



Rating Your Range

Perhaps only one really good reason exists for rating (evaluating) your range—you need to know its status in some detail in order to know whether improvement is occurring or you just think it is occurring. Don't trust your memory. Use a simple, straightforward scheme on a rather regular basis. You will find a record helpful in planning better future management.

You should know the status of soils and vegetation on your range and pasture areas. Is the surface stable? Is there soil movement? By what force? How much and where? What is the relative plant vigor and production? Is it satisfactory? If not, can you pinpoint why? Is it something you can control?

Rate your own private range and your leased range, especially that managed by federal agencies. Knowing how to rate should help you greatly when dealing with resource managers. Use the same methods they do, if possible. Or, use something similar to the scorecard approach proposed in this circular. It will help you determine what is the true situation.

For long-range management planning, especially in semi-arid rangelands, assessing soil conditions is critically important. Most managers desire to manage so soil stays in place. It is true that natural forces will move soil downslope, even with good management, and we have little control of where soil will be deposited after it starts to move. Consequently, retaining it in place makes good sense. Evaluating your range will tell you the current situation in some detail. It does not tell the cause. Soil can move because of lack or shortage of litter. Unusual or accelerated soil disturbance

can be caused by too many animals or by man's activities. Slope and texture also have a great effect. The person doing the rating needs to determine what the *best* situation looks like in order to determine the amount of deviation.

Recognize the effects of soil texture. Light-textured (sandy) soils can be moved by wind from plant interspaces to the plant crowns. Heavier-textured (clay) soils heave as a consequence of repeated freezing and thawing. Pedestalling of plants, where the soil appears to be, or actually is, removed from around the plant, can result from soil movement or from freezing and thawing, which lifts plants, creating a similar effect. Make note of this. You need to know whether the soil was being moved or whether the plants were lifted up.

Know the difference between desert pavement and erosion pavement. Pavement refers to rocks of varying size on top of the soil. The common thought would be that soil was washed or blown away. In fact, rocks protect the surface from high winds and heavy water events. Desert pavement is a result of long-time freezing and thawing so that rocks end up on the surface. Erosion pavement results when the surface horizons and organic matter are washed or blown away, leaving rocks.

Assess effects of storms on similar areas that are grazed versus those which are not. Record the intensity of storms. If real differences occur, and the differences appear to be due to grazing, this

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A Form for Recording Range Rating

Pasture or range _____ Date _____

Location within pasture _____ Observer _____

Kind of site _____

Terrain _____ Kind of growing season _____

Plants

Species composition	Good	Fair	Poor	
Ground cover				
Desirable species	High	Medium	Low	
Undesirable species	High	Medium	Low	
Vigor				
Desirable grasses and forbs	High	Medium	Low	
Desirable shrubs	High	Medium	Low	
Undesirable grasses and forbs	High	Medium	Low	
Undesirable shrubs	High	Medium	Low	
Grazing Use	None	Light	Moderate	Heavy
Poisonous-noxious species	None	Scattered	Common	Abundant

Soil

Litter	High	Medium	Low	
Surface protected by	(rocks, twigs, litter, other)		Adequate	Inadequate
Pedestalling of perennial grasses	None	Slight	Moderate	
Surface movement by water	None	Slight	Moderate	
Surface movement by wind	None	Slight	Moderate	
Gullies	None	Few	Several	
Condition (if applicable)	Sloughing and getting worse		Revegetating and healing	

Notes

will tell you where your management actions need to be concentrated.

Look at plants as intensively as the soil. To rate a range, plant identity must be known. Assess the state of plant health on at least a species-grouping basis. The rating should tell you how capable the range or pasture is for maintaining the most desirable plant productivity. Therefore, look at all of the plants—how vigorous they are or how weak, whether they are reproducing, whether there are many or few undesirables present and, if present, the locations where they may be concentrated. Look at levels of grazing use and decide if a different species might be preferred. Determine whether there is an effect of differential grazing on vigor.

Whether you use a scorecard or just make notes, record your observations so the same locations can be rated in subsequent years. It may be impractical to rate every site, so establish benchmark areas. The ratings can be made at any time of year, but may be done better after the grazing season than at other times.

The rating form suggested here uses a simple, subjective approach. Agency rating forms or scorecards use numbers, so a numerical rating can be made each time the area is rated. A rating form used by the Bureau of Land Management also is shown. Regardless of the form you use, remember that it is important to rate the range, record observations, and use them to make your management better.

