



United States
Department of
Agriculture

Forest
Service

Toiyabe NF
Tonopah RD

P.O. Box 3940
1400 S. Erie Main Street
Tonopah, NV 89049-3940
(702) 482-6286

Reply to: 2200 Range

Date: December 9, 1993

Rose Strickland
P.O. Box 8096
Reno, NV 89507

Dear Rose,

I apologize for my delay in responding to your urgent request for information, and I hope this response is not too untimely. Diane has been out of the office, and I've spent most of my time this last week working against Nye County's passage of a resolution proclaiming all public lands to be the property of the State of Nevada.

You asked for me to identify three grazing allotments that are in the best resource condition—and why, and three allotments that are in the worst resource condition—and why. Before I do that, let me repeat again what we talked about on the phone last week. Generally speaking, those allotments I have that are improving in condition any at all are allotments where non-use is being taken or cattle numbers have been greatly reduced. The reasons for this obvious result is simply that most of these Central Nevada ranges are not suitable for cattle grazing. The Toiyabe NF here in Central Nevada sits astride what are aptly termed the desert islands of the state—high ridges and peaks up to 12,000 feet high. The topography is rough and sharply dissected by deep narrow canyons. Much of the country is too steep, rough, and inaccessible for livestock grazing. Where grazing can occur, it is confined to the narrow canyon corridors or broader basin areas at the heads of these canyons. These areas are now marginally suitable for grazing because of decades of abuse.

Historically, livestock management in the Central Nevada ranges has not been intensive. Ranchers have placed their cattle on the Forest and allowed them to seek their own level of use, which means that the cattle generally seek out the cool, lush meadow sites and stay there until there is nothing left to eat before going to the upland sites. Ranchers readily admit that these vitally important meadow complexes must be sacrificed in order to obtain moderate levels of use on the uplands.

When this happens, vegetative biomass in the meadows is removed to the point that the meadows cannot withstand the impacts of flood events. Concentrated camping of cattle on these meadows increases ground compaction, or hardening, of these otherwise soft soils. So infiltration decreases and run-off intensifies. Flood waters cut downward creating channels and headcuts; the water table is lowered; the wet meadow area shrinks; vigor of plants decreases; and invader species begin encroaching. All of these affect both the size and production of meadow sites.

We cannot continue to sacrifice meadows in order to obtain moderate levels of use in upland areas. We are monitoring these meadow areas and when allowable use levels are reached, cattle have to be removed. If the ranchers can't distribute cattle away from these meadow areas when that allowable



Caring for the Land and Serving People

use level is reached, then they have to be removed from the Forest. Of course, when we do that the ranchers claim that we are managing only approximately 2% of the land and then disallowing use of 98%.

But let me give you an example of the real situation. A typical allotment is a large, arid, harsh piece of country. Consider an allotment which is 120,000 acres in size of which only 12% or about 14,000 acres are suitable for livestock grazing. Of that 14,000 suitable acres, 300 acres or 2% are classified as riparian or meadow complexes. The differences between these uplands and meadow areas is significant in terms of forage production. The 14,000 acres of uplands are very poor forage producers, generating only about 100 pounds of forage/acre or about 1,400,000 pounds of forage.

In contrast, the meadows have the potential to produce about 2000 pounds per acre. On these 300 acres, 600,000 pounds of forage could be produced. So a total of about 2,000,000 pounds of forage are produced on this allotment of which 30% is produced on 2% or less of the suitable range.

This is of some concern to the FS and it should be of major concern to the rancher. Because whatever happens to either reduce the production of the meadows or to decrease the size of the meadows significantly affects total forage production and cattle stocking rates. So, looking after these meadows is looking after ranch economics. This then, is the focal point with which the livestock industry makes their attack—that our “over-regulation” has made it so burdensome for the rancher that it has effected an economical “taking” of their grazing “rights”.

We argue to the contrary. Consider a typical Central Nevada meadow area. The meadow is in unsatisfactory condition and probably producing less than a 1000 pounds/acre of forage. Allowable use on meadows in unsatisfactory condition may be as low as 45%. Allowable use on a 1000 pounds/acre meadow then would be 450 pounds. If we improve this meadow to satisfactory condition and under a rest-rotation system it produces 2000 pounds/acre, the allowable use increases to 65%. Sixty-five percent of 2000 pounds is 1300 pounds of available forage. So the difference gained by going from unsatisfactory to satisfactory condition (by going from 450 pounds of forage to 1300 pounds of forage) is a tripling of the available forage—a potential tripling of the stocking capacity. It is vitally important to the resource and the economic issue that we maintain meadows in satisfactory condition.

