

2010 ADSA-PSA-AMPA-CSAS-ASAS Joint Annual Meeting

Small Ruminant Symposium

July 11, 2010

9:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m.

“Going, going, gone!” How curtailment of livestock grazing on federal lands could alter the U. S. Sheep Industry

Opening comments: How curtailment of livestock grazing on federal lands could alter the U. S. Sheep Industry

Author: J. B. Taylor* (USDA, Agricultural Research Service, Dubois, ID, USA)*

Abstract (5 min): This symposium will demonstrate how the potential curtailment of livestock grazing on federal lands will alter the U. S. sheep industry, and what policies, perceptions, and biases are being used to challenge the use of federal lands for agricultural production. Five speakers will demonstrate the influence of land management policies and other related legislation, judicial decisions, and nonlitigation activities on availability of federal lands for sheep grazing, and detail the potential economic impact on the U.S. sheep industry if livestock grazing is prohibited on federal lands in the future. The overall goal of the symposium is to challenge attendees to consider where to best place their information dissemination and research efforts in light of current policies, judicial decisions, and events that threaten the continued availability of federal lands for livestock production.

Keywords: public lands, sheep grazing, symposium

The follow sessions are focused on:

A Legal Perspective (2 speakers)

An Economic Perspective (2 speakers)

A Challenge to Scientists (1 speaker)

A LEGAL PERSPECTIVE:

Presentation 1 (30 min): The future of livestock grazing on federal lands: Opportunities for change

Author: J. Kaiser* (USDA, Forest Service, Washington, DC, USA)

Abstract: The regulatory, environmental, social, and judicial aspects of grazing livestock on federal lands are duplicative, complicated, and litigious. Environmental laws and policies are enacted with good intentions, but often take a short-term approach to save a species without consideration of longterm effects, which may result in the demise of that same species. The threat of disease transmission from domestic to wild species has alarmed the public and various land-management agencies. A consequential reaction to this threat has been to completely separate domestic and wild species. For example, management decisions were instituted that resulted in removal of domestic sheep from federal lands that wild sheep inhabit. Although seemingly prudent for the short-term, such action fails to address longterm management needs and simultaneously threatens the vitality of sheep enterprises dependent upon federal lands. Land management policies and resulting actions must be based on sound science and a "balance of harms" approach, which takes the longterm view. The challenge is to override perceptions and deliver credible information that forms sound policy and drives workable solutions. To successfully develop sound policies, one should consider relevant regulatory, environmental, social, and judicial aspects of federal-land grazing; understand "balance of harms" approach for managing federal lands; and be aware of perceptions that drive policy related to separation of domestic and wild species using the same federal lands. Ultimately, policy should enable management that sustains healthy federal lands that provide habitat for thriving and diverse populations of wildlife and forage for productive sheep enterprises.

Keywords: policy, public lands, sheep

Presentation 2 (30 min): The future of livestock grazing on federal lands: Real and perceived threats

Author: W. G. Myers* (Holland & Hart LLP, Boise, ID, USA)

Abstract: Various special interest groups want to nudge federal lands out of reach of livestock producers. In the 11 western Public Land States, federal lands that are administered by the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Forest Service and the Department of Interior, Bureau of Land Management are an important and sustainable source of forage for many sheep enterprises. Preservation, conservation, and antiagriculture groups that are opposed to the use of federal lands for agricultural purposes have initiated species- and process-based litigation and other tactics to advocate removal of sheep grazing from public lands. For example, litigation that relates to Federal Land Policy and Management Act, Endangered Species Act, National Environmental Policy Act, and National Forest Management Act has been initiated to limit or restrict grazing access to federal lands. Furthermore, a variety of other tactics have been employed that result in unbearable fiscal, management, or labor burdens for sheep owners using federal lands. These antigrazing actions have resulted in closure of some federal lands to sheep grazing and(or) producers forfeiting grazing leases. Ultimately, closure of federal lands to sheep grazing may set precedents for removal of all livestock grazing, including beef cattle, on federal lands.

