

IMPACT

University of Idaho
Extension

Lemhi County, 200 Fulton, Suite 202, Salmon, Idaho 83467; 208-756-2815 ext. 283; Fax: 208-756-6915

Cattle Distribution Project on the Muleshoe Ranch Range Using Low-moisture Blocks

The Situation

In 2003, Ross Goddard, owner and operator of the Muleshoe Ranch, approached the Lemhi County Cattle and Horse Growers Association about hosting the annual stewardship ride on his range. The ride is co-sponsored by the Association, Lemhi Soil and Water Conservation District and Lemhi County Extension. He was having several issues with the Bureau of Land Management about his allotment and thought that an “on-the-ground” discussion about the situation, history of the range, and possible solutions with outside parties and BLM representatives would be beneficial.

The ride was hosted on the range in September, 2005, and the focus of the ride was the interaction between grazing, Lewis and Clark activities, and riparian areas. There were 60 people in attendance representing other ranches, the Soil and Water Conservation Board, Idaho Department of Agriculture, University of Idaho Extension, Forest Service, and Bureau of Land Management. Some of the challenges discussed on the ride included:

- A major part of the Lewis and Clark trail is through the allotment
- Improvements for recreation are in conflict with grazing practices
- Water sources are limited

As challenges were discussed, various changes were suggested. Suggested changes included:

- Development of informative signs giving the history of the area, including grazing practices

- BLM recreation crew to coordinate with range conservationist on the best time to work on trails and picnic areas
- Alteration in the grazing plan allowing for a split herd to utilize two of the pastures at the same time
- Utilization of protein barrels to help “scatter” the cattle and keep them in the high country

Our Response

In September of 2005, a group of individuals came together to discuss the possibility of utilizing low-moisture blocks on the Muleshoe Allotment. Low-moisture blocks have been successfully used in Montana and New Mexico to alter grazing patterns and extend grazing seasons, but never in the summer or on steep terrain. Those discussing the project included representatives from the Muleshoe Ranch, Bureau of Land Management, National Marine Fisheries, United States Forest Service, University of Idaho Extension, Ridley Block, Inc. and Idaho Department of Agriculture.

In November, 2006, cooperators involved in this project, under guidance of Dr. Karen Launchbaugh, professor at University of Idaho College of Natural Resources, applied and received a David Little Grant to start this project. Beginning in June of 2007, low moisture blocks were furnished by Ridley Block, Incorporated, and placed on various pastures within the allotment. Two students were hired and trained to do grazing utilization mapping where the blocks were placed. Training was furnished by the Bureau

of Land Management and the Idaho Department of Agriculture. The Lemhi County Extension Office and Lemhi County Weed control furnished global positioning units for the riders. Completion of the map indicated that the use of the blocks looked promising. Some challenges were discovered in the 2006 project in relationship to placement of the block in inaccessible areas and the amount of landscape to cover.

In 2007, the project was modified in regards to the challenges faced in 2006. It was decided to focus specifically on the Gould Basin pasture. Gould Basin contains a sensitive riparian area and slopes that have been under-utilized by cattle. A single rider was hired with funds from a University of Idaho Critical Issues Grant to utilize a gps and map the pasture. Ridley Block again furnished the low-moisture block for the project. Once the maps were completed in the field and the global positioning system downloaded, the Bureau of Land Management completed the map.

Program Outcomes

In comparing the 2006 map to the 2007 map, the utilization pattern has definitely changed. Approximately 500 acres of range went from being slightly utilized to light to moderate utilization. Gould Basin was grazed for 30 days with 200 head of cows with calves in both 2006 and 2007. Though there wasn't an increase in grazing days, there was better distribution of the cattle throughout the pasture. This was a major accomplishment considering it was over 100 degrees during the grazing period.

For More Information

Shannon Williams, Extension Educator
University of Idaho Extension—Lemhi County
District III
200 Fulton, Suite 202
Salmon, Idaho 83467
208-756-2815 ext. 283
Fax: 208-756-6915
Email: shannonw@uidaho.edu

Ross Goddard
Muleshoe Ranch
Box 11
Tendoy, Idaho 83468
208-756-2196
Email: suegoddard@centurytel.net

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