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A voluntary partnership with private landowners

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by Steve Cote, District Conservationist, USDA-NRCS, Arco, ID

GLCI Spotlight: The American Farm Bureau
A new feature of our newsletter. This issue highlights the Bureau and two individuals who serve on the National GLCI Steering Committee:
RICHARD KJERSTAD
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FLAVIUS A. BARKER
Sequatchie County, Tennessee

The Chair's Corner
Read about some of the activities your chairman has been involved in since the last issue.

Cover photograph:
Steve Cote demonstrates low stress handling. Going straight by the cow and white calf, he moves the cow forward, then he either backs up and in to the calf, stopping it. Next, he moves the cow away while the calf waits. It is quietly done, and both animals stay calm and obedient to him.

Managing Rangelands - Without Fences

Using Low-Stress Handling Techniques

By Steve Cote, District Conservationist, USDA-NRCS, Arco, ID

Editor's note: *Most of us have become familiar with the present controversies associated with livestock management on our public lands, primarily in the West. Much of the controversy is often focused on the results of grazing in lowland and riparian areas in large grazing allotments. Both livestock producers and environmental advocates have much to gain by developing alternatives to traditional management scenarios on public lands. In many parts of the West, the viability of private livestock operations are dependent upon maintaining historic grazing leases on public lands. On the other hand, effective grazing management not only reduces negative impacts on stream banks and water quality, but is an effective tool in maintaining rangeland health and enhancing wildlife habitat.*

On a few grazing allotments in S. Central Idaho, herding, using low-stress livestock handling techniques, have been implemented as a key tool to protect and enhance riparian areas. Low stress herding provides an efficient way to achieve the full benefits of planned grazing because it allows greater control over where livestock graze and for how long, which is especially important on large expanses of rangeland where installing more fencing is not a viable option. Low-stress handling allows for greater ease and efficiency in moving, gathering and working livestock, improving overall livestock (and rangeland) health and increased herder efficiency. Riders skilled in the method can place animals in the uplands, where they will remain, with individuals leaving the herd to drink and then returning to the uplands. This solves the typical pattern of over-grazing riparian areas (livestock staying too long), and under-grazing uplands (low proportion of plants grazed). Cattle will naturally stay as one herd when handled correctly, so where you find one, you find them all. The technique used here was developed by Bud Williams of Lloydminster, Alberta, who has been hailed throughout the world for his handling methods.

Central Idaho rangelands are reflective of many areas in the West dominated by checkerboard ownership consisting of federal, state, and private lands. Several local grazing associations hold leases on several grazing allotments ranging from 50,000 to 140,000 acres covering an expanse of rugged terrain. The grazing associations are made up of local ranchers who run their cattle collectively in the allotments through the summer grazing season, with numbers typically ranging from 1,500 to 3,200 pairs.

Over the years, these allotments have been hit with severe reductions in stocking rates because ranchers could not effectively control cattle grazing in the lowland and riparian areas. These watersheds are typically salmon, steelhead or bull trout spawning areas, so the degree of streambank degradation and impacts to water quality are especially important. As a result, stubble height and bank shear standards are set high.

In the mid-1990s, a Coordinated Resource Management (CRM) effort was initiated by the local Conservation Districts to address management concerns involving federal agencies (BLM, USFS, US Fish and Wildlife Service, and the National Marine Fisheries Service), state and private landowners, environmental and wildlife organizations. The effort was facilitated with help from private

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individuals trained in Holistic Management. This resulted in the development of one management plan with common goals and a defined decision-making process for all land ownerships within the area. The plan called for the implementation of herding through low-stress handling techniques as the primary range health management tool.

Learning the method is not easy but it isn't hard either. It requires a sound understanding about how livestock think and a real commitment to changing yourself. Like Bud Williams says, when students do it according to his instructions "The thing is, you get what you want, the cattle got what they want, you just don't get to do it the WAY you want."

As far as cattle are concerned, people are predators who behave aggressively, so their response is to act defensively to ensure self-preservation. When livestock are mishandled, this causes the behavior problems we see in cattle. It also causes sickness and poor performance. Behavior that prompts stock to quit the herd and hide out in their favorite places on the range, or causes them to return right back to grubbed out riparian areas are reacting defensively, to (in their minds) save their hides. Riders ride and re-ride the creeks but some animals still keep coming back. So it is our lack of understanding about why stock react this way that is the secret to preventing wasted efforts and frustration. With the right knowledge, in contrast, livestock will stay where you leave them, often for days and days. Stock will do this when they know that they can always do something comfortable to get relief from pressure AND correct techniques are used. These animals know that pressure from the handler has a release, it has meaning, and that they can control it by moving, speeding up, moving as a herd, stopping and staying etc. Using the correct aids, along with correct application of pressure and release of it, is key to handling cattle, as it is with horses.

