

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.



Little Snake Land Company

Craig, Colorado

Q & A with John Raftopoulos, Ranch Manager

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

It's a larger sized cattle ranch in the semi-arid environment of northwest Colorado. It is mostly rolling hills and sagebrush. It is between 6,000 to 7,000 feet elevation. We get between 10 and 14 inches of rain a year. This particular unit is a small part of a much larger ranch system, but it's an integral part. It is one of the pasture rotations in the system. Originally, it was set up for season-long type of grazing, and we have converted it into a shorter, more intense spring and fall type of grazing. It lacks water like many areas of Colorado, so that's the most limiting factor.

What is the philosophy that guides this ranch?

We're a family business. We are the third generation and the fourth generation is coming up. The main ranch was originally a sheep ranch and we started running cattle on it. When my brother and I divided the operation, he took the sheep and I took the cattle. We are in this business for the long term. We have a legacy to uphold from the past generations. We want to leave the land better than we found it, aiming for rapid improvement. When I say rapid improvement, I mean in five years or less. We are large enough that we can modify the grazing so that we can alternate different pastures and give the growing season the rest it needs. The main thing that we always want to do is improve the land, the health of our cattle and provide a good living for our families. We want to work hard and enjoy what we do, which comes from seeing good ranching and good cattle.

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

The main reason we enrolled is for the flexibility that this program will give us in the future. We are a combination of many different allotments. It is hard to get the flexibility that we need to operate the short duration, high intensity type of grazing that these pastures need. Our hope is that it will speed up a lot of the environmental improvements that need done so we can improve the public lands.

Why is some flexibility important in a grazing permit?

Because the environment dictates how we move the cattle and how much feed is going to grow in how much time, and how many numbers we can run. If you don't have the necessary flexibility, you can't move to the appropriate pasture when you need to. For instance, if we have a pasture that has a permit from May through October, and we want to use it in late March or early April, then give it the growing season off to go back to it in November or December, we can't do that. When you have a big rotation like this, you need to be able to pick the appropriate place to go to better work with the land and the given conditions.

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

The environment is a beautiful thing when managed properly. It's not just beautiful for livestock and livestock operators, but for the wildlife, too. It's not just good for agriculture, but also for soil, water, insects, birds, and all kinds of wildlife. When you take care of the range, it's good for everybody. The multi-generation family operations are in it for the long run. You don't destroy what is taking care of your family. You nurture it and it keeps you in business so everyone can benefit from it.



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***.