

**July/August 2005**

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Find out the most common grazing management mistakes and how to avoid them.

**Ready for Drought?**

Tips to plan ahead for managing drought.

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**Chair's Corner**

Florida will host the Fall Business Meeting of the National GLCI Steering Committee September 8-11 in Sarasota. Join us for some exceptional tours.

**Learning from the Land**

Range managers share advice to help producers learn from common mistakes.

By Kindra Gordon

What is the one good thing about making a mistake? Learning from it. Here, three range management specialists weigh in on the most common grazing management mistakes they see producers make and offer strategies to correct those errors.

Missouri's Maurice Davis, an NRCS state grassland conservationist who is now retired, says the most frequent mistake he saw during his career were producers allowing livestock to graze pastures too short. Davis says grazing a pasture to the ground, either because it is overstocked or the livestock have been left there too long, "does not leave enough residual plant material to carry on photosynthesis."

As a result, Davis says root growth stoppage begins, and he adds, "That means top growth of the plant also stops." Specifically, research has shown that when up to 50% of a plant's leaf volume is removed, root growth stoppage is about 2-4%. If 60% of the leaf volume is removed, root growth stoppage escalates to about 50%. At 80% removal, the roots have no regrowth.

To prevent overgrazing, Davis, who has a long history of working with the University of Missouri's Forage Systems Research Center and the annual Management Intensive Grazing schools it hosts, advises that producers monitor when to move animals to new pasture based on residual plant material – the green stuff left after grazing.

Davis and most range managers advocate the rule "take half and leave half," meaning once the forage has been grazed to about half its volume across the pasture, cattle should be moved to a new pasture. Pastures can be grazed shorter, but then the rest period required for recovery becomes longer, Davis says. As a guideline on introduced pastures, he says plants should not be grazed below a minimum of three inches.

**Be Prepared To Adapt**

John McLain, a range consultant with Resource Concepts, Inc., based in Nevada, counts lack of flexibility as a reoccurring mistake he sees in range management

situations. McLain says, “We are hearing the word adaptive management more these days, but in the past there has been an absence of flexibility especially by federal agencies in administering public lands grazing.”

He adds, “Good land managers have to allow for flexibility and adaptive management in grazing systems to achieve desired objectives.”

Similarly, Texas rancher John “Chip” Merrill, who also serves on the GLCI National Steering Committee says the most common mistake he sees producers make is not reducing stocking rates soon enough when they realize they are in trouble during drought.

Merrill, who directed the Ranch Management Program at Texas Christian University in Fort Worth from 1961 to 1996, says, “It takes nerve to cutback when you’d rather not. But if producers adjust as they go, the resource is still in good shape, the cattle are in good condition, and the markets haven’t declined.” He adds, “It is much less of a risk to adjust early than to hold on too long.”

### **Proactive Preparations for Drought**

A common error among ranchers is failing to plan ahead for drought.

But Rod Heitschmidt with USDA’s Fort Keogh Livestock and Range Research Laboratory in Miles City, MT, says producers don’t have to wait until they are out of forage before making management decisions. Instead, Heitschmidt says producers can be proactive by monitoring precipitation early on during the growing season and making decisions based on historical data.

He says, “Drought is quite normal in the Northern Great Plains, and historical precipitation probabilities can be a good indicator of years when drought will be likely.”

For instance, Heitschmidt says historical records show that a current year’s forage production is primarily a function of April and May precipitation with June being less important than one would think.

Additionally, from evaluating over 15 years of research from 15 different data sets, Heitschmidt says that typically 70% of forage for the year is produced by June 1 in the Northern Great Plains and 90% is grown by July 1. He clarifies that there is no way of estimating how much total forage will be produced, just that 90% of the total amount will be grown by early July.

Thus, by monitoring spring precipitation, Heitschmidt says producers in the Northern Great Plains can begin to make drought decisions by July 1.

Here’s why: Heitschmidt says producers know whether their spring precipitation is below, near or above normal, and even if they get one inch of rain in July, it won’t grow as much forage as one inch of precipitation in April. Therefore, he suggests if spring rainfall is below normal, in early July producers should plan to take positive action to reduce risk. “Wean early; or sell open cows,” he suggests, and adds, “If you hang on until you are completely out of forage in October, then you are putting yourself at risk”

### **New Rangeland Health Document Available**

The Olney Boone Conservation District (CD) in Colorado has published a new rangeland health document titled “Decreasing the Impact of Drought on Rangeland Health.” The purpose of the publication is to provide a history (written and pictorial) of the 2002 drought and to show how proper grazing can mitigate the effects of drought.

The publication also shows some common rangeland grasses and provides information on who ranchers can contact to get help with their grazing management.

In addition to the Olney Boone CD, sponsors of the publication are the East Otero CD, Colorado Association of Conservation Districts, Grazing Lands Conservation Initiative Committee, USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service, Colorado State University Cooperative Extension, Otero/Crowley Counties, The Renewable Resources Extension Act (Drought Grant), Crowley County Commissioners, Otero County Commissioners, Colorado Chapter of the Soil and Water Conservation Society, Colorado State Board of Land Commissioners, and Southeastern Colorado Water Conservancy District.

For free copies of the publication, contact the Olney Boone office at (719) 254-7672 ext. 3.

*Submitted by Mary Miller  
NRCS Public Affairs Specialist, La Junta, CO*

### GLCI effort brings grazing management education to Texas Hill Country

The historic community of Fredericksburg in the Texas Hill Country is a place a lot of people want to live and visit. The region is teeming with activities and a lot of new residents, many of whom have bought land and are eager to learn how to be stewards of their land.

