

Quality of plants key to proper rangeland management

Approximately 600,000 acres in Morrow County are rangeland on which native vegetation is predominantly grasses, grass-like plants and forbs on shrubs—suitable for grazing or browsing use. Rangeland is important because of its many resources, including being a primary source of forage for domestic livestock, providing water, wildlife habitat, areas for natural recycling of wastes and purification of air. In addition, rangeland has esthetic value and provides open space and urban buffer areas.

RANGELAND MANAGEMENT— THE BASIC THOUGHT

It is important that we, as users of rangeland, understand that use and management of rangeland revolves around use and management of plants. The measure of good range is not the number of cows nor the number of acres, but rather, the amount and quality of the plants. Plants are the crop produced on grazing land; animals just harvest the crop and convert it into meat and fiber. Although plants are managed chiefly through manipulation of grazing animals, this management must be based on the needs of the plants.

HOW GRASS GROWS

Plants manufacture food through their leaves and green stems from the minerals and water they take from the soil and from elements in the air; the sun supplies energy. Perennial plants use food they have made for growth, reproduction and as a reserve for resuming growth after winter or after being defoliated. Vigorous plants produce more top growth than they actually need and it is this surplus that can be safely harvested by animals. If too much top growth is repeatedly removed plants from overgrazing, growth is impaired. These overgrazed plants become less vigorous, less competitive and more susceptible to damage by drought, heat, insects and disease. Eventually these plants die.

PLANTS ARE COMPETITORS

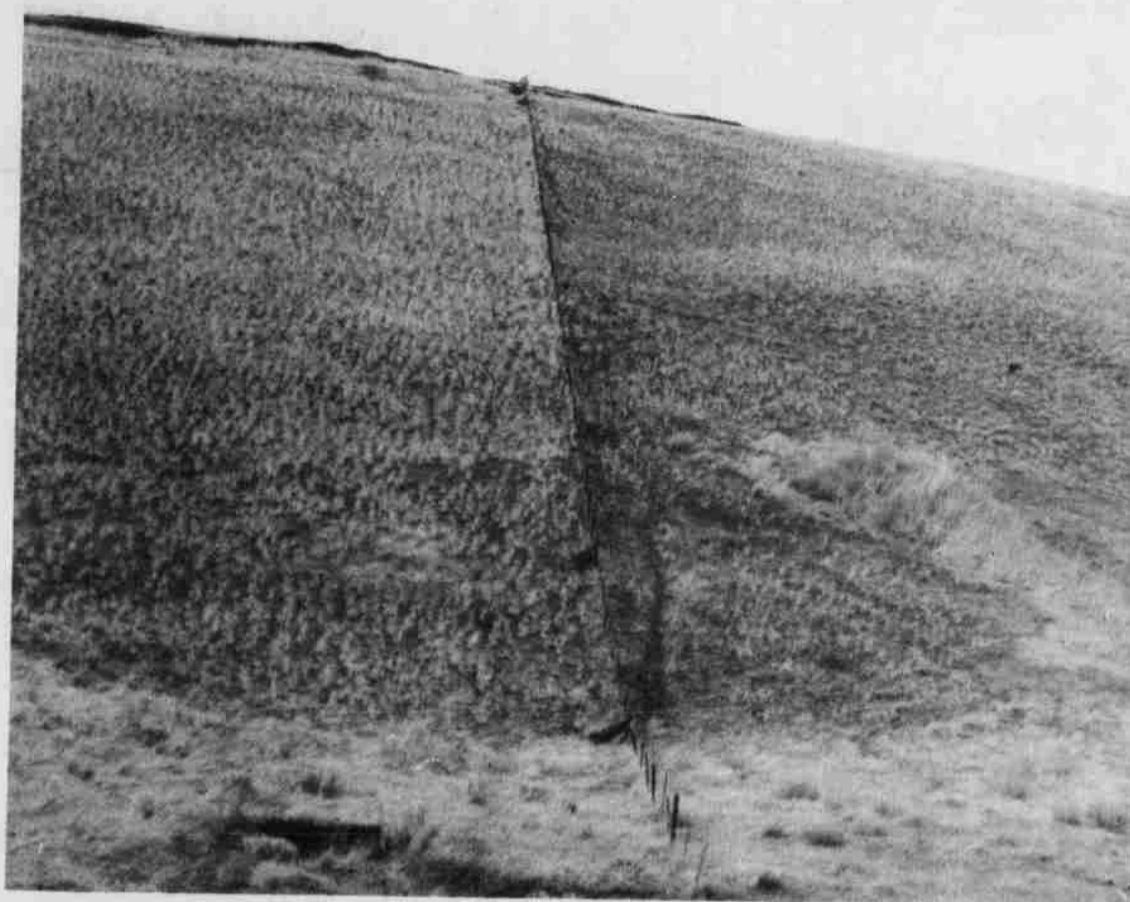
Plants continually compete with each other for moisture, sunlight, nutrients and growing space. Healthy plants are better competitors than unhealthy ones. The proper

