

Outcome-based Grazing Program

The Bureau of Land Management implements an initiative known as Outcome-based Grazing Authorizations. It is designed to offer a more collaborative approach between the BLM and its partners within the livestock grazing community when issuing grazing authorizations. The following is part of a series highlighting ranches in this pilot program.



Horseshoe Ranch

Battle Mountain, Nevada

Q & A with Joel Donalson, Ranch Manager

How would you describe this ranch to someone who has never been there?

The Horseshoe is a great ranch with a lot of Humboldt River access as well as private meadows. The BLM allotments we have entered into the Outcome-Based Grazing project are to the east and south of the ranch headquarters on either side of the Humboldt River. In anticipation of the Outcome-Based Grazing pilot, we increased our herd to nearly 2,500 cows on the ranch through the winter. This year we leased the Gund Ranch in Lee, Nevada, so that we would have a place to take the cows during the hot season in anticipation of having a grazing permit that allows for flexible AUMs (animal unit months, which is an indicator of the amount of forage consumed). The Horseshoe is a historic ranch that was founded in 1872 and that has a long history in the Nevada cattle business. We work to be good stewards.

What is the philosophy that guides this ranch?

A lot of what we're doing on the ranches is working on mitigation and environmental projects associated with the mines that we run. The company that owns this ranch was very eager to work with the BLM on the Outcome-Based Grazing Project. After some consideration, we finally decided on the Horseshoe as the best fit for this project. The primary operating considerations for our ranches are environmental stewardship and beneficial use of land. We support the use of grazing on federal lands, and we try to be good neighbors to the other ranches.

Why did this ranch enroll in the outcome-based grazing program?

The biggest reason is that there is a lot of the Horseshoe that has been impacted by historic wildfires, and that has led to widespread cheatgrass invasion. We're interested to see grazing as an important part of reversing that trend and shifting back towards perennial and native-species dominated ecosystems.

Why is some flexibility important in a grazing permit?

Because of the annual variability in the amount of fuels that are built up, especially cheatgrass. We need the availability to graze based on how the cheatgrass has grown, the precipitation and the temperatures, so we can change the number of animals and time and timing of grazing use to try to reduce the cheatgrass fuel loads and to allow for the perennial grasses to have a competitive advantage in the grazing rotation.

Why should someone who isn't involved in agriculture care about how public lands are managed?

Many of the ranches in Nevada are a combination of private and public land, which means that we are using a public resource that belongs to everyone in order to produce beef. Also, these projects do have the potential to change the landscape toward something that is more favorable again to native species, wildlife, and plants. Fighting wildfires is of course something that is very expensive to the taxpayer, not to mention the smoke and hazardous conditions that affect all of our communities across the West.



Partnering to Conserve Sagebrush Rangelands is a collaborative effort between the BLM and Intermountain West Joint Venture. Our purpose is to catalyze proactive, voluntary, and community-led sagebrush rangeland conservation – expanding success across private and public lands. This collaboration is supporting the Outcome-Based Grazing Authorizations efforts. Learn more at ***www.PartnersInTheSage.com***.