

 UI Extension Forestry Information Series

## Forest Grazing

*Thom Hawkins and Ron Mahoney*

Idaho's private woodlands usually contain varying topography and soils covered by a mix of plant communities, providing many opportunities that have evolved successful landowners into Jacks-of-many-trades.

Unfortunately, many landowners clear timberland or high-grade (take the best and leave the rest) timber stands in an effort to increase pasture. This reduces timber production and can be a disadvantage to livestock operations, according to research reported by Martin Vaura at Oregon State University.

Weight gains for livestock on forest pasture may exceed those of open grasslands because:

- Prolonged spring run-off provides more available moisture.
- Forage reaches maturity more slowly.
- Grasses are protected from sun and frost curing.
- Different types of forage provide a longer grazing season.

Forests also protect cattle from weather, according to Floyd Gephart, retired University of Idaho Benewah County Extension Agent. Cattle protected by wind-breaks gained 35 lbs. more than unprotected herds during a mild winter and lost 10.5 lbs. less during severe winters.

Another advantage to managing forests for both grazing and timber is the additional income from sustained timber and forage production. A carefully planned harvest schedule that leaves the best, well-spaced trees can provide rapid, sustainable forage and a profitable timber enterprise. You may need professional assistance to develop the best management plan for your specific situation and gain the benefits of successful woodland grazing.

Public assistance is available from the Idaho Department of Lands, the Cooperative Extension System and the Natural Resource Conservation Service. These agencies have people that can help you define your objectives and understand your opportunities and limitations, and provide help with planning. They will also give you information about various cost-share programs for thinning, seeding, and other practices. Private forest consultants offer complete forest management services, including planning, marketing, cruising, timber sale preparation and administration, and prescribed burning. Many local farmers and ranchers with tree farms can recommend assistance, and a directory of consultants is available from most natural resource agents.

Successful Idaho landowners are Jacks-of-many-trades, including ranching, farming, forestry, and wildlife management. Successful integration of timber and grazing management requires a lot of information and planning, but the result can be a more stable and profitable operation. A good place to start is with a basic management plan and a visit with a natural resource professional. For more information, contact your University of Idaho Cooperative Extension Office and ask for a copy of *Management Planning for Woodland Owners*, CIS #675. Contact the local office of the Idaho Department of Lands for on-the-ground advice.

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