

Range Management: Rangeland Inventory

Fact Sheet

September 2011

What is it? One of the first steps in developing or updating a rangeland management plan is an inventory of resources. Inventory assistance is available from your local Natural Resources Conservation Service office.

**Inventory
Includes**

Ecological Site. An ecological site is a distinctive kind of land with specific characteristics that differs from other kinds of land in its ability to produce a distinctive kind and amount of vegetation. An ecological site map will help tell a rancher the potential kinds and amount of vegetation production in the area.

Rangeland Health. Rangeland health is a qualitative assessment of seventeen different but related indicators utilized to evaluate how well the ecosystem processes (water cycle, nutrient cycle and energy flow) of an ecological site are functioning. The result is a rating of the three rangeland health attributes: 1) Soil/Site Stability; 2) Hydrologic Function; and 3) Biotic Integrity.

Similarity Index. Similarity index is a comparison of the present plant community to the potential plant community for a specific site. An experienced conservationist can easily determine if enough desirable plants remain to obtain improved "range condition". Even an area that has been seriously mismanaged may have enough of the desirable plants to reestablish the stand. If there are not enough desirable plants, the area may need reseeding.

Fence locations. On a map include not only existing fences, but also the potential locations that could improve grazing distribution and management of livestock.

Water supply. Livestock need an adequate water supply. Water location has an effect on grazing. Providing water supplies may be necessary to implement a good management plan.

Erosion. Rangeland that has a long history of overgrazing often has gullied areas. It may need shaping and reseeding or some other kind of erosion control. Temporary fencing may also be needed to protect the areas until vegetation is established.



Grazing distribution patterns. Determine and record the grazing patterns for each pasture. Are livestock overgrazing some portions and under using others? Obtaining proper use and even distribution is a major objective in developing a management plan.

Brush control. Invasion of brush not only reduces production of grasses, but can affect grazing patterns. Problems with brush only get worse unless control measures are taken. Inventory the kinds and location of brush when developing a plan.

Forage inventory. The location, kinds, and amount of existing forage resources should be noted. Amount is measured in pounds per acre.

Wildlife and recreation potentials. Wildlife species are part of any operation. An inventory determines if food, cover, and water are adequate for both domestic and wild animals. If they are not, this could become part of the management plan. The potential for various kinds of recreation could also be inventoried.

Location of corrals. Pens and corrals need to fit into the operation where they would be the most convenient and efficient for use by the rancher. If new corrals are needed, they should be planned for the best location.

Location of salt and feeding areas. Is the location of the existing areas causing problems such as overgrazing, undesirable distribution of grazing, or erosion? A conservationist could assist in relocating these to more desirable locations.

Supplemental forages. In the proper management of rangeland, grass must have periods of rest to recover from grazing to maintain its vigor. Special pastures can be used to provide this rest as well as meet seasonal nutritional requirements of livestock. These pastures may be annual crops or they may be tame pastures such as crested and/or intermediate wheatgrass and should be noted in the inventory. To fully use supplemental pastures, a grazing plan should be developed to provide optimum forage quality for livestock needs.

Summary

Before plans can be made to improve or better use rangelands, a rancher must know what resources are available and their condition. A detailed inventory of the above listed areas can provide this information.

Where To Get Help

For more information on range management, contact the local office of the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Natural Resources Conservation Service.