

Range Management

How NRCS Can Help

NE Fact Sheet-11

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What Is It?

As an owner or manager of rangeland, NRCS conservationists can help you maintain and improve your complex resource. Rangeland is land on which the potential native vegetation is predominantly grasses, grasslike plants, forbs, or shrubs suitable for grazing or browsing by livestock or wildlife.

How?

The first step is for you and the conservationist to discuss and observe, on the land, some factors that affect range management. These include:

1. Identifying major plants that grow on your ranch.
2. Discussion how these plants produce food and how they respond to leaf removal by grazing or browsing.
3. Observing plants that are grazed and ungrazed to understand the relative palatability of each species.
4. Observing range sites (different kinds of rangeland) and the ability of each to support different kinds of plant communities.
5. Evaluating range condition on the ranch. Range condition is the comparison of the present plant community with the community that was on the site originally. This comparison is expressed as:

Excellent Condition – Rangeland that has 76 percent or more of the original plant species present.

Good Condition – Rangeland that has 51-75 percent of the original plant species present.

Fair Condition – Rangeland that has 26-50 percent of the original plant species present.

Poor Condition – Rangeland that has 25 percent or less of the original plant species present.

6. Determining range trend on the unit, which is an indication of whether range condition is improving or deteriorating. This can be determined by observing plant vigor, the abundance of seedlings or young plants, plant residue, composition changes, and condition of the soil surface.
7. Discussing the production potential of each range site in each kind of range condition.
8. Identifying major wildlife species that are on the ranch, then discussing habitat requirements, and determining the condition of existing habitat.

Range Inventory

After these factors have been observed and discussed, the conservationist can help inventory your rangeland resources, including:

1. Range sites, which can be recorded on an aerial photograph
2. Range condition by range sites
3. Range trend

4. Grazing patterns
5. Fences
6. Forage inventory and production potential of each pasture
7. Wildlife habitat
8. Location and amount of available water
9. Location of salting and feeding areas
10. Location of corrals
11. Other physical features and resources

Alternative Treatments

As the resource data is collected, range management problems and opportunities usually become obvious. When they have been identified, the conservationist can help you consider treatment alternatives in developing a range management plan to meet your objectives. These alternatives might include proper grazing use of key plants, short growing season deferments on some pastures, or a planned grazing system. Also, brush management, range seeding, cross fences, additional water development, better livestock distribution, and wildlife habitat improvement may be planned. You may want to consider recreation potential. All of these alternatives can be evaluated as to the cost effectiveness in meeting your goals.

Range Management Plan

As you develop your range management plan, conservationists can help you record your decisions which may include:

1. A plan map, or aerial photograph, showing permanent features, range sites, and condition classes.
2. A list and schedule of your planned treatments.
3. Information used in determining your range condition.
4. A forage inventory as well as an annual grazing plan to guide manipulation of livestock and vegetation.
5. Brush management overlays used in planning wildlife habitat improvement.

Follow-up

After you develop the plan and put it into action, the role of the conservationist is to assist you with needed follow-up that might include:

1. Technical information needed to apply conservation practices.
2. Continued evaluation to ensure success of applied practices.
3. Helping to keep you informed of new techniques in rangeland and wildlife management.
4. Helping you watch for needed changes in the range management plan as it is applied.

But YOU make all the decisions. The NRCS role is to help you understand your rangeland and to provide the needed technical assistance to help you carry out your decisions.

Where to

For more information on rangeland management, contact the local office of the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Natural Resources Conservation Service. NRCS personnel give technical assistance to

Get Help

landowners and operators through local natural resource districts.