

Grazing Lands Assistance



photos: NRCS Oklahoma



Grazing lands cover an immense area and provide a diversity of ecological and economic benefits. Healthy grazing lands provide water for urban and rural uses, livestock products, flood protection, wildlife habitat, purification of air, and carbon sequestration. These lands also provide aesthetic value, open space, and vital links in the enhancement of rural social stability and economic vigor.

Grazing Lands Assistance

The Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) helps farmers and ranchers with one-on-one technical assistance for pest plant management, prescribed burn plans, plant identification, development of grazing plans that include fencing, watering facilities, windbreaks for shelter, and managing nutrition. This direct technical assistance is also available to help landowners enhance their wildlife or recreational resources.

Grazing Land Conservation Initiative

Grazing land assistance is frequently accomplished with partnerships. One organized effort is the Grazing Land Conservation Initiative (GLCI). The GLCI is a national voluntary effort to enhance privately owned land. NRCS provides funds through GLCI to support demonstration projects and educational programs. In Oklahoma, this effort is led by a local citizen steering committee, the Oklahoma Grazing Lands Conservation Association. NRCS Grazing Lands Specialists work as liaisons to facilitate projects and actions with the committee and others.

Oklahoma Grazing Lands Technical Assistance

Grazing lands, which include rangeland, pastureland, grazed forest, and grazed cropland, are the backbone of Oklahoma's agricultural industry. NRCS provided assistance to local clients on a variety of matters to improve and/or sustain the health and productivity of grazing lands. Oklahoma currently has 14 grazing land specialist positions.

Forty-five tours, workshops, seminars, and field days were conducted for local clients on subjects such as mesquite control, thistle control, prescribed burning, sericea lespedeza, wildlife habitat, grazing management, integrated pest management, quail management, rangeland monitoring, and others. Over 1,800 participants attended these hands-on workshops. NRCS assisted with prescribed grazing on 650,000 acres. New plans were developed on 555,000 acres. Additionally, nine demonstration projects were implemented on 11 operating units. These were joint efforts with other partners including conservation districts and the extension service. Media activities included 121 newspaper and magazine articles and five television or radio programs related to grazing lands management.

Emphasis continues to be placed on the management of Juniper in Oklahoma. The acreage of Juniper doubles

every 18 years, and the NRCS is assisting clients with its management. This rate of increase in Juniper equates to about 760 acres per day between 1985 and 1994! These efforts include technical assistance on prescribed burning and mechanical controls, and financial assistance through the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP). Juniper management is important not only because of forage losses and loss of habitat, but also from a human safety standpoint. Using fire as a tool to safely reduce volatile fuel loads continues to be a priority.

A field trial is currently being conducted in Harper County to evaluate different herbicide treatments for a high-water-use invader--saltcedar. Alternative treatments for mesquite treatments are also being evaluated.

Oklahoma actively participates in the National Forage Quality and Animal Well Being Project. NRCS grazing lands specialists assisted over 10 livestock producers in collecting 80 fecal samples to be analyzed using Near Infrared Spectrometer (NIRS) technology. This provided the NRCS and client an analysis for dietary crude protein and energy to be used as a planning tool, planning supplemental feeding strategies, forage production systems, and grazing management. The goal of this effort is to improve production efficiency of grazing livestock operations through reduced winter feeding costs and improved performance of livestock.

Range conservationists also conducted youth education activities at the National Rangeland Judging contest and the Youth Range and Wildlife Academy. Numerous Boy Scout, 4-H, FFA and other local youth organizations benefited from presentations on grazing lands.

Range conservationists have published two new Ecological Site Descriptions, which interpret the different plant communities that can exist on a given soil. These descriptions also provide guidelines on how to manage for each of these vegetative communities.

Great Strides Made in Education and Training

Training is an important component of a strong grazing lands technical assistance program. One hundred, fifty-three NRCS employees attended grazing lands training courses, and the agency provided training to 280 landowners and 27 other agency employees.

Workshops were given in Weatherford and Geary to assist producers with various strategies in coping with Oklahoma's drought. Topics included grazing and forage management, and enterprise diversification.

Fredrick formed the first Big Pasture Prescribed Burn Association. The association facilitates training for producers so they can help each other on burns, and they can also acquire equipment. Dewey County is also forming a burn association.

For More Information

For more information on this program or other USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service Programs, contact your local Natural Resources Conservation Service office or USDA Service Center, or check out the following website: www.ok.usda.gov.

Education and information is the key to a strong grazing lands technical assistance program.



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