With low-stress handling techniques, animals are not forced to do anything, nor subjected to handling that makes them anxious. Shouting and tearing around bothers them, so they don't learn much and don't react calmly. Force creates panic in many cattle. Instead of force, a good handler will just set it so the animals will want to do what he (or she) wants, then they let it happen. Good handlers use techniques that prompt the livestock to respond naturally and predictably, offering a greater degree of control in a shorter period of time. By understanding this reality, handlers can use the natural instincts of the animal to move them naturally in the desired direction, at the desired speed. For example, if you want an animal to move forward in an alley, walk by the point of the shoulder, going the opposite way. Using these and other basic principles taught by an experienced handler, livestock can be placed with ease and efficiency and will stick where they are placed.

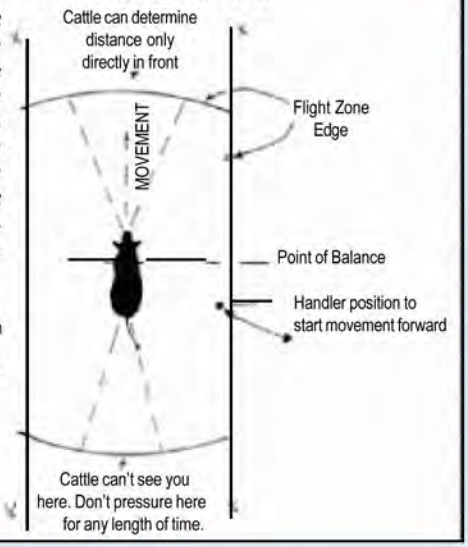
Low-stress cattle handling on the open range has proven to be one of the most powerful range management tools ever developed. Bud Williams' stockmanship techniques allows for remarkable control over the stock with minimal stress. By implementing these principles, members of the grazing associations can now move cattle where they want them, knowing cattle will stay there the next day. They can then be easily moved on to fresh pasture when needed. Greater control has also translated into improved condition of lowland and riparian areas within the watershed since animals don't loaf in the riparian areas around the waterways or hide out on the range at gathering time. No tool can be utilized to its full potential unless management is guided by a sound plan, driven by a sound goal.

Many livestock producers have experienced positive benefits from implementation of herding using low-stress handling techniques both from a livestock production and health perspective as well as a rangeland health and water quality perspective. The challenge continues, however, since the success of the management strategy depends on the commitment and acceptance of all operators involved. In community pasture situations, the good that one operator can achieve through consistent handling can unravel if others in the pasture are not committed to the same techniques.

For more information, contact Steve Cote at (208)-527-8557 or steve.cote@id.usda.gov. Address: USDA-NRCS, P.O. Box 891, Arco, ID 83213.

FLIGHT ZONES ON CATTLE

The flight zone is not a circle around the animal. It tends to be closer at the sides and farther out in front and back. It might be somewhat larger in the back. It changes with the situation and with time.



BENEFITS OF BUD WILLIAMS STYLE-STOCK HERDING

- Livestock grazing can be controlled more effectively in large pasture or range systems without having to install major fencing.
- Cattle can be placed and kept as one herdk facilitating grazing manage ment in riparian areas and uplands.
- Time required for gathering can be reduced significantly.
- Livestock injury rates are low.
- Conception rates increase since bulls remain with the herd rather than brushed-up.
- Improved range nutrition, palatability, less flies and parasites, higher calf weights.
- Save on horses' and riders' time.
- Reduce stress on mother cows and incidence of fighting bulls.
- Less need for genetic selection for disposition.
- Ability to apply herd effect, and to achieve high stock density to control brush.
- Improved herd health with reduction of diseases like pink eye, pneumonia, scours and even dystocia.
- Reduced weaning stress, allowing calves to feed and drink within an hour or two and mother cows to remain calm.
- Lower shrink on moves and in transport.
- Increased herder efficiency with one herder able to handle manyhundred head along.
- Sick calves can be removed quickly and quietly from pens and animals can be cut out of a herd easily.
- Get along better with your wife or husband.