To assist with that effort, Tom Hammer, the NRCS district conservationists, his staff, and the Gillespie Soil and Water Conservation District have a very active GLCI program to meet the high-demand for technical assistance. One such program was offered this spring to 50 landowners – some new, some had owned their land for many generations. It was the first of an on-going series of presentations that are planned to include topics such as plant ID, ecological sites, forage inventories, wildlife management, goal setting and other related topics to help inform and educate private landowners.

Some of the presentations have included Bob Lyons, Extension range specialist with the Texas Cooperative Extension Services, explaining how Ecological Site Descriptions can serve as a roadmap to land management. Lyons also provided information on research using GPS to monitor cattle movements in pastures.

Jerry Turrentine, a biologist with the NRCS, shared wildlife concepts with participants and taught them the important plants and how to manage for them to meet wildlife goals.

This workshop and those that follow are a result of a strong GLCI effort. Other grazing lands specialists helping with the workshop as instructors include Charles Anderson and Melony Sikes, San Angelo; Phillip Wright, Hondo; Jim Bob Ellisor, Fredericksburg; Joe Franklin and Fred Reyna, Kerrville; and Mark Moseley, San Antonio.

### **Nebraska Grazing Lands Coalition hosts Grassland Summit**

This spring the Nebraska Grassland Summit was successfully hosted by the Grazing Lands Coalition in Nebraska, according to state coordinator Roger Chesley. He reports many industry organizations within the state sent representatives to participate.

The format allowed each organization to present a five minute overview of their organization and state their three major concerns about grasslands. During the noon break each group was asked to vote for their top three grazing land issues that the felt the state coalition should focus on. During the afternoon session, participants divided into small groups and discussed ways to address these concerns.

Chesley reports that a printed proceedings is being developed from the event. To help inform others of the goals and efforts of the state grassland coalition.

### **Grazing Studies Underway for Dairy Industry**

USDA-ARS scientists in three states have initiated an intensive grazing research and demonstration project aimed at helping family dairy farms. The studies are taking place at the U.S. Dairy Forage Research Center in Madison, WI; the Pasture Systems and Watershed Management Research Unit at University Park, PA; the North Appalachian Experimental Watershed in Coshocton, OH; and at Ohio State University.

The scientists plan to monitor manure runoff and water quality, as well as determine how various forage species hold up under intensive grazing and the volume and quality of milk produced by pastured cows. The researchers will evaluate if grazing can make small dairy farms more profitable by increasing the per-cow profit margin. Grass-based dairies may help alleviate economic pressures on farmers to convert to big confinement dairies with 1,000 or more cows. Such large dairies face higher costs, including those associated with manure storage. Rotational grazing may reduce pollution risks by spreading manure more evenly in fields.

### **2005 Grazing Events**

July 29- Aug. 4 Soil and Water Conservation Society Conference, Rochester, NY

Aug.5-6 Oklahoma GLCI annual Dollar\$ and Cent\$ conference, Oklahoma City

[www.okgrazinglands.org/conference04/conference.html](http://www.okgrazinglands.org/conference04/conference.html)

Aug. 8-9 Nebraska Grazing Conference, Kearney, NE,

[www.grassland.unl.edu/grazeconf.htm](http://www.grassland.unl.edu/grazeconf.htm)

Oct. 20-21 King Ranch Institute for Ranch Management Holt/CAT Symposium, Texas A&M University-Kingsville. For information call 361-593-5401 or visit [krirm.tamuk.edu](http://krirm.tamuk.edu).

### **Chair's Corner**

The grazing season has been a great one for much of the country this summer with ample rains across most of the U.S. It's been a wonderful opportunity for many of our GLCI specialists and state GLCI coalitions to host tours and workshops to help educate private landowners on the benefits of managing those grazinglands. Everyone keep up the good work.

In September, Florida is making plans to host the National GLCI Steering Committee Fall Business Meeting from the 8th through 11th in the Sarasota region. Many unique tours showcasing the grazinglands of the state are planned. They include visits to a grazing dairy, the Archbold Research Station which is an agro-ecology research facility, the Avon Park Air Force Range which uses a rangeland grazing system, and the Carlton 2x4 Ranch and Longino Ranch which include pasture, citrus, quail and forest

management. The Steering Committee Meeting will be held from 8 am to 5 pm on Saturday September 10th. At the fall business meeting, discussion will include current GLCI efforts, as well as a request for some on the national steering committee to move to an emeritus role and for new committee members to be nominated.

We thank Florida organizers Pat Pfeil and Pete Deal in advance for the extra efforts and arrangements they are making for this great event in their state. Everyone interested in the GLCI effort is invited to participate. For more information contact Monti Golla at [grazinglands@verizon.net](mailto:grazinglands@verizon.net) or call her at 979-268-0980.

Bob Drake, Chair

### **Help GLCI Update It's Mailing List**

We are in the process of updating the bulk GLCI mailing list to each state. If your address has recently changed, you want to get on the list, or you would like to receive more newsletters, please e-mail Kindra Gordon with your information at [office@gordonresources.com](mailto:office@gordonresources.com).

If you would like to get on the mailing list to regularly receive a single newsletter, please contact your state GLCI coordinator. You can find their contact information by going to the GLCI website at [www.glci.org](http://www.glci.org), and then click on the "Who's Involved" button, and then click the State GLCI Coordinators link.

Also, **state coordinators** help us make sure we have your information correct on the GLCI website by going to the site (follow the links above) and checking your information. If it needs to be changed, contact Monti Golla at [grazinglands@verizon.net](mailto:grazinglands@verizon.net).

Please let us know of your corrections by Sept. 1!