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Impact of the 2023 Central Utah Grazing Expo

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Abstract

A collaboration between Extension Agriculture and Natural Resource specialists and county faculty responded to a need to educate public land grazing permit holders, public land management agency personnel, and public members on regulations, management, economics, and social values associated with public land grazing permits.

Introduction & Problem Statement

According to the National Agricultural Statistics Service's (NASS) Utah Agricultural Statistics (2023), there were 318,000 head of beef cows in the State of Utah in 2023. Most of those beef cows grazed Utah's rangelands during the summer months, and many grazed rangelands all year. The total acreage of the State of Utah is 52,696,960 acres, and of these acres, 33,267,621 acres (63.1%) are owned by the federal government (Congressional Research Service, 2020). Much of the federally owned property in Utah is rangeland and has been grazed by beef cattle since the late 1800s.

The Taylor Grazing Act of 1934 created a permitting system to regulate grazing on federally owned lands. As interest in using federal lands has evolved, differing ideologies have competed for the resources available on federal lands. This competition for public resources has resulted in increased regulations associated with public land grazing permits. As grazing permits have become more complex, incorrect information has contributed to misunderstandings and conflicts between public land management agencies, grazing permittees, and the general public.

Response & Target Audience

The Central Utah Grazing Expo (Expo) was created to educate ranchers, agency personnel, and the public to increase knowledge of grazing permit regulations, livestock management, and the cultural and economic impacts of public land grazing in the central Utah area. The Expo followed a three-day format, and the first day consisted of presentations, which were also offered again on the second day at a different location within the central Utah area. The third day has been an in-the-field tour of grazing allotments in central Utah. Presenters have included experts from universities, land management agencies, and livestock producers. Topics have included science-based data and regulatory information, and livestock producers have provided their perspectives on how science and regulation affect their operations.

Figure 1
Participants of the 2023 Central Utah Grazing Expo



The 2023 Central Utah Grazing Expo was held October 17th through the 19th, with the first day of presentations in Richfield and the second day in Bicknell. The field tour was held on the Robbers Roost Allotment in eastern Wayne County and included the historic Ekker Ranch homestead located within the allotment.

Figure 2
Rancher explaining the dynamics of the Robbers Roost Allotment and Ekker Ranch



Outcomes & Impacts

Over the three days, 129 individuals attended the Expo. Data were gathered from participants of the Expo using a retrospective pre-post evaluation survey utilizing a five-point Likert-type scale (1 = No understanding, 2 = Little understanding, 3 = Moderate understanding, 4 = Quite a bit of understanding, 5 = Almost complete understanding). Participants indicated an increased understanding of the topic across 82% of the individual presentation evaluations. The average increases in participant understanding of individual topics, as measured by point rating, are from 0.79 to 1.73, with an overall mean knowledge increase of 1.30.

Table 1
Mean Point Rating Increase of Participant Understanding by Session

| Session | Net Increase in Knowledge |
|---|---------------------------|
| Rangeland Insurance | 1.18 |
| Sheep Nutrition and Flushing Strategies | 1.32 |
| Utah Public Land Policy Coordinating Office Updates | 1.41 |
| Natural Resource Conservation Service Funding | 1.19 |
| Poisonous Plant App | 1.73 |
| Meadow Restoration Techniques | 1.51 |
| Electric Fencing Demonstration | 1.07 |
| Virtual Fencing in Nevada | 1.50 |
| Multi-Agency Parker Mountain Fence Project | 1.63 |
| Flood Irrigation Efficiency | 0.79 |
| Range Improvement in Wayne and Sevier Counties | 1.53 |

Note. Point rating increase refers to participants' net improvement on a scale of 1 to 5.

Although there was an increase in the mean point rating of participant understanding in all sessions, new technologies and on-the-ground range improvement topics had the highest

increases. A new poisonous plant app from the United States Department of Agriculture’s Agricultural Research Service Poisonous Plant Research Lab topped the list by providing producers with poisonous plant identification and information on their cell phones in the field. In contrast, a major multi-agency fencing project along Highway 24 in Wayne County allowed livestock producers to utilize additional range by significantly reducing the potential for livestock and automobile collisions, producing the second-highest rating. A presentation by the Utah Department of Wildlife Resources on how collaboratively funded range improvement projects positively impact range conditions and by Utah State University Extension’s Range Specialist, Eric Thacker, on meadow restoration techniques also rated well above the mean. A presentation by the University of Nevada’s Extension Range Specialist, Paul Meiman, on the effectiveness of virtual fencing received a similar rating. Attendees were asked whether they agreed with the following statements:

Table 2
Participant Change

| Question | Yes (%) | No (%) |
|--|---------|--------|
| This workshop improved my awareness of the topics covered? | 100 | 0 |
| This workshop provided new knowledge? | 97 | 3 |
| This workshop provided new skills? | 97 | 3 |
| This workshop modified my opinions and/or attitudes? | 82 | 18 |
| This workshop will improve the advice I give others? | 100 | 0 |

Public Value and Next Steps

The value of increased knowledge is best understood by reflecting upon the misunderstandings and conflicts resulting from incorrect information in the past. Ideologies surrounding public land use are complex and prone to conflict, and misinformation exacerbates the problem. Dispelling incorrect assumptions and correcting misinformation reduces conflict by allowing discussions to focus solely on factual information and avoiding conflict based on erroneous information. This is critical with highly complex issues like public lands, where it can be difficult to reconcile even with factually-based information, and inserting non-factual information often dooms discussions to failure.

The Central Utah Grazing Expo will be held annually, with one presentation day consistently being held in Richfield in October and another at different locations throughout the central Utah area. The field tour will also rotate to different locations throughout central Utah to provide a diverse representation of issues.

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