Keywords: grazing, litigation, public lands

AN ECONOMIC PERSPECTIVE:

Presentation 3 (30 min): Economic considerations of sheep grazing on federal and public lands

Authors: N. R. Rimbey* (University of Idaho, Caldwell, ID, USA), L. A. Torell (New Mexico State University, Las Cruces, NM, USA)

Abstract: Dependency of the western livestock industry on federal lands varies widely. Federal lands administered by the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Forest Service and the Department of Interior, Bureau of Land Management contribute significant portions of the annual forage base for sheep and cattle in the western United States. These lands also provide critical habitat for wildlife and recreational opportunities to the public. Conflicts over the use and management of federal lands have greatly influenced development of grazing regulations and policies, which significantly impact the availability of federal lands for grazing. Relatively low grazing fee levels contribute to the image that federal-land grazing is heavily subsidized. These real and perceived subsidies have led to the development of asset values of federal grazing permits and of livestock enterprises that hold these permits. Therefore, administration of grazing regulations and policies that affect the availability of federal grazing permits directly influence the overall worth and viability of many western sheep enterprises. The focus of this presentation will be to discuss historic legal and regulatory basis for managing federal land grazing resources, methods for estimating grazing-use dependency, how the federal grazing fee formula is derived from federal and private grazing costs, the role that grazing permit value plays in the grazing fee debate, and policy-based alternatives related to the future of federal land grazing management.

Keywords: grazing permit, public lands, sheep

Presentation 4 (30 min): Impact of reduced federal and public land grazing on viability of the U.S. sheep industry

Author: D. P. Anderson* (Texas A&M University, College Station, TX, USA)

Abstract: The sustained viability of the U.S. sheep industry is linked to grazing on federal lands. As of January 1, 2010, the 11 western Public Land States contained 46 percent of the U.S. mature ewe flock. Many of those sheep spend some portion of their lives on federal lands, which are mainly administered by the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Forest Service and the Department of Interior, Bureau of Land Management. Loss of access to federal lands for grazing purposes would have a negative impact that is beyond the sheep enterprises that are dependent upon these lands. For example, factors that further aggravate the longterm decline in U.S. lamb inventory could be enough to reduce the U.S. sheep industry to levels below a critical mass for industry infrastructure, e.g., meat packers and wool warehouses, to survive. In addition to lambs from the western Public Lands States, many meat packers also process a significant number of lambs and goats from non-public land states (e.g., Texas, the largest sheep producing state) to maintain a critical volume that is essential to keeping the plant operational. This presentation examines the economic impact of the loss of federal land grazing on the U.S. sheep industry. Components of the U.S. sheep industry that will be discussed are regional flock inventory in the U.S., lamb packing capacity, seasonal lamb production affecting packing capacity, regional wool production and quality effects, regional lamb prices, and import levels.

Keywords: economic viability, public land, sheep industry

A CHALLENGE TO SCIENTISTS

Presentation 5 (20 min): So what? What is a scientist supposed to do?

Authors: G. S. Lewis*, C. A. Moffet, and J. B. Taylor (USDA, ARS, U.S. Sheep Experiment Station, Dubois, ID, USA)

Abstract: Scientists can do what they do best: research and publish. But, if that is where it starts and ends, the publications are not likely to be focused on issues that matter to Federal regulatory processes. Scientists interested in conducting research pertinent to laws and regulations governing livestock grazing on public lands should 1) understand applicable laws and regulations; 2) work with stakeholders, including livestock producers, public land-management agencies, groups who oppose livestock grazing, and experts in the process of complying with the various laws and regulations, to identify critical research needs; 3) convert critical needs into focused research; 4) conduct statistically valid research to provide unbiased tests of null hypotheses and robust data; and 5) publish timely articles in well-known peer-reviewed journals that are organs of highly respected scientific organizations. In their publications, scientists should discuss and cite the “best available” published data that bear on the topic of their research. They should also describe the shortcomings of poorly designed research that appears in recognized scientific journals, and of bad science, phony science, and pseudoscience that appears in gray literature aimed at supporting a cause. Unfortunately, some Federal judges and key decision makers in land-management agencies may not be able to distinguish between outstanding “real” science and bad science, phony science, or pseudoscience. In some cases, there is a dearth of “real” science, and land-management decisions are not science based. Thus, scientists should develop close working relationships with public land managers and become trusted scientific advisors. However, scientists must understand that aesthetic, historical, and recreational considerations, rather than sound science, may dominate public land management decisions and policies. Nevertheless, scientists must remain committed to the process and to the idea that sound science will eventually lead to policies that permit the continuation of appropriate livestock grazing on public lands.

Keywords: livestock grazing, public lands, research