

In 1986, due to the high cost of feeding weaner calves thru the winter in Ruby Valley, we decided we would try wintering our calves in California.

We shipped 540 or so calves that fall to Larry Quigley, a rancher just outside of Oraville, California. The calves were put on pasture with supplemental feed of rice cakes, almond hulls and alfalfa hay.

In January we went down to help the Quigley's sort and class the calves. It was a new experience for us. Here it was January, yet it was like being in Ruby Valley in late March or April. The black birds were singing, there were geese, ducks and coots just everywhere on their ranch.

The Quigley's had approximately 700 acres of private land adjacent to the Oraville Dam Afterbay. The Afterbay is a shallow man made reservoir created to hold water in summer until it has warmed enough to irrigate the Valley's rice fields.

Larry Quigley had been able to obtain a state lease on a portion of the Afterbay lands adjacent to his property. The remainder of the Afterbay lands were being left ungrazed each year. He had been pasturing livestock on the leased portion at his discretion for some time.

After returning home to Ruby Valley, I began thinking about the hundreds and hundreds of geese and ducks on Larry's ranch. It then occurred to me that I had not seen any Wildlife on the ungrazed Afterbay lands. We made several more trips to California during the winter, and on each trip I made a special point of noting the pattern of Wildlife use in the area.

It appeared that at least 50% of the Wildlife use in the area was on Larry's place. The heavy concentration of cattle and added feeds fed on the ranch had created extra litter and organic matter in the soil, resulting in making extra moisture and nutrients available to plants, thus creating an abundance of tender clover, grass and forbs in all the low areas.

Even in the Quigley's Afterbay pasture where no extra feed was fed to livestock, there were hundreds of ducks, geese and coots using the shallow water areas. But what was the most striking was the obvious lack of Wildlife use of any kind on the remainder of the State Afterbay lands. When I studied the plant communities where there had been no grazing, it was obvious that there were no clovers or tender plants among the heavy stands of decedent grass. It was obvious that all the healthy, vital, life producing plants were only in the area where livestock grazing had occurred.

Later at home in Ruby Valley I called Jerry Wilson, the Ruby Lake National Wildlife Refuge manager, in our Valley. I related what I had seen and suggested livestock operators and wildlife biologists work together to improve the habiat on the Orville Afterbay lands in California. He mentioned that while stationed on a Refuge in California a few years privious he had sat on an advisory board for recommended management of these same lands.

Other than that he seemed uninterested. I also talked to Dave Livermore, Representative of Nature Conservancy, then stationed in California, thinking he would be interested in promoting changes. But I don't believe I created any real interest.

Here in Ruby Valley, our ranch encompasses a large portion of Franklin Lake, a marshy type lake, very similar to Ruby Lake which is managed by the National Fish and Wildlife Service.

My Grandfather owned a large part of Ruby Lake prior to the Government's purchase of that lake in 1938. My family has continued to hold a grazing permit on the Refuge since that time.

Livestock grazing on the Refuge was not curtailed until the 1960's, when the Gardner permits were reduced from 3200 AUM's to less than 1000 AUM's. Today the best Wildlife producing area in Ruby Valley is not Ruby Lake, but Franklin Lake where the lands are privately managed. After livestock use was reduced on the Refuge the plant communities tended to change from grasses and forbs to heavy sedges. We believe the open areas created by livestock grazing not only on the upland meadows but also along the edge of the lake itself provides the natural plant and insect production wildlife need. Also wildlife need a definite amount of visibility in areas where they feed in order to see predators as they approach. We have learned here on our ranch that if we have a heavy concentration of ground squirrels, to reduce their numbers all we have to do is let the grass grow tall for a year and the coyotes and raptors will move in and often eliminate a colony. Over all there are more coyotes, hawks, and predators on Franklin Lake, simply because agriculture practices provide better habitat than on Ruby Lake for gophers, mice, ground squirrels, and small game of all kinds for the predators to feed on. Waterfowl production and use is greater also. Many Wildlife Managers agree, yet the push for greater control over and acquisition of private lands continues.

My family and I are very concerned over the growing conflict between environmentalists and Landowners. It appears to us that too often our adversaries are far more interested in furthering their control over our natural resources than in Wildlife production.

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