



Range Management--Transactions with Federal Land Managers

Beef producers who operate on federal land managed by the Bureau of Land Management and U.S. Forest Service have much at stake. Current and probable future land-management policies and philosophies are, and will be, different than those of the past. But, this does not mean you necessarily will lose privileges if you are knowledgeable of each situation.

Know what your grazing permit or license says and what it means. Try to determine where there is and is not flexibility. An attitude of friendliness and cooperation can pay real dividends. Remember that you are dealing with people, even when the structure may seem to be monolithic and cumbersome.

Be the leader in private-federal relations. Leadership does not mean being so dominant that relationships are strained to the breaking point. Recognize that reason can prevail and that managers are often trying to do balancing acts between several goals and interests. Managers and range conservationists will accommodate your concerns if they can see a way to do so. Try to be as familiar with the manager's directives, policies, and regulations as possible. Federal managers may be sympathetic to your causes and concerns but may not be able to do much about them.

First, be certain of your facts in every position you take. Have first-hand knowledge of the major plant species on the ranges where you operate. Know the range sites and the ecological condition of the vegetation. This will take some doing,

but the knowledge is important to accomplish good management.

Know the history of management on each allotment. The mobility within federal agencies is such that most range conservationists, resource managers, and other resource personnel with whom you deal will be moving from position to position on a regular basis. In a very real sense, producers have an educational role. If they play it well, they may find the results to be rewarding since they will be building credibility.

If your allotments had range improvements made in the past, keep good records of the impact they have had, both on the resource itself and on animal production. If improvements are planned, know something about the several alternatives proposed that could be used to meet the objectives. As an example for brush control, if prescribed fire is proposed instead of effective chemicals and some of the target species are sprouters, it should be pointed up that fire will not be effective and the brush problem could be made worse. Well-trained and perceptive range conservationists should know this. They may feel environmental constraints about the use of chemicals, however, and opt for fire. Be firm in your suggestions without being demeaning, but be certain to get your suggestions put into the resource knowledge base.

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Being "up" on range management can put you in a good position to question actions or decisions that may appear questionable to you. Public land managers have the obligation to be responsive and they will be to responsible concerns. Conversely, permittees have the obligation to take corrective action in matters for which they are responsible. As an example, if you have been making use checks and find that realistic use levels are close to being exceeded, take the lead in moving the stock. By doing this your credibility is established. If the stock would remain even though the agency had not checked, exceeding use levels may be considered your responsibility rather than theirs.

Producers need to build a "savings bank" of good records. Keep account of stock movements, times, and numbers into which units, so animal-unit-months (AUM's) can be determined for each pasture. Keep track of the activities you have while in the process of operating on public land. These will aid in determining costs of operation.

Know where your stock like to be and don't like to be in range units. If grazing objectives are not being met, determine if some positive changes could help accomplish them. When at all possible, ask the range conservationist to take part in the riding effort. Finding that livestock management doesn't always work as the book says may be beneficial in helping develop realistic management objectives for the future.

Use a camera to help record what is actually there. Take pictures at both on- and off-grazing times. This, combined with AUM's, weather records and use-check information, will help you be a better manager and at the same time show the agency that they are not the only ones to whom records are important.

As a back-up to your memory, document all of your contacts with the federal agency. Just write it in your day book. Record who you saw, what you talked about, and whether any decision was made, no matter how small. The public land employee is required to do this too. It is unrealistic in our time to expect a public land manager or employee to look out for your interests. But, many of them will if you are a good cooperator.

Whether your allotment is operated under an Allotment Management Plan or a Coordinated Resource Management Plan, there will be some management constraints built into it. In virtually every planning effort, some compromise is necessary. If your allotments are being considered for plan alterations, play devil's advocate to help anticipate the alternatives you might have to consider in dealing with the public agency. Know what you can realistically do without imperiling your operation.

Cooperation does not mean you do it their way. It means that decisions are arrived at mutually and all know when, where, and probably how something is going to be done. Cooperation builds confidence.

Recognize that current regulations are more restrictive than in the past and the level of co-operation may be more difficult to attain. This doesn't mean giving up.

Consider legal action only as a last resort. Sometimes it can become the only course of action, and if that is the case, pursue it vigorously. Good resource management will not be handed down from the bench. It is even more probable that court decisions will result in less flexibility, which is to no one's favor. Thus, no one wins in the long run.