Livestock Grazing and Wilderness: A Survey of User Attitudes

E. Bruce Godfrey
Utah State University

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.usu.edu/eri

Recommended Citation
https://digitalcommons.usu.edu/eri/399
LIVESTOCK GRAZING AND WILDERNESS:
A SURVEY OF USER ATTITUDES

By

E. Bruce Godfrey
LIVESTOCK GRAZING AND WILDERNESS: A SURVEY OF USER ATTITUDES

by

E. Bruce Godfrey

A Report Submitted to the Utah Farm Bureau

September 1983
LIVESTOCK GRAZING AND WILDERNESS: A SURVEY OF USER ATTITUDES

The use of America's western rangelands has changed dramatically over time. For example, when early trappers and pioneers entered this area they were used primarily by American natives. Later they were used almost exclusively as a source of feed for domestic livestock. Some land where sufficient water was available was converted to other forms of agricultural production. Since the early 1940's, however, many of these lands have become sites that are used extensively for recreational activities (e.g. hunting, fishing, site seeing).

Several authors (e.g. Godfrey 1982) have shown that the use of lands administered by the Forest Service (FS) and Bureau of Land Management (BLM)--the two primary agencies that administer federally owned lands in America--has not been uniform over time. For example, the use of these lands for commercial purposes (grazing, timber, mining) has generally declined over time while recreational use has increased dramatically during the last two decades. Most of these changes are the result of an increasingly affluent population, but they have caused some management problems.

In an effort to eliminate uses that were viewed as being undesirable, preservationists campaigned heavily for a wilderness preservation system. As a result, the Wilderness Act of 1964 was passed which provided a means whereby some uses of these areas were legislatively eliminated. In addition, it provided a means whereby areas could be added to the system over time. For example, 30,088 acres, in Utah, that are administered by the Forest Service have been designated as wilderness areas. In addition, 77,593 acres have been proposed by the Forest Service to be added to the...
wilderness system while 141,886 acres are also being studied for possible inclusion in the system in Utah. Similarly, the BLM has designated 2.6 million acres as study areas that may also be designated wilderness areas. If all of these lands were designated as wilderness areas, numerous livestock operators in Utah and the availability of approximately 275 thousand AUM's of use could be affected (unpublished agency reports). As a result, livestockmen in Utah have expressed fear that the use of these areas may be in jeopardy.

RESULTS

In and effort to obtain some information concerning user attitudes and perceptions of use in wilderness areas, a survey was sent (see Appendix A) to all operators having permits to graze Forest Service or BLM lands in Utah during the fall of 1982. Another questionnaire (see Appendix B) was also sent to livestock operations who had permits to graze in designated wilderness in Region 4 of the Forest Service during the spring of 1983—no livestock grazing exists in the only designated wilderness area (Lone Peak) in Utah.

The two questionnaires noted above were designed to obtain different sets of information. The first was designed to obtain information on what livestock permittees thought would happen if lands they were permitted to graze were designated as a wilderness area. As such these data represent before the fact, ex ante or expected impacts. The second questionnaire was sent to those who were using a wilderness area. These responses, therefore, reflect what has happened (ex post) or historic impacts.
Utah Study

Approximately 2400 questionnaires were sent to livestock producers who had permits to graze BLM or FS lands in Utah during 1981-82. A fairly large, but unknown, number of these permittees own permits on more than BLM district and/or forest. As a result, a portion of these operators received more than one questionnaire--no data is available that can be used to identify the number of separate individuals or firms who own grazing permits. Approximately one fourth of the questionnaires sent were returned--this probably represents more than 1/3 of the permittees as a result of the duplication noted above.¹ This represents a fairly typical response rate to mailed questionnaires. It is not known how biased the sample may be, but some indication is suggested in the following data.

Respondent Characteristics

Some indication of the relative response can be obtained by comparing the permitted AUM's of use on public lands versus the AUM's of those responding to the questionnaire. Table 1 shows the number of AUM's of use that were permitted on BLM, Forest Service, and State lands during 1980. The amount of use by those responding to the questionnaire was estimated in the following way. The number of cows grazed by each respondent was multiplied by 12 (number of AUM's required per cow). This result was then multiplied by the percentage of forage reported by each operator obtained from each of the particular forage sources (see question 2 on the questionnaire, Appendix A). These amounts were then summarized for the state. It should be noted that this procedure under estimates the amount