Reseeding rangeland

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Contrary to popular belief, abandoned cropland and severely depleted range will not revert back to native vegetation in the near future if ever. Competition from plants like cheatgrass, an imported annual, is too intense. Many winter annuals like cheatgrass germinate so early that all moisture is gone from the site before the native perennial seed can germinate. This means that year after year, the cheatgrass robs the moisture and the native bunchgrasses cannot seed back in.

If you have abandoned cropland, you plan on abandoning some, or you have severely depleted rangeland—consider seeding to improve your land.



A fenceline in Morrow County marks the big difference between range properly managed and range that has been overgrazed.

degree of grazing use plus occasional rest during critical periods of growth are essential to efficient and desirable changes in plant communities. It is true that the first few years of overgrazing will produce more forage than proper grazing. But those few years can also destroy your ranges' productive ability for many years to come.

RANGE CONDITION IS IMPORTANT

Just how important is range condition in relation to the livestock carrying capacity? Let's look at an example. Suppose an area in a pasture has deeper soil, faces to the south, and is in good range condition. This site should produce up to 500 lbs.-ac. (1.5 ac.-aum) of usable air-dry forage. Now assume this area is grazed too heavily for several years and drops into fair condition. Usable air-dry forage could reduce to as little as 75 lbs.-ac. (10 ac.-aum) or a reduction of 85 per cent from what it was in good condition. If it then takes 15 years for this site to return to good condition where it will safely produce 500 lbs.-ac again, is this good, sound quality ranch or range management? No! Too much forage has been lost as well as too much soil.

KEY TO SUSTAINED PRODUCTION

What is the key to maintaining a good productive ranch operation that you can pass on to your children? Is it that you select a good breed of cattle or sheep and teach your

children proper livestock management? These things are important to good ranch operations; but the real key to good ranch operation is that you recognize your crop as grass and manage for maximum sustained production. Remember, all the animal science know-how there is won't maintain your ranch's productivity without good range management.

SOME QUESTIONS FOR YOU

There is a real need for further understanding and application of range management practices in Morrow County. Ranchers should be familiar with the answers to most of these questions:

What does Bluebunch wheatgrass and Idaho fescue look like?

Which is most palatable?

What does "take half and leave half" mean in terms of remaining stubble for these two common grass plants?

What is spring deferment and why is it a good practice every few years?

Why should you salt away from water?

What is "good" rangeland?

If you don't know the answer to some of these important questions or doubt their importance to maintaining sustained production on your ranch, contact the Morrow Soil and Water Conservation District or the Heppner office of the Soil Conservation Service.

1979 ACP changes told

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4. Cost-share rates range from 50 per cent to 75 per cent depending on the priority placed on the practice.

5. Practices included in the 1979 program are:

SL1. Permanent Vegetative Cover Establishment

SL2. Permanent Vegetative Cover Improvement

SL4. Terrance Systems

SL5. Diversions

SL6. Grazing Land Protection

SL7. Windbreak Restoration or Establishment

SL9. Conservation Tillage System

SL11. Permanent Vegetative Cover on Critical Areas

WC1. Water Impoundment Reservoirs

WC2. Spreader Ditches or Dikes

WC3. Rangeland Moisture Conservation

WC4. Irrigation Water Conservation
WP1. Sediment Retention, Erosion, or Water Control Structures

WP2. Stream Protection

WP3. Sod Waterways

Wp4. Animal Waste Control facilities

FR1. Forest Tree Plantations

FR2. Forest Tree Stand Improvement

WL1. Permanent Wildlife Habitat

WL2. Shallow Water Areas for Wildlife

6. A request has been submitted to include underground drainage as a special practice.

7. Long term agreements will again be offered, but with some important changes. Mini LTA's (agreements three to five years) may be approved and may be to solve a certain conservation problem rather than ALL conservation problems on a farm. It would be possible to have more than on LTA on a farm.