Range Rating Example

Pasture or range COYOTE BUTTE Date JULY 14, 1980
 Location within pasture NORTH END Observer JOE SMITH
 Kind of site LOAMY UPLAND
 Terrain ROLLING Kind of growing season COOL, LATE
RANGE IMMATURE

Plants

Species composition	Good	<u>Fair</u>	Poor
Ground cover			
Desirable species	High	<u>Medium</u>	Low
Undesirable species	High	<u>Medium</u>	Low
Vigor			
Desirable grasses and forbs	High	<u>Medium</u>	Low
Desirable shrubs	High	<u>Medium</u>	Low
Undesirable grasses and forbs	<u>High</u>	Medium	Low
Undesirable shrubs	<u>High</u>	Medium	Low
Grazing Use	None	Light	<u>Moderate</u>
Poisonous-noxious species	None	<u>Scattered</u>	Common
			Heavy Abundant

Soil

Litter	High	Medium	<u>Low</u>	
Surface protected by	(rocks, twigs, <u>litter</u> , other)		Adequate	<u>Inadequate</u>
Pedestalling of perennial grasses	None	<u>Slight</u>	Moderate	
Surface movement by water	None	Slight	Moderate	
Surface movement by wind	None	Slight	Moderate	
Gullies	None	Few	Several	
Condition (if applicable)	Sloughing and getting worse		Revegetating and healing	

Notes

BLM Range Rating Form

Range Site Symbol _____ Date _____

Condition Class Symbol _____ Examiner _____

Legal Description _____

OBSERVED APPARENT TREND

(Check appropriate box in each category which best fits area being observed)

VIGOR (10 points)	<input type="checkbox"/>	Desirable grasses, forbs, and shrubs are vigorous showing good health. These plants should have good size and color and produce abundant herbage.
(6 points)	<input type="checkbox"/>	Desirable grasses, forbs, and shrubs have moderate vigor. They are medium-sized with fair color and produce moderate amounts of herbage; some seed stalks and seedheads are present.
(2 points)	<input type="checkbox"/>	Desirable grasses, forbs, and shrubs have low vigor. They appear unhealthy with small size and poor color. Portions of clumps or entire plants are dead or dying. Seed stalks and seedheads almost non-existent except in protected areas.
SEEDLINGS (10 points)	<input type="checkbox"/>	There is seedling establishment of desirable grasses, forbs, and shrubs. Seedlings are present in open spaces between plants and along edges of soil pedestals. Few seedlings of invader or undesirable plants are present.
(6 points)	<input type="checkbox"/>	Some seedlings of desirable grasses, forbs, and shrubs may be present in open spaces between plants. Some seedlings of invader or undesirable plant species may be present.
(2 points)	<input type="checkbox"/>	Few if any seedlings of desirable grasses, forbs, and shrubs are being established. Seedlings of invader or undesirable plants should be present in open spaces between plants.
SURFACE LITTER (5 points)	<input type="checkbox"/>	Surface litter is accumulating in place.
(3 points)	<input type="checkbox"/>	Moderate movement of surface litter is apparent and deposited against obstacles.
(1 point)	<input type="checkbox"/>	Very little surface litter is remaining.
PEDESTALS (5 points)	<input type="checkbox"/>	There is little visual evidence of pedestalling. Those pedestals present are sloping or rounding and accumulating litter. Desirable forage grasses may be found along edges of pedestals.
(3 points)	<input type="checkbox"/>	Moderate plant pedestalling. No visual evidence of healing or deteriorating. Small rock and plant pedestals may be occurring in flow patterns.
(1 point)	<input type="checkbox"/>	Most rocks and plants are pedestalled. Pedestals are sharpsided and eroding, often exposing grass roots.
GULLIES (5 points)	<input type="checkbox"/>	Gullies may be present in stable conditions with moderate sloping or rounded sides. Perennials should be establishing themselves on bottom and sides of channel.
(3 points)	<input type="checkbox"/>	Gullies are well developed with small amounts of active erosion. Some vegetation may be present.
(1 point)	<input type="checkbox"/>	Sharply incised V-shaped gullies cover most of the area with most of the gullies actively eroding. Gullies are mostly devoid of perennial plants with fresh cutting of the bottom.

Total Points _____ Rating: 26-35 = Upward; 17-25 = Static; 7-16 = Downward

General Comments: _____

Taken from BLM, EIS, Drewsey Resource Area, Oregon.