

IMPACT

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The economics of land stewardship: Pasture and rangelands

The Situation

Over the last 15 years many new residents have moved to Clearwater County and North Central Idaho in search of rural lifestyles and rural land. "Ranchettes" from 5-100+ acres have become increasingly common, many with owners who are unfamiliar with land management or agriculture. Many of these properties are purchased for the scenery and rural location without much thought of managing the land. As a result, lands in the county and surrounding area that were once put to use for hay production, livestock grazing, or timber production, now sit idle with increasing problems with weed infestation, poor forest health, and a lack of economic return.

Although Extension has traditionally provided programs in the county directed primarily at forest management, approximately half of the individually owned private land in the county is non-forested, much of this pasture and rangelands. For example, the south facing aspect of the Clearwater River canyon to the west of Orofino is primarily rangeland of very low quality due to major infestations of yellow starthistle and other noxious weeds. Clients surveyed have expressed a strong interest in programs addressing pasture and rangeland management.

Our Response

To address this need Extension launched a new annual workshop series called "Current Topics of Pasture and Rangeland Health" that was held in Orofino in May of 2013. This workshop series is intended to complement the longstanding workshop series, "Current Topics of Farm and Forest Health," that is held every December.

Topics covered in the inaugural workshop included the economic considerations of pasture and range-



A view of pastures on the Weippe prairie.

land management, such as costs associated with livestock grazing (such as costs for different types of fencing) as well as hay production (leasing vs. producing one's own hay); ecological principles of pasture and rangeland management; weed ecology and management; Natural Resource Conservation Service cost share programs for pasture and rangelands; and the use of goats to control noxious weeds for rangeland restoration.

Morning presentations were followed by a field tour in the afternoon where speakers discussed management options for particular rangelands.

Program Outcomes

A post workshop evaluation was given asking respondents to estimate the degree of learning they experienced as well as whether they intended to employ any of the knowledge gained during the workshop. Overall, the 19 participants reported an average

48% increase in knowledge, and 100% said they would (or probably would) adopt one or more of the practices learned. Attendees represented 16,343 acres of land ownership in the area.

The Future

Based on the success of the initial workshop, we plan to continue the offering in future years, and to develop additional workshops that address the needs of the small acreage landowner to promote improved economic conditions in the county as well as better management of its landscape for ecological benefits.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

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