

Invasive Weeds and Rangeland Health

Informative flier: no.1- Grazing Systems

All livestock grazing systems share two common traits:

- 1) rest periods allowing forage plants to re-grow
- 2) Scheduling to graze different areas of the range.

The goal of any livestock grazing system is:

- 1) allow range plants to set seed and reproduce
- 2) attain uniform utilization
- 3) restore, maintain, and/or improve plant vigor
- 4) prevent invasion by undesirable plant species
- 5) convert plant material to meat, wool, or other saleable product

Examples of various livestock grazing systems are:

- 1) Continuous grazing: Year-long (or season-long) grazing.
Advantage: Easy to manage. Minimal livestock handling required.
Disadvantage: livestock tend to overgraze the "ice-cream" plants creating rank grazing areas more prone to invasion.
- 2) Deferred-Rotation Grazing: Moving livestock between two or more range areas.
Advantage: allows plants to recover during the rest period(s).
Disadvantage: more livestock handling required than continuous systems. More fencing required.
- 3) Short duration grazing (aka rapid rotation or cell grazing). At the heart of this system is Holistic Management where decisions made are based upon a holistic goal extending beyond the realm of livestock production. Grazing times are short and a large number of paddocks are typically used. Rotation intervals are not rigid but based upon field observation and range condition.
Advantage: Holistic approach to rangeland and livestock productivity and sustainability.
Disadvantage: requires more livestock handling and more fencing.
- 4) Merrill System: Three herd/ four-pasture system. Each pasture is grazed continuously for one year and then given a four-month rest. Since the rest period rotates throughout the year it is important that this system be implemented only in areas where plant growth continues during the rest period. See continuous grazing above for more information.
- 5) Seasonal-Suitability: Range paddocks are created based on vegetation types. These areas are grazed based upon livestock requirements and plant phenology.
- 6) Best-Pasture: This system is a modification of the seasonal-suitability method proposed for use on semi-desert ranges of the Southwest.
- 7) Rest-rotation grazing: Developed by Gus Hormay, this system provides one pasture in the schedule with 12-months of rest while the remaining pastures are grazed. It is considered superior to continuous grazing and is well suited to mountainous areas or other areas where livestock distribution is a concern.
- 8) High-Intensity/ Low-Frequency grazing: Uses multiple pastures or paddocks where grazing periods are no longer than 2 weeks in duration followed by a rest period of 8 weeks or more. It was designed to eliminate rank plants by effectively forcing the livestock to use less palatable species.