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GLCI News

Grazing Lands Conservation Initiative

A voluntary partnership with private landowners

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Cover photograph:
Cattle on Hanson Livestock rangeland near Lusk, Wyoming.

A Heritage of Stewardship

By Matt Hoobler, Wyoming Department of Agriculture, Cheyenne, WY

When Danny Hanson talks about sustainability, people from all across Wyoming listen. That's because he's talking about his family, his community, and the land. Danny, Donna, Dan Henry, and Ben Hanson of Lusk, Wyoming are proud representatives of what sustainable agriculture has become…improving the environment and creating the opportunity to pass the land on to future generations. Danny Hanson says "My greatest hope is to hand my ranch down to my sons so they can hand it down to their children, and so on."

The Hansons have been outstanding stewards of their grazing lands since 1905. Hanson said, "My father ranched most of the century and was never afraid to change and better himself." Acting on the values that his father instilled in him, Danny Hanson has accepted the challenge of holistic range management and is not afraid to make necessary changes. Since 1992, the Hanson family has made major strides toward improving the health of their grazing lands while increasing their stocking rates and improving their bottom line.

The Hansons run about 800 pairs, 270 replacement heifers, and 480 stockers on an annual basis. Grazing is rotated through multiple pastures to promote a positive rangeland ecosystem. "Basically what we have tried to do is let that blade of grass grow up, then we'll crop it off with a cow. We try not to come back and crop it off again until the grass has recovered," says Hanson. Their resource management earned the Hansons the 1999 Wyoming Stewardship Award sponsored by the Wyoming Stock Growers Association and the

(Continued on next page)

Danny Hanson explains the management of Hanson Livestock resources to tour participants.

A Heritage of Stewardship

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Wyoming Coordinated Resource Management Executive Committee.

In June of 1999, the Hansons hosted a tour highlighting their commitment to environmental stewardship and community involvement in the ranch. Nearly half the population of Niobrara County turned out for the tour along with representatives from several Wyoming natural resource, environmental, and political organizations.

Rob Hendry, President of the Wyoming Stock Growers Association, said "This operation is a showcase for today. There are a lot of outfits in Wyoming, and by the Hansons winning this award, they represent a lot of outfits that are doing things the same way. The Hansons are not only providing habitat for their cattle; they also provide habitat for many different species of wildlife. We need to get that story out. We're not abusing the land. As a matter of fact, it takes grazing in order to provide this kind of habitat."

Ron Micheli, Director of the Wyoming Department of Agriculture, stated, "It is always great to go see somebody's operation…how they do things. We can pay respect to a rancher who probably represents hundreds of other ranchers who could tell the same story. It is such a deep heritage for most pioneer families in terms of wanting to leave your family something better than it was when you got it. The Hansons' message is that we can come onto this land and make it better. That's what stewardship is all about."

Danny Hanson feels that educating others about the land is important. He is a strong supporter of Ag in the Classroom and its commitment to agricultural education in the school system. The Hansons allow their ranch to be used as an educational resource for the community of Lusk and Niobrara County. They have hosted schoolchildren on the ranch to help them learn. "Young people recognize truth faster than an adult can," says Hanson. "When they can see it, feel it, and smell it, they see the truth right away. We show them that the ranching industry really isn't as bad as some folks say it is," he adds. "We are actually beneficial to the environment."

The Hanson family has helped the people of Niobrara County, Wyoming become more aware of the sustainability of a family and a community because of the contributions of agriculture and a heritage of good environmental stewardship.

Ag in the Classroom teaches youngsters from Niobrara County schools about the benefits of agriculture and the results of good resource management.

"THE CHAIR'S CORNER"

The annual spring meeting of the National GLCI Steering Committee was held in Washington, DC from March 27-30. All of the organizations included on the National GLCI Steering Committee were represented along with 24 invited guests. The steering committee had excellent dialog with key officials of USDA and NRCS including USDA Deputy Undersecretary Glenda Humiston, Chief of NRCS Pearlie Reed, and Deputy Chief of NRCS Larry Clark.

I also had the opportunity to have a personal meeting with Deputy Secretary of Agriculture Richard Rominger. We discussed issues such as increased technical assistance, review of the USDA's modernization plan, and our support of Conservation of Private Grazing Lands (CPGL). The CPGL rule development, current status of CPGL and funding of CPGL were also discussed. Deputy Secretary Rominger will follow up on the rules and progress of CPGL. The meeting with Deputy Secretary Rominger was very successful and constructive.

