

Outcome-based Grazing Program

The Bureau of Land Management implements an initiative known as Outcome-based Grazing Authorizations. It is designed to offer a more collaborative approach between the BLM and its partners within the livestock grazing community when issuing grazing authorizations. The following is part of a series highlighting ranches in this pilot program.



Elk Creek Ranch

Lewistown, Montana

Q & A with Chris King, Ranch Owner and Manager

How would you describe this ranch to someone who has never been there?

Our ranch is almost all native prairie except for the hay land. It's your typical northern plains landscape with a lot of sagebrush and rolling hills. Overall, the ranch is a little over 20,000 acres. About one third of that is either BLM or state lease, and the remaining is private. We run about 650 mother cows, plus some bulls and yearlings, but it is mainly a cow-calf operation.

What is the philosophy that guides this ranch?

The word everybody uses these days is sustainability. We're trying to operate the ranch in such a way that the next generation of ranchers will be able to take it over. It's been in the family for several generations. The next generation is here now, and we want that to continue. We want to manage it so that we know the range will be in good quality in order for the operation to continue.

Why did this ranch enroll in the outcome-based grazing program?

I was interested in the program because we had already wanted to make some minor tweaks and changes to our current grazing management plan. This is difficult when you have a lease agreement signed with the BLM and it says that this is the way that we're going to do our rotation. If you want to make changes, then you need to go in and sit down to work out some new agreement. This is alright, but my son and I go to a lot of grazing seminars and are always reading new things, so we're always learning while trying to tweak and improve things. The Outcome-Based Grazing Program should make it easier for us to make these minor adjustments. As we go on and see results with what changes we make, we can adjust accordingly. We thought this program might work well for us to be able to make better management decisions and improve things all the time.

Why is some flexibility important in a grazing permit?

For a number of reasons. The weather is never the same from one year to the next. You don't always end up with the exact same number of cows that you plan on having and then there is always new information. There are always studies coming out about better ways of doing things. Maybe you have issues with fire, weeds or even some wildlife considerations. We have a third-party group doing our monitoring so that the results are not biased. The monitoring also helps us to make management decisions. The resources are protected through the monitoring. If things are not going in the right direction, we're going to know, and the BLM is going to know. This enables us to make the adjustments we need to better the land.

Why should someone who isn't involved in agriculture care about how public lands are managed?

Everybody should care if its public land. We would like to think that it's being cared for responsibly. If the range is good for cattle, it should be good for wildlife at the same time. I think that a lot of people have an interest in what is going on with public lands, because it does affect a lot of people. How public lands are managed have an impact on the community's tax dollars, economy, and safety.



Partnering to Conserve Sagebrush Rangelands is a collaborative effort between the BLM and Intermountain West Joint Venture. Our purpose to catalyze proactive, voluntary, and community-led sagebrush rangeland conservation – expanding success across private and public lands. This collaboration is supporting the Outcome-Based Grazing Authorizations efforts. Learn more at www.PartnersInTheSage.com.