A VOLUNTARY PARTNERSHIP
GRAZING LANDS CONSERVATION INITIATIVE
GLCI

Grazing Lands Conservation Initiative

A Voluntary Partnership with Private Landowners

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American Farm Bureau Federation

American Forage and Grassland Council

American Sheep Industry

Dairy Industry Representatives

National Association of Conservation Districts

National Cattlemen's Beef Association

Society for Range Management

Soil and Water Conservation Society

The Nature Conservancy

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GLCI Research and Education Priorities Evaluated

Gary Westmoreland, Dr. Herman Mayeux, Dr. A.J. Dye, Tom Riley, and Rhett Johnson are working to analyze the research and education priorities identified by our state GLCI coalitions. One meeting and several teleconferences have been held and decisions were made on an outline for a preliminary report. Dr. Mayeux is chairing this task force which will identify those items which surface as national and regional priorities. They expect to have a report ready by the August meeting of the National Steering Committee.

The GLCI's subcommittee on Phase II (Pat Bagley, Pete Jackson, and Jack Cutshall) have been developing a draft Research and Education Policy and Strategy for the Committee's consideration as well as revising the draft legislation which Pat presented at the April meeting. These items will be discussed and considered by the Committee at a later date.

National Coordinator Gary Westmoreland has been asked by NRCS to coordinate and conduct a national grazing lands issues work group meeting(s) among NRCS grazing lands personnel (including the NRCS State Conservationists' GLCI Advisory Committee). The purpose of this work group is to identify all potential issues which NRCS should consider in developing a national NRCS strategic plan for grazing lands assistance. Gary reports the first meeting will be in St. Paul, Minnesota on June 18–19.

GLCI Home Page—Gary has also made final arrangements for a GLCI Home Page on the Internet. The home page is now being designed and we hope to be "on line" within the next few weeks.

Strengthening State Coalitions

The Wyoming GLCI state coalition underwent restructuring recently to build a stronger organization. Tina Willis, land owner from Wheatland, Wyoming coordinated the group. Seventeen Wyoming landowner's "signed up" to serve on the coalition's steering committee as a result of this meeting. They are now officially the "Wyoming Private Grazing Land Initiative Team."

Their Mission: As private grazing land owners, is to provide leadership in the stewardship of Wyoming's grazing lands; to satisfy current needs, while maintaining and enhancing these natural resources for Wyoming's future generations.

Wyoming's meetings will follow a Coordinated Resource Management process; Decisions will be made by consensus.

A work group will meet in Casper, July 14 to develop a working set of bylaws for the Wyoming Private Grazing Lands Initiative Team.

Good Pasture Management
Turning a profit and taking care of the land

By Amy Smith
NRCS Public Affairs Specialist, Des Moines, Iowa

Taking care of your pasture makes economic and environmental sense. Effective pasture management is the key that will open the door to achieving higher profits and healthier natural resources.

The USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) works through local Soil and Water Conservation Districts in Iowa to provide pasture management planning assistance. The information in this article comes from a new 20-page color booklet available from the NRCS in Iowa titled *Profitable Pastures—A Guide to Grass. Grazing and Good Management.*

"Our goal is to improve the grassland resources while benefitting those who manage the land," says Leroy Brown, State Conservationist in Iowa. "*Profitable Pastures* provides producers with information to care for the soil, water, and other resources, and to get the most out of their pastures and grasslands," said Brown.

Benefits

Poweshieck County farmer Russell Hughes started intensive grazing seven years ago and has been doing it ever since. "The first year I established a rotational grazing system, I had as much production as approximately 150 bushel corn or 45–50 bushel beans," said Hughes. "That first year alone allowed me to pay for the whole system, including electric fence, labor and materials. I haven't seen another investment that more than paid for itself in the first year—and that's what convinced me to continue rotational grazing."

"Other guys were feeding winter supply that year, the only difference for me was what I did. I set up the electric fence and rotated the cattle. I ran 60 cows on 63 acres—19 paddocks about 3 acres each. My rotation was about 2 days per paddock, which gave each paddock approximately 38 days to grow back. This allowed me to graze about half of the land and to make hay on about half. I was able to increase my stocking rate, increase pounds per acre, avoid having overgrazed land, keep my winter hay supply, plus make a profit on hay," says Hughes.

Now Hughes' rotation is intensive—60 cows, 2 acres, 3 days. But he adds that every year is different, depending on the number of cattle, growing conditions, and forage availability.

Hughes uses ponds and creeks for water, but fences livestock away from streambanks. "Initially there's labor to set up the system, but after that it really doesn't take too long to move the cattle. They catch on rather quickly, and pretty soon they are ready and waiting at the gate, anxious to go the next paddock. They usually come as soon as I call. The thing to remember is you have control—you control access to the water, and determine where and for how long the cattle graze, which has both conservation and economic implications," says Hughes.

Pastures help the environment by reducing erosion, improving water quality and providing food and habitat for wildlife. Like Hughes, other Iowa farmers are finding good pasture management pays off—and in more than one way. Bob Eklund, farmer in Union County agrees. "If you improve your pasture you can get higher rent, and save the soils." Ekland said.

According to the National Resources Inventory (NRI) conducted by NRCS in 1992 erosion on Iowa pastures was just 1.3 tons/acre/year, compared to erosion on cropland of 6.7 tons/acre/year.

Good pastures are good for Iowa. Pastures cover 10 percent of the state, and provide forage that helps produce beef, milk, wool and leather. The impact of healthy pastureland and the livestock that graze those pastures is significant to Iowa's economy and to the livelihood of those who manage the land.