Deputy Undersecretary Humiston told the group that we must make greater efforts to highlight the contributions to society from grazing lands as the result of voluntary technical assistance. Chief Reed commended the GLCI Steering Committee for their efforts in emphasizing the need for technical assistance. He said NRCS is dedicated to improving the ability of its employees to deliver high quality, timely conservation technical assistance. Deputy Chief Clark stressed the need to improve the efficiency of training NRCS employees. He discussed how new tools, such as the internet, are being evaluated to determine if they can help meet agency training needs in the future.

Steering committee members made numerous contacts with members of Congress and their staffs to inform them about GLCI progress and activities. We concentrated on those who serve on the agriculture and appropriations committees. The message we carried to the Hill emphasized the need for increased technical assistance, funding for the Conservation of Private Grazing Lands, and research and education.

Representatives of National Farmers Union (Eunice Biel, Delbert Mandelko, Chris Schepis, and Gerald Jaeger) met with the steering committee to present their articles of association. At their recent National Farmers Union convention, they adopted a resolution to apply for membership to the GLCI National Steering Committee. They were well received at our meeting and we are enthusiastic about NFU coming aboard this fall. I was very impressed with their working knowledge on Capitol Hill and their concern for grazing lands and technical assistance.

Jack Cutshall, John Peterson, Robert Toole, and Regional GLCI Coordinators made significant progress on the program and agenda for the National Conference on Grazing Lands. Invited speakers have been recommended and program structure has been finalized. Abstracts for presentations are being reviewed. We are well on our way for the conference. The next National GLCI Steering Committee meeting will be August 6-9 in Las Vegas to finalize all details for the conference.

BOB DRAKE, Chairman
National GLCI Steering Committee

Reminder !!

Mark Your Calendars NOW

NATIONAL CONFERENCE ON GRAZING LANDS

Bally's Hotel and Casino

Las Vegas, Nevada
December 5-8, 2000

Invited Speakers, Voluntary Papers and Poster Sessions

*Grazing Management
*Emerging Technology
*Enterprise Diversification
*Grazing Land Watershed Impacts on Urban Areas
*Grazing/Wildlife Interactions
*Public/Private Lands Interface
*Effects of Legislation and Policy on Grazing Lands
*The Business Side of Grazing Management

National & Regional GLCI Sessions

Trade Show and Expo

Watch future issues of *GLCI News* for information on Registration, Agenda, and Program Details.

Small Acreage Grazing by Horses

By Martin Hicks, Cheyenne, Wyoming

In recent years the landscape around many cities has changed dramatically. What was once open grazing land and farmland has now been transformed into small acreage ranchettes. Many of these places have 4 or 5 horses grazing on just a few acres. This has caused serious resource problems and concerns about grazing land ecosystem health.

Heavy continuous grazing allows undesirable weeds to crowd out perennial grasses and often results in bare soil. The result is usually soil compaction, excessive water runoff, low moisture infiltration, and soil erosion.

The Laramie County Conservation District (LCCD) in Cheyenne, Wyoming began working with Scott Heatherington, who owns 3 horses and 11 acres of land near Cheyenne. The LCCD developed a project with him to demonstrate improved grazing management techniques on his place. The Wyoming Private Grazing Lands Team provided support and partial funding to implement the project.

A "tumble wheel" system of portable electric fencing is used to create an 8-paddock rotational grazing system. Each paddock is approximately 1° acres in size. Horses graze each paddock for 4 to 5 days and then rotate to the next paddock. Each paddock receives 28 to 35 days of rest between grazing periods.

After one grazing season, improvements are already apparent. Native cool season grasses, such as western wheatgrass, are beginning to return to the pastures that are predominately blue grama. Blowouts and bare soil areas are beginning to heal over. Most importantly, that was the first summer that Scott didn't have to provide supplemental feed for his horses.

Scott Heatherington will continue to implement his rotational grazing system and monitor the site to make sure the pastures are continuing to heal. LCCD will conduct educational tours each summer to show other small acreage landowners how hard work, good grazing management, and a little time can improve grazing land ecosystem health.

A "tumble wheel" electric fence system.

After just one season of rotational grazing, pastures are improving.

GLCINews

Contact these affiliated organizations:

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Visit the GLCI homepage at http://www.glci.org