

Moves are made when proper use has been made of the grass, usually one of the gramas, that the pasture is being managed for. Each year, at the end of the growing season, an estimate is made of the amount of forage produced by each pasture. This is the basis for the livestock-movements the following year. Because production is estimated it is important that the plan be flexible and each pasture grazed properly. In most cases proper use is roughly 50 percent of the production of the species being managed. Sometimes the cattle are moved when some usable feed is left. Never are they held long enough to over use a pasture. Here is where flexibility is again important.

The split growing season grazing pattern was also hard to sell Webb at first. He thought this would ruin two pastures, actually it has benefitted both.

Webb is convinced that the rotation-deferred system is the best one that has ever been used on his ranch. He recognizes too that

improvements will be needed.

Cooperation Needed

After two successful years of rotation-deferred grazing on his own four units Webb decided to add the forest allotment to make a five-year, five-pasture, rotation-deferred grazing plan for the entire grazing area. He called on the Forest Service people at Prescott. To his delight they were interested. He arranged a get-together on the ranch.

Vincent Price, Forest Service range staffman and ASRM member spent a day riding the forest allotment and a part of the ranch with Patton, Webb, and Wall. He liked what he saw, especially the salting away from water.

In due course all interested parties cooperatively developed an over-all, rotation-deferred grazing plan for the entire holding. The planners included Webb, Patton, Wall, Price, Richard Johnson, Forest Supervisor and member of ASRM, and Forest Ranger Fritz Menninghaus. A little give and take was required but all participants agreed the resulting plan was good. The 50-head yearlong forest permit was converted to 600 animal unit months (AUM). On the average 600 AUM will be run on the forest allotment annually for the five-year period.

The ranch is well-watered and will be even better-watered when the Forest Service builds another tank this year in the forest pasture. Two main things are essential for the success of any rotation-deferred grazing system and those are fencing and water. The One Slash One ranch is fortunate in having plenty of both.

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