Pieces of the grazing plan

"Pasture management is more than just moving livestock from one pasture to another, it involves choosing and managing forages, water development and distribution, fencing, soil fertility, weed and brush control and much more," said Brown. "*Profitable Pastures* discusses each of these items and how producers can integrate them into a system that meets their resource and livestock goals."

Resources

Brown encourages producers to contact NRCS and several other agencies and organizations for help with pasture management. The local *Soil and Water Conservation Districts* can help provide technical assistance through state programs, and some counties have cost share available for pasture systems.

Extension Service grassland and grazing specialists may help develop a grazing system plan. The *Iowa Grassland Alliance* coordinates cooperation among organizations with interests in enhancing grasslands.

The *Iowa Forage and Grassland Council* is a nonprofit, educational organization of forage and livestock producers, and industry and public service representatives.

The *Southern Iowa Forage and Livestock Committee* is a non-profit group that has demonstrated pasture and hayland as alternatives to row crop production on highly erodible land following CRP.

"Pasture management is a process that can be completed in steps," says Brown, "and NRCS will be here to help you along the road to improved pastures."

A New Approach to Solving an Old Problem

by Debra Hoffmann
NRCS Range Management Specialist
Reno, Nevada

Everyone knows that you can't teach old dogs new tricks, but what about old cows? That's what the Sharp Ranches of Ruby Valley are trying to do in an innovative approach to livestock grazing of their public land grazing allotments.

Alan and Patty Sharp, and Alan's sister-in-law, Sandra Sharp, run cow/calf operations on Forest Service administered allotments in Elko County, Nevada. The major source of livestock drinking water on these allotments is from perennial streams. Cattle tend to loiter in the riparian areas adjacent to the streams, resulting in utilization of riparian vegetation to unacceptable levels before the permitted grazing period ends. Upland forage production in each allotment is more than adequate to support allotted livestock numbers, but it is under utilized. Discontinued use of these permits, or significant reductions in permitted livestock numbers, would endanger the continued operation of the Sharp ranches.

Alan Sharp—North Ruby Allotment CRMP Tour.

Protection of riparian habitats from excessive livestock use while utilizing adjacent uplands at an economical and environmentally sustainable level is often difficult without implementation of specialized grazing systems and associated fencing and upland water developments. For ranchers with public land grazing permits the alternative to doing nothing can be a reduction in allotted cattle numbers and/or an abbreviated grazing season. An economical and practical method of managing livestock grazing to ensure the protection of riparian areas while achieving desired levels of grazing use on adjacent upland vegetation is needed.

Research by Dr. Fred Provenza at Utah State University and others, has demonstrated that cattle and their offspring are "creatures of habit." These researchers have shown that livestock behavior relating to the use of an area year after year is learned from a parent animal and can often be reinforced or altered by peer pressure. Research and experience have demonstrated that cattle can develop learned behavior traits over time with a combination of selective breeding and consistent reinforcement of the desired behavior.

The Sharp ranches are cooperating with various agencies and institutions, including the Forest Service, Nevada Cooperative Extension, Utah State University, and the Natural Resources Conservation Service, in a project to demonstrate the practicality and cost effectiveness of controlling livestock use of riparian areas by altering behavior of the grazing animals. Riders are used to push cattle into the upland areas, allowing them to use the riparian areas only as access to drinking water for short periods of time. Although the behavior of the adult animals currently involved in the project will probably not change dramatically without constant herding, the Sharps intend to imprint a new behavior on female offspring which will later enter their herds as replacement heifers. These replacement animals and their calves are expected to exhibit the desired grazing habits, lessen the current use of riparian areas and eventually eliminate the need for intensive herding. Cows that habitually return to riparian areas after being herded to upland sites are culled from the herd each year.

"Although I have received mostly negative reactions from friends and neighbors, I think it will work," says Alan Sharp. "Once the cattle realize that there is good feed away from the water and get used to moving away from it, the meadows will be under-utilized."

The six year demonstration project is entering its second year and already Alan has seen results. "The project is really coming together", he said. "Last year we spent a lot of time getting the wrinkles ironed out, but this year we really have a handle on the project. You've got to realize that this is a long term project. The whole thing with these cows is the repeated herding out of the bottoms to the uplands. Last year we had a rider up there and after the first couple of weeks of the grazing period in each pasture, with continued herding, the majority of the cattle started to stay out of the bottoms."

Alan also realizes that economics is an important part of this demonstration project. "We need to determine the cost of implementing this technique compared to the more traditional approaches to riparian management. Other cattlemen will want to know if the cost of herding and increased livestock management offset the cost of fencing."

So far, it looks like you can teach old cows new tricks. Time will tell if the adage applies to cattlemen.

For Additional Information on the Grazing Lands Conservation Initiative Contact these Affiliated Organizations

American Farm Bureau Federation ..... Herb Manig (847) 685-8785
American Forage and Grassland Council ..... Dr. C. Pat Bagley (601) 566-2201
American Sheep Industry ..... Tom McDonnell (303) 771-3500
Dairy Industry ..... John Roberts (802) 462-2252
National Association of Conservation Districts ..... Robert Raschke (303) 988-1810
National Cattlemen's Beef Association ..... Bob Drake (405) 369-2177
Society for Range Management ..... Dr. Charles "Bud" Rumburg (303) 355-7070
Soil and Water Conservation Society ..... Douglas Kleine (515) 289-2331 x 13
The Nature Conservancy ..... Diane Vosick (520) 779-2892
USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service ..... Dennis Thompson (202) 720-5010

Please submit information for the July *GLCI Newsletter* by July 7th to GLCI Editor, Society for Range Management, 1839 York Street, Denver, CO 80206 • FAX 303-355-5059.

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