So, our range management philosophy on the Tonopah District consists of a three-fold approach:

1. *AGGRESSIVELY ASSUME RESPONSIBILITY FOR PERMIT ADMINISTRATION.* We have a 1.2MM acre District that includes four major mountain ranges. Of that vast acreage, only 12-15% is marginally suitable for grazing. Approximately 2% of the suitable acreage is riparian or meadow complexes.
2. *IMPLEMENT AND MONITOR FOREST PLAN FORAGE UTILIZATION STANDARDS AND GUIDELINES.* We are placing emphasis on key area (riparian area) management. This creates a conflict regarding percent riparian areas to total rangeland. It threatens traditional livestock management practices of sacrificing riparian areas to achieve moderate levels of use on uplands, because when allowable use levels are reached, cattle must be relocated or removed from the allotment. This type of management has, since 1991, resulted in 12 appeals and two multi-million dollar lawsuits all of which seriously impact range financial and personnel resources. It has resulted in personal convenience non-use by 1452 cattle (6535 HMs)—52% of the total number permitted on

the district. It is making us examine range suitability criteria—suitability and geographic terrain is a concern. It may result in exclusion of grazing from geographically unsuitable areas of the District.

3. MOVE TOWARD FOREST PLAN DIRECTION AND DESIRED FUTURE CONDITION OF ACHIEVING 95% OF RANGELANDS IN SATISFACTORY CONDITION. Satisfactory condition is defined as being in mid succession or higher ecological status. It is estimated that less than half of the suitable range on the Tonopah RD is in satisfactory condition. If progression toward satisfactory condition cannot be achieved while grazing, we will adjust permitted numbers and modify management or implement non-use for resource restoration. This management method has resulted in a 75% reduction (542 cattle reduced to 130—reduction of 1648 HM's or 10% of total HM's on the district) on the Monitor Complex Allotment. It has resulted in exclusion from grazing of a four-mile reach of Barley Creek in the Barley Creek unit of the Monitor Complex Allotment. It has resulted in exclusion from grazing of the entire South Sixmile Creek within the Hot Creeks Allotment. It has resulted in 100% suspension for resource restoration on the Meadow Canyon Allotment (211 cattle—950 HM's temporary reduction which is 6% of total HM's on the district). And it could yet result in 100% suspension for the Barney Meadows unit of the Cloverdale/Reese River Allotment and the Hunts Canyon unit of the Monitor Complex Allotment.

Now, with all this in mind I want to summarize and emphasize that poor rangeland conditions in Central Nevada are the result of three fundamental things: 1) These lands are marginal, at best, for cattle grazing—due to steep topography, high elevation, and perpetual drought, 2) historical abuse and overstocking, and 3) Ranchers have not, historically, been good stewards. Areas that are in good condition are due, in large part, to 1) proper stocking, and 2) flatter topography with deeper soils and more water retention capability. Good stewardship is still a problem on these few ranges that are in fair to good condition.

I have only two allotments that I will list that are in fair to good condition:

1. Table Mountain Allotment: This allotment is probably one of the better allotments in the State of Nevada. It is in relatively good condition because it lies astride one of the few table tops in Nevada. It has more soil, although much of it is thin, than the rocky spine-like ranges it parallels. It therefore, makes better use of the moisture which it receives. It is a high-elevation range and so the growing season as well as the grazing season is short. It is in good condition because a working, rest-rotation grazing system has been used since 1984. It is in good condition because it has been properly stocked. Good stewardship of the permittee and neighboring permittees is a problem, relative to unauthorized grazing outside the grazing season and authorized grazing allotments.

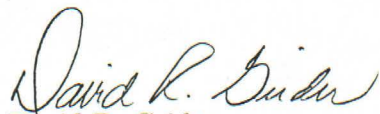
2. Twin Rivers Allotment: This allotment is in fair condition, although there are still some riparian areas that are in unsatisfactory condition. The uplands are in good condition, simply because they are not grazed by preference by concentrated numbers of cattle. This allotment consists entirely of the drainage systems of the North and South Twin Rivers and their headwater basins. The systems are expansive enough to support the stocking level of 85 cattle. A flip-flop rest-rotation system is used between the two river basins. This small amount of rest and proper stocking, coupled with the resiliency of those well-watered riverine systems, contributes to this allotment's fair condition. Maintaining good stewardship is a problem and continued unauthorized use concentrates isolated, but extreme, use in some meadows.

The three allotments that are in the worst condition are 1) Cloverdale/Reese River, 2) Meadow Canyon, and 3) Monitor Complex. Their unsatisfactory conditions are all due to extreme degra-

dation of riparian areas and meadow complexes. They all exhibit extensive active headcutting, lowering of water tables, loss of key plant species, loss of meadow productivity (size and vigor), impacts to stream quality, etc. These allotments are only marginally suitable for grazing. Probably the only unit in the Cloverdale/Reese River Allotment suitable for grazing is the Reese River basin. Where grazing has occurred, cattle numbers have been too many for too long. Permittees embrace the philosophy that cattle should seek their own level of use and therefore sacrifice the riparian areas. A 75% reduction is being effected on the Monitor Complex Allotment; 100% minimum five-year suspension has been implemented on the Meadow Canyon Allotment; and 100% non-use has been taken by the permittee on the Cloverdale/Reese River Allotment. These actions (a lack of cattle) have the greatest chance of showing the fastest improvement to these rangelands.

I hope this information is of some use to you in your efforts to support rangeland reform.

Sincerely,



David R. Grider
DISTRICT RANGER