

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.



Roaring Springs Ranch

Frenchglen, Oregon

Q & A with Andrew Shields, Ranch Wildlife Biologist

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

Roaring Springs Ranch is a cow calf operation in the high desert of southeast Oregon. The ranch consists of over a million acres of deeded land and BLM grazing allotments and ranges from 4500' up to 8000' in elevation. Geographic features encompassed by the ranch include the south end of the Steens Mountain, the Catlow Valley, and Beaty Butte, among others. The diverse landscape hosts a variety of vegetation types and facilitates cattle staying on the ranch year round. The landscape also supports many wildlife species including sage-grouse, redband trout, mule deer, elk, and bighorn sheep.

What is the philosophy that guides this ranch?

The ranch strives to conserve our natural resources and maintain healthy landscapes and wildlife populations while generating an economic return from the renewable resources in this area. Management of the ranch is driven by economic, ecological, and social sustainability. The ranch partners with agency, NGO, and other organizations to develop solutions and continue moving towards our goals.

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

We've been a huge proponent of and seen the benefits of flexibility in management. Our local district BLM office has been great to work with, and we have had a really good relationship with them. This has let us have quite a bit of flexibility. We really see this as a chance to show the benefits of and get some publicity for flexible grazing. Every rancher I know would love to have the opportunity to have more flexibility in their management. Hopefully, this program will be able to expand, and we're excited about that. We're excited to highlight some of the things that we are able to accomplish with flexible management and get the good word out showing that it has been beneficial and is good for the land.

Why is some flexibility important in a grazing permit?

It is extremely important just because of the variability of the weather in short-term climate. There is year-to-year variability in weather, precipitation, and fire risks. A few years ago, the BLM was able to give us some flexibility to graze an area that had really high cheatgrass growth. That year, Oregon and Nevada experienced some of their biggest fires that burned to the north and south of us due to the high cheatgrass fuel loads. Because the BLM was able to work with us, we got through the summer without having any fires, despite having an abundance of lightning. The reverse is true, too. On dry years, we need to be able to scale back and turn out the cows less and for less time in order to conserve the land.

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

Public lands belong to us all. They are obviously managed under the multiple use mandate. As with other uses, the programs that are in place by the different management agencies help to ensure that the uses aren't exclusive to one another and don't have significant negative impacts to other uses and people. Grazing is one of those uses, and it is a way that we can turn sunlight and grass into a resource to feed people while generating income for the local economy. Someone that isn't involved in agriculture may not realize that there are multiple uses of public lands, including recreational and agricultural, that are highly valued.



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.