

## Ranchers do rangeland photo monitoring with assistance of a monitoring “tutor”

### AT A GLANCE

Extension has offered rangeland monitoring workshops on a regular basis, but the adoption rate was low. This project offered ranchers a “tutor” to help them get started photo monitoring.

### The Situation

Monitoring is defined as to observe and check progress or quality over a period of time; keep under systematic review. Federal land managers are required to monitor public land grazing allotments on a regular basis to insure grazing standards are being met.

Ranchers meet with the federal lands personnel who make grazing management decisions on their grazing allotments on a yearly basis to review, renew and update the grazing plan. Grazing standards and forage measurements that need to be met are also discussed. These standards involve the amount of forage left after grazing has been completed. Failure to meet standards can result in penalties for the rancher. Penalties can include a reduction in the number of animals that can be turned out or a reduction in the amount of time animals can graze. These penalties require the rancher to find alternative forage for the cattle or reduce his herd.

Rangeland managers often invite ranchers to go with them when they are doing their monitoring, but many times, time does not allow the rancher to go. Sometimes, rangeland managers also have conflicts and are not able to monitor a grazing allotment at all. On those years, no monitoring is completed, leaving ranchers and managers not knowing if grazing standards were



Lemhi County rancher Bruce Mulkey takes a monitoring photo on his public lands grazing allotment. Shannon Williams photo.

met, if the rangeland is improving or declining, or if there are other problems that need addressed.

To assist ranchers in doing rangeland monitoring, Lemhi County’s UI Extension office has offered monitoring workshops on a regular basis. While ranchers attend workshops and their evaluations indicated an increase in knowledge and understanding of the importance of monitoring, the adoption rate of the practice was extremely low.

### Our Response

UI Extension entered discussions with federal land managers from the Salmon/Challis National Forest and Salmon Bureau of Land Management about how to get ranchers involved in doing their own

monitoring. The conclusion was that the monitoring plan needed to be simple, straight-forward and not require a large amount of plant identification. It was determined that photo monitoring would be an effective way to start. Photo monitoring is an accepted form of monitoring on public land grazing allotments. Photos work well for establishing long-term trends, are easy to do and are done at established sites.

UI Extension in Lemhi County applied for and received funding to hire a summer intern during 2016 with training in range that would serve as the ranchers “tutor” in photo monitoring. The focus of the intern’s position was to work with ranchers and assist them in beginning to do photo monitoring. The intern was instructed not to do the monitoring for the rancher, but rather to coach the rancher in doing it themselves. The goal of the program was to have ranchers feel comfortable doing the photo monitoring, so they would employ it on a regular basis.

A partnership with Idaho Department of Agriculture provided the initial training on photo monitoring for the interns. Lemhi Soil and Water Conservation District provided funds for monitoring kits. Each rancher that participated in the program was provided with a monitoring kit, so they had the tools necessary to do their own monitoring at any time.

Ranchers were invited to participate in the program beginning in January 2016 and gave permission to the intern to access the photo monitoring data for their grazing allotment. The intern accessed the data and photos and made copies for the ranchers and then set up appointments to visit the sites. At the sites, the rancher took the photos and completed the data sheets with the assistance of the “tutor.” The intern then typed up the data sheets and assisted the rancher in downloading and printing the photos. The first year of this project included six ranchers and a total of 23 monitoring sites.

In 2017, the Salmon-Challis National Forest came on board with the project. Not only did they encourage ranchers to participate, they awarded the project a

grant to fully fund an intern for 20 weeks. The number of ranchers participating increased to nine and a total of 30 monitoring sites. In 2018, an Extension intern grant and a David Little Endowment Grant from the U of I College of Natural Resources was utilized for funding. An intern was hired for 10 weeks. Due to summer storms, not all ranchers participated as they were behind on putting their hay up or could not access the sites due to road conditions. We had six returning ranchers participate and one new rancher for a total of 23 monitoring sites.

## Program Outcomes

In November 2018, a survey was sent to all participating ranchers to evaluate the program. Ranchers were asked if they were doing any monitoring before this project. 50 percent said yes; 50 percent said no. 66 percent of those responding had gone out with their rangeland manager when they were doing their monitoring. When asked to rank their comfort level of doing photo monitoring on their own with a four being “I got this” and one being “I still need a tutor,” 33 percent gave themselves a four; 33 percent gave themselves a three; 16 percent gave themselves a two and 17 percent felt they still needed a tutor. When asked if the program was not to continue, would they continue to monitor, 83 percent responded yes, they would continue to monitor. Ranchers were also asked if they would like to add some forage measurements to their monitoring and 83 percent responded yes.

For 2019, the plan is to continue to work with ranchers and add forage measurements to their monitoring plan. To help facilitate the addition of forage measurements, UI Extension Specialist Melinda Ellison, has partnered with the project. Individual meetings will be held with the ranchers to determine what forage measurements are needed to answer the questions they have about their public lands grazing allotment. Each rancher will have an individualized plan that can be implemented and added to their photo monitoring sites. Assistance will be available to the ranchers to help them start collecting forage data.

## FOR MORE INFORMATION

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