CATTLE HANDLING REFERENCES

Periodicals

- *Practical Holism* - includes regular articles about low-stress cattle handling (contact: Peter Donovan at 541-426-6490)
- *Quivera Coalition* - contains periodic articles about range issues, conflict resolution and herding in the Southwest (contact: 505-820-2544)

Instructional guides

- *Notes on Livestock Handling for Planned Grazing Systems*, by Steve Cote (contact: Butte Soil & Water Conservation District 208-527-8557)
- *Belief and the Will To Do It*, by Roger Ingram (contact: University of California Cooperative Extension Service 530-889-7385)

Video

- *Bud Williams' Training Techniques*, by Bud Williams (contact: 780-875-9256)

Training courses and Workshops

- *Bud Williams' Stockmanship School*, taught by Bud Williams (contact: 780-875-9256)
- *Rangeland Steward Stockmanship School* (contact: Steve Cote 208-527-8557 or Linda Hestag 208-527-2004)

GLCI SPOTLIGHT

AMERICAN FARM BUREAU FEDERATION

The American Farm Bureau Federation (AFBF) is the world's largest voluntary organization of farmers and ranchers and is one of the original member organizations involved with the establishment of the Grazing Lands Conservation Initiative (GLCI). More than 5 million families are members of county Farm Bureaus which, in turn, comprise state Farm Bureau organizations in all 50 states and Puerto Rico. AFBF represents all commodity interests and is involved in all issues that are of concern to the nation's farmers and ranchers, including economic and quality-of-life matters. Farm Bureau is farm and ranch people joining together to solve common problems.

AFBF is a strong supporter of the goals and objectives of GLCI, as reflected in the organization's National Conservation and Environmental Policy (29), which supports full funding of the $50 million authorized in the Federal Agriculture Improvement and Reform Act for GLCI. AFBF believes that "improving the environment by enhancing the conservation, wise use and productivity of our natural resources through private ownership, individual freedom and market-oriented approaches is our most important conservation and environmental goal."

In an effort to balance the economic viability of agricultural communities with the need to address conservation issues, AFBF advocates a consistent, long-term national conservation and environmental policy that would:

- Recognize the importance of improving agricultural productivity, while maintaining a productive natural resource base;
- Ensure individual freedoms including the right to own and use private property;
- Balance economic and social costs with real environmental benefits;
- Encourage voluntary, local and incentive-based approaches in which outcomes are well-defined, identifiable, verifiable and realistic;
- Rely on market solutions and/or performance-based approaches in which outcomes are well-defined, identifiable, verifiable and realistic;
- Base decisions on sound, scientific principles and peer-reviewed science;
- Recognize that education and technical assistance are key components needed to achieve conservation and environmental goals and objectives;
- Recognize farmers and ranchers as stewards of the land and protectors of the environment.

For more information about programs and services, contact AFBF at any of the local county offices or check its web site at www.fb.org. Rosemarie Watkins is the Senior Director for Congressional Relations for AFBF in the Washington Office, 600 Maryland Avenue, SW, Suite 800, Washington D.C. 20024; Phone: 202-484-3600; Fax: 202-484-3604. ■

FLAVIUS A. BARKER

Flavius Barker, a native of Sequatchie County, Tennessee, represents the American Farm Bureau Federation on the National GLCI Steering Committee. He presently serves as President of the Tennessee Farm Bureau, elected to that position in 1995. Flavius was first elected to the Sequatchie County Farm Bureau board in 1957 and has served continuously since that time.

Flavius and his wife, the former Naomi Miller, have four children. Their two sons are now managing the family farm. Flavius' interest in agriculture began at an early age when he and his brother began their first farming operation. Over time, the farming operation has grown to about 900 acres, with about half in timber. Long recognizing the importance and benefits of conservation, the Barkers became interested in doing what they could to conserve the soil and have practiced no-till on the farm for at least thirty years. They have also been long-time advocates of "wheel track planting," increasing soil roughness to reduce water runoff. Their livestock operation has now grown to about three to four hundred head, including both dairy and beef. The animals are used to harvest the grass. Cows are rotated through pastures every one to two days, using ryegrass pastures in the winter and Bermudagrass in the summer.

