

TRUTH BE KNOWN

I don't know about others in the cattle business, but as for myself, I'm disgusted, having to listen year after year to all the talk of overgrazing. Beginning back in the early 1960's, about the time I got a start in the cattle business, there's been an almost constant bombardment of articles, editorials and scientific papers even, saying over and over how overgrazing is causing this animal or that animal or some other value great harm. It's high time we put a stop to such hogwash. Truth is, there has never been a time in the history of mankind when wildlife and rangelands were more greatly benefitted than during the time when we were running the greatest numbers of domestic animals on our rangelands. The trouble is, those responsible have never been given credit for the benefits that have occurred during that period. And I'm not talking just about those who settled the region either. I'm also talking about the founders of this nation – for they more than anyone throughout history, understood the importance of free markets and the absolute protection of property rights. They understood, if you want people to prosper, and you want the world around you to improve, you hold government in check, you keep taxes at a minimum, you see that people living in local communities retain the right to govern the affairs of their local communities, and you let the free market reign. When you do that, everything benefits, including wildlife.

Regardless of what we have been told over the years, whenever the principles of our founding fathers have been implemented, **wildlife have benefited**. Unfortunately, we modern Americans seem to have forgotten all this - to a point that we now allow our government to form our opinions and do our thinking for us. Think about it, does it make sense that we now believe that government is the best manager of resources, when history tells us again and again that its only when private enterprise is allowed to reign that nations prosper. Why is it that we have allowed our government to go on year after year attacking the private sector - telling the world again and again, how bad grazing is, or how wetlands are being destroyed, or how, if it were up to the private sector there would be no wildlife production at all?

Think of the effect this has had over the years. A lot of ranching families have been hurt because of these constant attacks - many even been put out of business - particularly in the 1990's, soon after the Forest Service implemented it's first resource management plan in central Nevada - which called for protection of riparian areas when in fact there was no science what-so-ever to prove that such policy would be of benefit to any forest value.

In all, I believe there were 26 families that had their permits either drastically reduced or canceled throughout central Nevada during that period - all in the name of protecting resources, when in fact, wildlife and resources were hurt every bit as much or more than as the people were. Herewith and below, I present information supportive of my allegations.

Beginning in the mid 1970's there was a series of studies completed on the Starkey Experimental Station in Eastern Oregon. Over a period of 12 years, graduate students and scientists measured the effects of cattle grazing on every riparian value imaginable. They applied rest rotation grazing, season long grazing, short duration grazing, deferred rotation, and non-use. They monitored and determined effects on soil compaction, infiltration rates, stream bank erosion, sediment loads, stream bank cutting, biological content of the water itself, numbers of steelhead

trout redds per mile, impacts on streamside vegetation, and total production. And when it was all said and done, they found little or no adverse effects from grazing. In fact, they found the opposite to be true. On page 34 of the document it is stated:

“With the exception of short-duration grazing, all other grazing systems produced almost twice as much herbage as the ungrazed plots. With vegetation responding this dramatically to grazing treatment and the objective being improvement of biomass production in the riparian areas. It appeared that this can best be accelerated with grazing instead of protection.”

“In this study, productivity of riparian zone and floodplain vegetation was rapidly enhanced when no more than 70 percent of the herbage was removed annually. And in the floodplain, vegetative production was accelerated with grazing.”

The 70 percent figure used in the above discussion provides opportunity for me to call attention to the fact that while Forest personnel in Nevada were demanding the removal of livestock from riparian areas whenever 45 to 55 percent of the feed had been utilized, their own studies completed on the Starkey Experimental Station were indicating that riparian area values improve rapidly at 70 percent utilization.

Forest personnel may argue that there is other data available which contradicts that which was completed at the Starkey Experimental Station, but such is not born out. On pages 24, 41 and 57 of the Study Publication, it is stated, 1. “The literature of range management is essentially devoid of information specific to the management of riparian zones.” And 2, “Unfortunately, there is little other scientific information available on the relationship between livestock management and watershed science.” And 3, “The eastern Oregon study is the most comprehensive of its kind in the United States.”

Other information favorable to livestock grazing, found within the document is as follows. On page 56 it is stated; “...degradation during Spring discharge along ungrazed streambanks was significantly greater than degradation occurring along grazed streambanks.”

On page 58 it is stated; “None of the grazing systems affected the quality of Meadow Creek’s water as defined by the water quality standards of the Environmental Protection Agency.”

On page 112, comment is made to the fact that in that instance; “Forage utilization was 75% on meadows but only 10% on uplands.”

These figures, indicating that 75% of the forage was utilized on the meadows while only 10% occurred on the uplands also supports the argument we have been making - that whenever Forest personnel demand that permittees remove their livestock from an allotment when only 45 to 50 percent of the feed has been taken on a riparian area, they are, in effect, excluding the permittee from using 80 to 90 percent of available feed within his allotment.

Unfortunately, no one in the livestock business was aware of this information 25 years ago when the Forest people were first implementing their 45 percent utilization guidelines - even though, I

am certain that Forest Service personnel were aware of it. The question now is, are we in the ranching business going to continue to allow agency personnel to put people out of business based on faults information, or are we too apathetic and fearful of agency retaliation to do so.