¹Some individuals returned more than one completed questionnaire. Whenever duplicate responses from an operator could be identified, only one of the questionnaires was tabulated and used in the study.
of forage obtained because it does not include forage removed by bulls, replacement stock, horses, etc. The resultant AUM's (above) was, therefore, multiplied by 1.2 to reflect a cow to bull ratio of 20:1 and a 20% replacement rate. The AUM's for sheep were similarly estimated by multiplying the number of ewes by 2.4 (2.4 AUM's per ewe per year) and the result by 1.25 (a 30% replacement rate for ewes was assumed). Given the above estimates, the results suggest that a greater percentage of respondents use BLM as opposed to Forest Service lands. A further indication of this response is shown in table 2. These data indicate that a relatively small portion of the operators (less than 20%) who own livestock responded. This does suggest, however, that a relatively large portion of the range livestock operators did respond. These data also show that the response rate was significantly greater from those areas where wilderness issues have been or are controversial--e.g., Wayne, Garfield, Kane, Summitt, Cache (sheep), and Uintah Counties. Operators in these counties commonly use lands that are near either the Uintah Mountains or Canyonlands/Capitol Reef National Recreation Area(s). This suggests that concern over the designation of wilderness areas is likely to be more important regionally than it is at the state level when viewed from a livestock producers perspective. It also suggests that the use of specific areas (e.g., Mt. Naomi in Cache County, winter grazing lands near Lake Powell) may be particularly important to some operators. Therefore, the evaluation of specific sites as potential wilderness areas will need to consider local as well as national issues.

\[\text{---}\]

\[\text{2 The percentage for sheep and lambs understate the percent response.}\]
The use of public lands is often critical to range livestockmen in Utah. This is partially illustrated in figures 1-4. These data indicate

Figure 1. Percentage of feed obtained from various land ownerships in Utah by responding Utah operators.

Figure 2. Percentage of cattle obtained from various land ownerships by responding operators in Utah.

Figure 3. Percentage of sheep obtained from various land ownerships by responding operators in Utah.

Figure 4. Percentage of feed obtained from various land ownerships by all responding livestock operators in Utah.
that forage from privately owned lands represents the largest source of feed. However, more than one-half of the feed used to produce the livestock owned by respondents comes from public lands. Therefore, use of these lands are important to these operators. As a result, opinions of how management will affect these operators needs to be considered before changes in the use of Federally administered lands are implemented.

**User Opinions of Wilderness Use**

The designation of wilderness areas is apparently misunderstood by many livestock producers. For example, about 10 percent of the users indicated that they currently had permits to graze in designated wilderness areas, and 33 percent did not know if they used a wilderness area or not. Of those who responded positively to this question, none had permits in officially designated wilderness areas. However, a large portion of these operators probably had permits in areas that had been designated as either wilderness study areas (WSA) by BLM or proposed wilderness areas by the Forest Service. This suggests either that some education of users is needed and/or that these areas are being managed as if they had been designated as wilderness areas.

**Use of Wilderness Areas**

The designation of an area as wilderness suggests that this use will have priority whenever conflicts occur. As a result, most of the ranchers surveyed believe that designation of a wilderness area will negatively affect livestock grazing - 60 percent believe use will decline and 26 percent believe that livestock use in these areas will be eliminated--see figure 5.
Figure 5. Percent of respondents who believe use of wilderness areas by domestic livestock will change.

The Wilderness Act clearly states that livestock grazing "... shall be permitted to continue [in wilderness areas] subject to reasonable regulations. ..." However, it is not clear whether these "regulations" are "reasonable." One regulation is outlined in the Act—i.e., the use of "motorized equipment" will generally not be permitted in these areas. The Act is equally clear in stating a policy that a "natural" environment will be maintained. As a result, many management practices (e.g., seedings, some water developments) will probably not be allowed in these areas. Many of the ranchers surveyed (figure 6) believe that range improvements will increase in wilderness areas. It should be noted, however, that a nearly

Figure 6. Percent of respondents who believe the establishment of range improvements in wilderness areas will change.
equal percentage believe that range improvements in designated wilderness will decrease, and almost as many believe that they will be eliminated. This suggests that considerable uncertainty exists among ranchers concerning this issue. One of the reasons why this uncertainty probably exists stems from the fact that federal administrators are generally not unified concerning what range improvements (e.g., burning, spring developments) will be allowed.

One other reason why use of wilderness areas will probably not remain static is illustrated in figure 7. These data clearly show that most users expect conflicts with other uses/users to increase if an area is designated as a wilderness area. If conflicts increase, it is likely that livestock grazing would be reduced in an effort to benefit uses that are generally viewed as being more compatible with wilderness areas than is grazing by domestic livestock.

