JUNE 2012

Montana GLCI

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DEAN WANG, VICE-CHAIRMAN, MONTANA GLCI REPRESENTING THE MONTANA STOCK GROWERS ASSOCIATION

The dog, Spot, and I walk in the mornings. The phone doesn't get to come along. The old adage of 'only caring for and not owning the land' is never more apparent than early on a spring morning. I am the fourth generation of our family to be entrusted with caring for the land in eastern Montana. I am also a loan officer by trade. While the dog and I walk, and the June newsletter deadline quickly approaching, numerous similarities have come to mind.

A bank does not own the money. It is merely a caretaker of the money that the public has entrusted to the Bank's care. We are charged with a similar responsibility for the land. We may "own" the land for several generations, but are really just blessed to be caretakers in the end.

Our family, with an outstanding crew, farm and ranch, with the core operation consisting of cow/calf and bred heifer enterprises. We utilize crested wheatgrass pastures extensively in the spring, providing aggressive early grazing while allowing the native range to reach a full head of steam prior to turn out. The vast majority of our grazing land is filled with native species.

To enhance that use, in 1990 we began reseeding, cross fencing, and installing water lines. We have also used chemical control on approximately 1200 acres of club moss infestations. The resulting increase in the Western Wheatgrass production was astounding. We rotate pastures on a year-to-year and time of the year basis. The record

precipitation during the 2010 and 2011 growing seasons made many grazing plans look perfect. We're off to a good start in 2012 as well. We're fortunate that our noxious weed infestations remain manageable. We vigilantly ride herd over a small population of knapweed and leafy spurge, controlling it with chemical applications. We also annually spray Canada thistle, as needed. Native grasslands are one of our State's greatest renewable resources. Borrowing a line from the camping motto, "We intend to leave it better than we found it."

I proudly serve as the committee representative for the Montana Stockgrowers Association. We are looking forward to our mid-year meeting in Great Falls on June 8th and 9th. **DEAN**

36th ANNUAL MONTANA RANGE DAYS
Pack up the kids and head to Deer Lodge, Montana for the 36th Annual Montana Range Days, the largest range education event in the state will be held June 18-20 at St. Mary's Center in Deer Lodge. This event welcomes all ages! For more information contact Susie Johnson, Deer Lodge Valley Conservation District at (406) 846-1703 ext. 4

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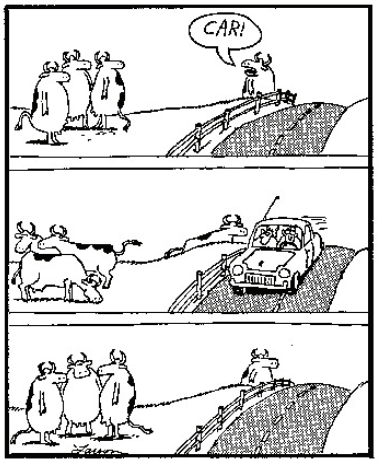

Forage Management Decisions – Take Action Early

Rachel Endecott, MSU Extension Beef Cattle Specialist
Miles City, MT

The current stretch of below-average precipitation is causing some drought concern for many agriculture producers. Even during drought, livestock and crop producers tend to be eternal optimists about the weather. After all, "it might rain tomorrow!"

Should the lack of moisture continue, it's important to act early to evaluate forage availability and implement forage management strategies. The majority of native pastures in the Northern Great Plains are dominated by cool-season grasses, which would grow early during a growing season that stretches from April through September in most areas. Fort Keogh Livestock and Range Research Laboratory range scientists Rod Heitschmidt and Lance Vermeire summarized 11 years of data from Fort Keogh (20th International Grasslands Congress, 2005) and found that an estimated 35%, 69%, and 91% of annual net primary production of perennial grasses occurred by May 1st, June 1st and July 1st, respectively. At the very least, two-thirds of annual perennial grass production would be completed by July 1st in 19 out of 20 years. This information implies that grazing managers can evaluate forage production in early July to estimate proper end-of-growing-season stocking rates with a relatively high level of confidence.

Spring precipitation is important for cool-season forage production, but in the case of a spring drought, what is the likelihood of receiving appreciable amounts of rain in July and August? Vermeire and Heitschmidt also evaluated long-term probabilities of receiving precipitation after July 1st (see http://www.hprcc.unl.edu/wrcc/states/mt.html). For example, the probability of receiving 1 inch of rain in July and August in Miles City, MT is 59% and 42%, respectively. Furthermore, the probability of receiving 2 inches of rain in July and August is 22% and 17%, respectively. This website has many weather sites throughout Montana and other states in a range of environments.

If a forage shortage due to drought is expected, it is imperative to take action early. Some options to reduce forage demand include selling cows, leasing additional pasture, feeding additional energy to reduce forage consumption, or weaning calves early. Selective culling of the cow herd, particularly of less productive cows, might be a good way to start decreasing forage demand. As drought progresses, supplemental feeds will increase in cost, thus leasing additional pasture might be an attractive option if it is available in the area. Supplementing cows daily with a high energy feed (i.e., ~5 lb grain) can cause a substitution effect where less forage will be consumed. Lactating cows experience dramatically increased nutrient requirements compared to dry cows. Early weaning not only decreases the forage intake of the cow, but also removes forage demand the calf had been placing on the pasture. A rule of thumb that may be useful is that for every day calves are early weaned compared to normal, ~0.6 grazing days worth of forage are saved (1300 lb cow, 600 lb calf when weaned at 7 months of age). In addition to the benefit of decreased forage demand, early weaning may have positive reproductive and cow body condition responses as well.

Cool-season perennial grasses are a major component of native range forage throughout the Northern Great Plains and Intermountain West. Assessing forage production and quality early could allow for forage management decision-making before it's too late to manage ecological and economic risk.

Montana Partner organizations seeking input into field office of the future

The Montana Conservation Partnership, comprised of the Montana Association of Conservation Districts (MACD), the Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation (DNRC) and the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Services (NRCS), is seeking your input on what the Field Office of the Future should look like. Every state and territory in our nation has been asked to take a look at the current structure and think about how we can best meet the needs of our customers, improve our efficiencies, and adapt to changing federal budgets. As part of this task, input and feedback from our customers, partners, employees, and the public is needed for the preparation of a statewide plan due in Washington on September 1, 2012.

The purpose of this message is to ask you for that input and feedback. It is important that we hear from you, your Supervisors, and your producers.. We ask that you forward this message to Supervisors who have email, and mail a hard copy of this email and the attached survey to other Supervisors. Do the same to your producers. We have prepared an online survey

We are asking you to complete by Friday, June 22nd, 2012. If you prefer to provide written comments, a hardcopy of the survey is attached. Please mail the completed written survey to:

Montana Association of Conservation Districts, 790 Colleen Street, Helena, Montana 59601 so that it is postmarked by Friday, June 22nd, 2012.

Your answers to the survey are confidential and will not be attributed to any person or organization. MACD is managing the survey.

To get you thinking about the Field Office of the Future, we are providing information about technology changes that are already underway at NRCS, called the Conservation Delivery Streamlining Initiative. The initiative will simplify conservation delivery, streamline business processes and ensure science-based assistance. A key measure of its success will be an increase in the amount of time technical field staff spend providing direct conservation assistance to farmers and ranchers. You can view a You Tube video from leaders of the Montana Conservation Partnership about these technology changes, read the attached Conservation Delivery Streamline Initiative factsheet, or find more in-depth information on the Conservation Delivery Streamlining Initiative.

If you have questions let me know. Thank you for your participation in this effort.