The purchase of his first farm in 1954 sparked an interest in agricultural financing that has stayed with Flavius throughout his life. He served on the Chattanooga Ag. Credit Board for several years and was Chairman of the Board in the 1980s, which were very interesting times for Farm Credit and for agriculture. Flavius became one of six people in Sequatchie County, Tennessee who organized Citizens Bank in 1973. The bank has since grown to become a five-county bank.

Flavius is committed to the efforts of GLCI to conserve our nation's grasslands through the availability of high quality technical assistance with an assurance of confidentiality and a respect for private property rights. He also feels that a priority for GLCI should be to promote research needed to enhance the production potential of forage species. ■

RICHARD KJERSTAD

Richard 'Dick' Kjerstad of Wall, South Dakota, is one of two members of the American Farm Bureau Federation on the National GLCI Steering Committee. He presently serves as President of the South Dakota Farm Bureau, elected to that position in November, 1995. Dick has been a Farm Bureau member for over 25 years and strongly believes and supports the Farm Bureau philosophy of the family farm.

Dick and his wife Patty, have four sons and ten grandchildren. They have a farming and livestock operation, which includes a family feedlot, along with a hardware and lumber business, which involves all four sons. The Kjerstads have employed innovative techniques to diversify their income potential and incorporate a value-added approach, while balancing conservation efforts to enhance health, production and habitat potential in their family operation. Along with traditional crop and beef production, wildlife and habitat enhancement have become important components of the operation. The ranch is home to pheasants and sharptail grouse as well as a significant deer population. Along with public hunting opportunities, guided mule deer trophy hunts are offered through Dakota Safaris Mule Deer, which also involves several neighbors.

Over the years, Dick has worked closely with NRCS, participating in the Great Plains Conservation Program as well as EQIP to implement a variety of conservation practices to enhance his operation. The farming operation has been practicing no-till for over 10 years now, making it possible to implement a continuous cropping system successfully in a semi-arid environment. In addition, Dick feels that no-till provides an effective means of erosion control and an improvement of soil quality.

The majority of the ranching operation consists of native rangelands, grazed in a year-round rotation system, enhancing plant vigor and production while limiting supplemental feeding needs to a handful of days each year when snow is too deep for cattle to graze effectively. The introduced pastures are used primarily in the spring. Calving begins the 1st of May, which also helps reduce feed and labor costs. Over the years Dick has received numerous awards recognizing his accomplishments in agricultural conservation and production.

Dick believes that GLCI should play a key role in addressing the need to educate the public about the environmental benefits associated with well-managed rangelands. He also strongly supports the need for NRCS to maintain a credible, technical field staff to provide continued assistance to producers on grazing lands. ■

THE CHAIR'S CORNER

The National Grazing Lands Conservation Initiative Steering Committee will be conducting our spring meeting in Washington, DC on March 4-6 at the Holiday Inn in Rossyln. The main purpose of this meeting is to visit with our Senators and Representatives to inform them about GLCI activities, funding, and Farm Bill concerns. I will report more on this meeting in the next issue of the GLCI news.

Some of the activities, which National Steering Committee members and I have been involved with include:

⇒ Testifying for producers and GLCI on the final hearing on Total Maximum Daily Loads (TMDL) in Washington, DC.

⇒ Attending the American Farm Bureau Meeting in Reno, Nevada and participating in a GLCI Forum with Pearlie Reed, Chief, NRCS. Other members attending this meeting were Dick Kjerstad, Flavius Barker and Jack Laurie.

⇒ Participating in the National Association of Conservation Districts meeting in Reno, attending and addressing the Grazing and Public Lands committee meetings.

⇒ Attending the American Sheep Industry meeting in San Antonio, Texas. Aggie Helle and Tom McDonnell represented the National steering Committee at the Public Lands Committee and the Resource Management Committee as well as other functions during the meeting.

⇒ Attending the National Cattleman's Beef Association meeting in Denver, Colorado. GLCI was represented at the committee meetings and we had the opportunity to speak to the Cattlemen.

⇒ Attending the Society for Range Management meeting in Kansas City, Missouri, chairing the GLCI forum and conducting a National Steering Committee meeting.

The Midwest GLCI Coordinators from Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Michigan, Missouri, Wisconsin and Michigan conducted an information and training session in Ina, Illinois. Rod Baumberger, National Coordinator and Jim Wallace, Regional Coordinator conducted the session. After the session was over the Heart of America Grazing Conference was held at Rend Lake College and 300 producers were present for the one-day conference. ■

Bob Drake, Chairman
National GLCI Steering Committee

GLCI News

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