

MANAGEMENT NOTES

Control of Saw Palmetto and Recovery of Native Grasses

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This issue's Cover Photo is one of a series—a picture story of the control of saw palmetto (*Serenoa repens*) and recovery of native grasses. The author's entry was awarded Second Prize in the Picture Story Contest at the ASRM Annual Meeting in Las Vegas, Nevada, February 9 to 12, 1965.

Saw palmetto, a shrubby plant of low forage value, grows abundantly and dominates an estimated nine million acres of rangeland in Central and South Florida. The understory composition of an additional sixteen million acres of grazable woodlands is likewise dominated by palmetto. Historical notes, research results plus experiences of early day ranchers indicate that palmetto presently occupies a much greater acreage than it did 75 years ago.

Saw palmetto is a perennial, ever-green member of the palm family.

The stem is normally creeping 4-6 inches in diameter with a large number of roots on the underside. Stems are frequently branched and often extend along the soil surface for distances up to 30 feet. Ground cover composed of stems and frond canopy varies from less than 20% to a dense thicket representing 80% or more. Many of the decreaser grasses are to be found within the protection of palmetto clumps. Due to severe competition for light, moisture, and nutrients, these desirable grasses are extremely low in vigor. Creeping bluestem (*Andropogon stolonifer*) is the most important of the native grasses. On poor condition ranges and suppressed by palmetto, it produces as little as 150-200 lb/acre.

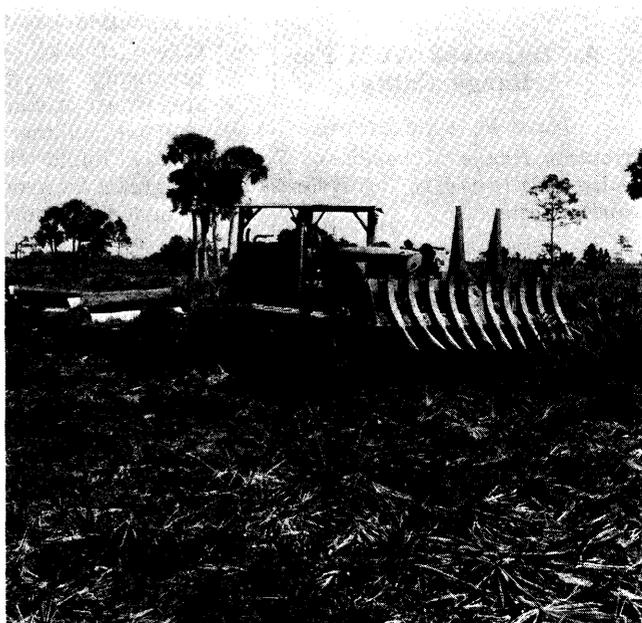
Effective mechanical control of saw palmetto and followup management has been accomplished by several ranchers in southern and central Florida. Two roller choppers set at a slight angle and pulled in tandem by a crawler tractor are commonly used. Each chopper filled with water weighs 15,000 lb. Chopping is done from December through March. One time over effectively cuts the horizontal stem and the terminal bud of

the saw palmetto. Fringe areas adjacent to marshes, sand ponds and areas along major drainageways are left undisturbed to provide cover for wildlife and shelter for stock. A complete growing season deferment is given treatment areas from March or April through November. Successive deferments are applied when cows and calves are carried on improved pastures during summer months.

Results indicate an 80% control of palmetto at a cost of approximately \$4-5 per acre. Forage production from creeping bluestem three months following treatment was 1,600 lb/acre green weight and 6,000 lb. eleven months after treatment. Palmetto fronds provide an effective mulch during the normally dry spring season. The forage produced by creeping bluestem and associated desirable grasses as a result of a planned system of brush control and deferred grazing is invaluable to a ranching operation. It provides the needed cheap roughage for brood cows when supplemented with protein during a 3-4 month period between the fall weaning period and the first grazing of improved pastures in the early spring.



Saw palmetto, (*Serenoa repens*) is a problem on 25 million acres of rangeland and grazable woodland in Florida.



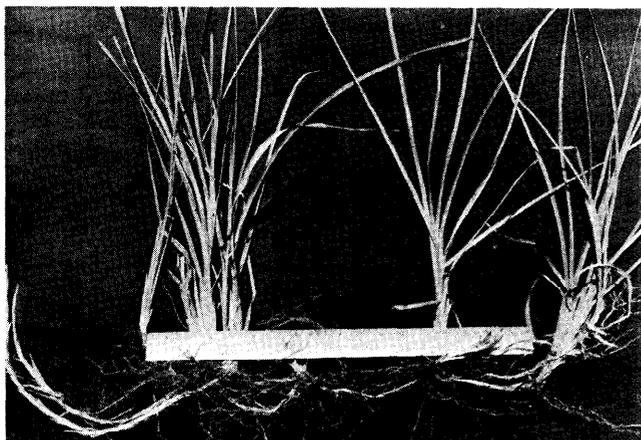
Two roller choppers pulled in tandem with a crawler tractor are commonly used equipment to control saw palmetto.



A complete growing season deferment from March to November is given the treated area.



New shoots of creeping bluestem are shown emerging through a protective mulch of palmetto fronds.



Rhizomes of creeping bluestem after a full growing season following palmetto control.



A southern Florida rancher observes results of brush control and deferred grazing 11 months after treatment.