

MANAGEMENT NOTES

The Resource Conservation Area Concept

RICHARD E. ECKERT, JR.

Crops Research Division, Agricultural Research Service, U. S. D. A., Reno, Nevada

The Resource Conservation Areas administered by the Bureau of Land Management are part of an effort to show what can be done with millions of acres of public domain in the West. The program will demonstrate how wise management practices on public lands can result in benefits in soil and water conservation, better forage for domestic livestock and wildlife, higher sustained yields of forest products, and protection of the Nation's capital investments in these lands. In this program BLM is actively seeking cooperation at the local level—from civic and agricultural organizations, conservation groups, private ranches, local schools and students and other State and Federal Agencies.

Resource Conservation Areas are located in nearly all of the Bureau of Land Management's Administrative districts. Eighty-five of these areas have been chosen to demonstrate a wide variety of land conservation practices, many of which are applicable to private lands as well as to the public lands managed by the BLM.

The Horse and Cattle Camp resource conservation area (Cover photo) is located in White Pine County, Nevada, about 15 miles southeast of Ely on U. S. 93. It includes 94,000 acres of public land and 1,600 acres of private land. The work at Horse and Cattle Camp represents a community effort in conservation and multiple use management. Eleven private ranches, the



White Pine Soil Conservation District, the Nevada Fish and Game Commission, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the White Pine Chamber of Commerce, the Nevada State Department of Highways, and White Pine County are co-operating with BLM to demonstrate the potential of eastern Nevada's public and private range lands.

The Horse and Cattle Camp area consists of rolling hills descending to a valley floor that is similar to any number of valleys in Nevada. Elevation within the area ranges from 6,800 to 9,100 feet. The climate is semi-arid, with hot, dry summers and cold winters. Average annual precipitation is 10 inches. Many of the lower elevation sites are dominated by shrubs of the *Artemisia* and *Atriplex* genera. Pinon-juniper woodlands comprise about 30 percent of the total Horse and Cattle Camp area and furnish Christmas trees, fence posts, wood for charcoal production and pinon pine nuts. An ecological resource inventory of the area is now being made in a cooperative study with the University of Nevada. The area is host to a large

migratory deer herd, is popular for dove hunting, and contains a small sage grouse population. At present there are three groups of livestock operators using the Horse and Cattle Camp allotment. The area produces 5,928 animal unit months of grazing with 1,184 cattle and 2,000 sheep using the area from 5 to 6 months each year.

The present range improvements include 100 miles of fence, 11,000 acres of crested wheatgrass seedings, 5 wells, 10,000 feet of pipeline for livestock watering, 500 acres of contour terracing and 5 check dams. Generally, range improvements are on a cooperative basis with the livestock operator and the BLM each paying half the cost. Some projects are conducted solely by the resource conservation area cooperators, and others by BLM. All work is carried out under a unified resource management plan.

Future work will include: seeding, 5,000 acres; chaining, 4,000 acres; contour furrowing, 1,000 acres; spraying, 2,000 acres; water spreading, 1,000 acres; 60 gully plugs, 10 detention dams, 3 springs, 6 reservoirs, and 50 miles of access road improvement. These improvement practices will provide more feed and improved habitat for wildlife. Seeding lower ranges to perennial grasses will defer grazing of native range and will benefit deer herds at higher elevations by reducing livestock pressure. Revegetating higher ranges with browse species and providing openings in the pinon-juniper stands will aid both big game and livestock.

The Resource Conservation Area concept is an excellent example of the challenge to conserve, manage, and develop the natural resources of the West.