

National Resources Inventory Rangeland Resource Assessment

Regional Interpretation

October 2010

About the Data

Estimates presented here are based upon rangeland data collected on-site as part of the National Resources Inventory (NRI).

Rangeland is defined by the NRI as a *Land cover/use* category on which the climax or potential plant cover is composed principally of native grasses, grasslike plants, forbs, or shrubs suitable for grazing and browsing, and introduced forage species that are managed like rangeland.

This includes areas where introduced hardy and persistent grasses, such as crested wheatgrass, are planted and such practices as deferred grazing, burning, chaining, and rotational grazing are used, with little or no chemicals or fertilizer being applied. Grasslands, savannas,

The National Resources Inventory (NRI) is a statistical survey of natural resource conditions and trends on non-Federal land in the United States. Non-Federal land includes privately owned lands, tribal and trust lands, and lands controlled by state and local governments.

The NRI rangeland results presented here address current conditions. In the future, the NRI rangeland survey sample will include revisited sites. This will allow estimates for change in rangeland resource conditions to be made.

Basic interpretations of patterns recorded for each of the three attributes of rangeland health (soil and site stability, hydrologic function, and biotic integrity) throughout the United States are provided. Interpretations rely primarily on qualitative assessments that were made relative to the land's potential to support ecosystem services. Quantitative indicators are used to help interpret qualitative assessments, and the potential implications of these assessments for management. These quantitative data will serve as a baseline for future studies establishing trends.

The emphasis of the discussion is on those areas where the status of the land differed significantly from the expected status based on the land's potential. A moderate or greater departure from potential was set as the level of significant departure. This emphasis is intended to facilitate a further assessment of where additional management resources may lead to improvements in land status. Lands with significant departure may have crossed ecological thresholds and therefore may not be sufficiently resilient to recover naturally from degradation.

An interpretation of general patterns in these data focuses on each of four regions of the western United States (Figure 1).

many wetlands, some deserts, and tundra are considered to be rangeland. Certain communities of low forbs and shrubs, such as mesquite, chaparral, mountain shrub, and pinyon-juniper, are also included as rangeland.

These results are based upon NRI rangeland data collected in the field on rangeland during the period 2003-2006. Current estimates cover non-Federal rangeland in 17 western states (extending from North Dakota south to Texas and west) and to a limited extent in Florida and Louisiana.

Quality assurance and statistical procedures are designed/developed to ensure data are scientifically legitimate. Irrespective of the scale of analysis, margins of error must be considered. Margins of error (at the 95 percent confidence level) are presented for all NRI estimates.

These regions are defined based on similarities in ecosystems and/or results within them. An additional section summarizes results for sub-tropical grasslands in Florida and annual grasslands in California.

Figure 1. Broad regions described in these interpretations



More Information

For more information about the NRI, visit <http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/technical/NRI/>

Send comments and questions to the NRI Help Desk (nri@wdc.usda.gov).