While the above may be important and reflect a general belief that use of wilderness areas by domestic livestock will decline, this does not represent the only reason for possible reductions. The above generally represent management decisions that can be changed, to some degree. However, voluntary reductions may occur if the costs of using these areas become too costly.
User Costs and Wilderness Areas

The data in figure 8 clearly show that most range livestock operators believe that the costs of using wilderness areas will increase. These costs are in addition to the grazing fees paid by livestock operators. It should be noted that the operators surveyed do not believe that all of these costs will be affected equally. For example, most believe that:

1) More animals will be lost if an area is designated as a wilderness area than if it is not (figure 9).

2) The cost of feeding or salting in a wilderness area will increase (figure 10).

3) Herding costs will increase (figure 11).

4) Costs of travel, including moving livestock, will increase (figures 12 and 13).

Figure 8. Percent of respondents who believe the costs of grazing livestock in wilderness areas will change.

Figure 9. Percent of respondents who believe the number of livestock lost in wilderness areas will change.
Figure 10. Percent of respondents who believe the costs of feeding or salting livestock in wilderness areas will change.

Figure 11. Percent of respondents who believe the costs of traveling to and from wilderness areas where livestock are grazed will change.

Figure 12. Percent of respondents who believe the costs of moving livestock to and from wilderness areas will change.

Figure 13. Percent of respondents who believe the costs of moving livestock to and from wilderness areas will change.
All of the above costs are interrelated and are some function of the means of travel available. Many of these operators will probably no longer be able to use ORV's to monitor cattle, salt, maintain facilities, nor will they be able to truck animals to the degree they have in the past. As a result, it is likely that animals will not be cared for as easily or intensively. This is particularly true for cattle operators, because they do not typically provide herders as do sheepmen. This is also generally reflected in the responses recieved, because a slightly greater percentage of the cattlemen believed the cost trends noted above would occur than did sheep operators. As a result, the use of some wilderness areas may not be used if these non-fee costs of using public lands increase too far.

The above generally reflects an uncertain belief concerning the future of livestock grazing in wilderness areas. These beliefs may not, however, be a good indicator of what will happen.

**Current Users/Region 4**

There is essentially no published data on the historic impact on livestock use from an area in a designated wilderness. In an effort to provide some information, Forest Service officials were asked to provide a list of those livestock operators who had permits to graze wilderness areas in Regions 1 and 4 of the Forest Service--operators were identified and mailed a questionnaire--see Appendix B. Nine questionnaires, a response percent rate, were returned including one operator who did not use a wilderness area. Every response, where the area was specified, was for the Absoroka-Beartooth Wilderness Area in Montata which borders Yellowstone Park. Most of the responses were very general, but they did provide some useful insights.
Unlike the beliefs expressed above, most of these operators indicated that the cost of using the wilderness area had stayed the same. However, it should be noted that several of the operators in a narrative indicated that not being able to use ORV's and chain saws had made use of the area more difficult. Others also indicated that they also spent more time cleaning campsites and keeping the area "natural." There was also some belief that predator problems and the need for expanded habitat for bears would result in more conflicts.

In general, the responses received suggest that the conflicts and costs of using this particular wilderness area had not increased as much as may have been expected. These operators also tended to be very optimistic concerning future use of the wilderness area(s) they currently use--costs were generally expected to increase, but 5 of the 8 also expected use of the area by livestock to also increase.

Summary and Conclusions

The use and designation of wilderness areas has been an area of concern by livestock producers since passage of the Wilderness Act of 1964. However, most wilderness related problems were not large because use of most designated wilderness areas by domestic livestock in the past has been small or non-existent. Current efforts to designate additional areas as wilderness have caused livestock operators to express concern.

A survey of range livestock operators in Utah indicated that they generally believe that use of a designated wilderness will decline. They also believe that the cost of using these areas will increase as will conflicts with either uses if an area is designated as a wilderness area.
A survey of operators from Montana who currently have permits to graze in a designated wilderness area tended to show the same results as the beliefs expressed by Utah operators. However, the magnitude of increased costs, conflicts, and anticipated declines in use were as great as most livestock operators would expect. This suggests that the management of wilderness has more to do with these impacts than one might expect. It is, therefore, important to resolve and make explicit policies that will be used to govern management of wilderness areas if livestock use in these areas are to be secure.