

Natural Resources Policy

Name:

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An increasing population implies additional pressure on natural resources to ensure all people with necessary amenities and products. In order to feed people, the agricultural industry needs to increase the volumes of harvests and meat. The latter, in its turn, means increasing the number of livestock and subsequent overgrazing. Due to its geographical location, Colorado (especially, Rio Blanco County) is a favorable place for the development of the agriculture industry oriented on meat products. As a result, it has been a matter of high importance to introduce a specific policy related to livestock grazing interwoven with overall laws on keeping livestock in order to protect natural resources.

Before people learned the art of agricultural, herbivorous animals had a diet that did not pose a significant threat to Earth. In the process of time, livestock production in Rio Blanco County, for instance, has turned into a crucial component of the economy (“Land and natural resources...,” 2016). Apart from that, the concept of private and public lands has been firmly established, and a part of the public lands has also started to be used for livestock grazing. According to laws adopted in the twentieth century, the primary reason for setting boundaries for ranchers was based on the “need to halt the deterioration of range resources and the desire by many ranchers to have a reliable sole source of livestock forage” (Bartlett, 1987, 1). At the same time, public grazing had been confirmed as a traditional use of land; it only requires the reasonable management of natural resources in order to avoid the negative consequences of overgrazing.

The final versions of the land and natural resource plans and policies adopted by Rio Blanco County, and anticipated to cover 2017 and 2018, provides an opportunity to review policy on livestock grazing. At the beginning of the document, there is a notification that AUMs

(Animal Unit Month) are allocated accordingly to federal laws as well as the adopting of decisions related to wild animals so that livestock have more lands to graze (“Land and natural resources...,” 2016, 3). Nevertheless, Rio Blanco County has managed to provide a environmental-friendly grazing policy with benefits for animals, stockmen, and the land within the permits of federal laws. Stockmen should consider the requirements posed by the Bureau of Land Management to receive an allotment where livestock grazing could occur on public lands. Rio Blanco County possesses a low percentage of private lands; hence, the permission to use federal lands is critical for its economy (“Land and natural resources...,” 2016, 26). The overall policy consists of five articles that cover environment, monitoring, rangeland improvement projects, permits/AUMs, and the reduction in AUMs. Considering the benefits to animals and the environment, one of the prominent sections of the policy is drill-seeding as “one of the most effective methods of seeding” (“Land and natural resources...,” 2016, 28). It also includes removing temporary fences when they are worn out, and creating gazing programs in combination with adaptive management.

Monitoring as a part of the policy is focused on maintaining land suitable for grazing and the timely collection of information. Particular attention is paid to the separation of the species, including livestock and wild animals (“Land and natural resources...,” 2016, 30). The third part is aimed at encouraging the cooperation to understand when allotments are necessary and have a high-priority of need. Moreover, stockmen should install “wildlife-friendly range improvements” (“Land and natural resources...,” 2016, 30). Such a requirement is vital to maintain the healthy condition of the environment and not to threaten species of wild animals. An interesting part of the policy in the fourth section relates to grazing allotment when it is not for personal use. To maintain a good environmental condition, one should be ready that other permittees will use

grazing allotments; moreover, livestock can be used as a means of recovery in case there is a concern about resources (“Land and natural resources...,” 2016, 30). At the same time, permittees can be assured that, in case of unforeseen circumstances, they can receive vacant grazing allotments to continue their activities. The fifth part of the policy ensures that lands allocated to the grazing of domestic animals would not be reduced in favor of wild species in case if their numbers are over norms accepted by the AML (appropriate management levels) (“Land and natural resources...,” 2016, 31). However, the increasing number of specific livestock classes should be managed in appropriate time, but suspended lands would be returned when the natural threat (fire) to natural resources would be eliminated.

The livestock grazing policy in Rio Blanco County has been adopted to maintain the sound condition of natural resources without harm to stockmen and the local economy. At the same time, people should remember Colorado laws on agriculture and know about cases when the death of domestic animals could be punished. Moreover, it is crucial to comply with the fence law and be aware that the blame for the consequences of grazing on the road will not lie on a driver. For instance:

“In case any such livestock so running at large is killed or injured by any vehicle, the owner, driver, or person in charge of such vehicle shall not be liable therefor if the killing or injury is not malicious, willful, or wanton” (“Colorado Livestock Laws,” 2001, 35-46-105).

In this way, it is crucial to establish the notion that farmers should not bypass federal law in order to obtain additional privileges offered by the Rio Blanco County policy. However, overall, the program, with one of its statements to improve grazing lands, can positively change

the condition in which stockmen receive their allotments of “miles of nothingness” or prevent the deterioration of the soil, causing the appearance of unhealthy rangeland with “trampled or overgrazed stream banks” (Schick & Burns, 2016, para. 15;24). The livestock grazing policy program proposed by Rio Blanco County can be combined with the Endangered Species Act based on the information provided by a recent study conducted in 2017. Appropriate grazing management can stimulate the growth of plants that make up the diet of sage grouse, a species of bird that is near-threatened (Brown, 2017, para. 10). The Rio Blanco County livestock grazing policy does not include points related to grazing in a wilderness area. In his article, Mark Squillace (2014) writes about a positive impact on conditions of lands; among them are the prevention of forming desert soils and animal waste that can be used as fertilizer with proper management. It is what can be suggested as a possible revision to the policy to make it more effective and beneficial.

To conclude, the origin of the policy lies in the fact that grazing has been an integral part of herbivores, but people's growing needs require the increasing number of agricultural productions (including meat). Rio Blanco County has adopted a livestock grazing policy in compliance with federal laws to ensure effective stockmen activities without significant threat to the environment. Overall, all statements are appropriate, and include private and public lands. However, it would be better if the policy included points that concern grazing in a wilderness area to ensure the necessary management and conservation of certain species under or near threat, and the improvement of these lands concerning preventing the dangers of desert-like lands.

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