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# Utah's Grazing Lands: Sustaining a Vital Resource

Utah State University Extension

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# UTAH'S GRAZING LANDS

**Sustaining a Vital Resource**

OCTOBER 1995



## Utah's Grazing Land Conservation Initiative

### Sustaining a Legacy

As the 21st century nears, world attention is increasingly focused on the preservation of the environment and the intelligent management of our natural resources. Global trends and concerns often are expressed through community-level policy decisions. Citizens and policy makers in urban and rural communities make daily decisions about the use of energy and natural resource products. Water conservation and protection are priority issues. Other communities must deal with overflowing landfills and air quality problems.

Concerned farmers and ranchers, consumers, state and community leaders, business people, and educators are increasingly motivated by the desire to protect wildlife habitats and open space while improving both wildlife and livestock productivity, to protect our watershed, and to address many other environmental questions.

Did you know that about 80 percent of Utah's agricultural, forests, and rangelands are publicly owned? This means that there are relatively few acres of valuable, privately owned, natural resources. Keeping these acres productive is important because they often contain critical water resources and provide critical winter range for wildlife.

Education and awareness concerning the wise use of natural resources such as our grazing lands is our best insurance for sustaining the production of goods and services while protecting these resources on which we depend. The Grazing Land Conservation Initiative (GLCI) is dedicated to the development of programs that sustain, improve, and protect Utah's privately owned grazing lands.



### What Is the GLCI?

The Utah GLCI is a coalition of state agencies, the USDA Natural Resource Conservation Service, producer organizations, professional societies, USU Extension and research services, and interested publics that provide landowners, and thus society, with a variety of benefits. These are provided by developing programs at the local level that accomplish the mission of GLCI.

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*The mission of the Utah GLCI is to identify priority issues, then find solutions that effect positive change on private grazing lands. The Coalition will serve as a catalyst for enhancement of grazing land resources. It will provide a basis for coordination with units of government, institutions of higher education, and private landowners. It will implement and enhance already existing conservation programs.*



## Utah Grazing Lands

Grazing land systems are a complex set of interactions among soil, water, air, plants, and animals. The health of these systems depends upon human management decisions. The resources that these systems provide are water, wildlife populations, wildlife habitat, mineral deposits, forage, wood, landform, atmospheric visibility, and biological processes.

The production of livestock on these grazing land systems is the only economic activity that maintains vast areas of the state open to other citizens for their activities. These activities include photography, hiking, birdwatching, rafting, fishing, hunting and just enjoying the scenic beauty of these grazing lands.

Remaining competitive is the key to sustaining rural Utah and its associated high quality of life. To remain financially competitive, farmers and ranchers must continue to improve the condition of their grazing lands. The Utah GLCI Coalition is dedicated to assisting private producers to maintain their competitive status through educational and promotional programs that provide the tools for

improving grazing lands. This is accomplished by fulfilling the Utah GLCI Coalition's objectives. These objectives are:

- *Identify critical elements needed to improve Utah's grazing lands including best management practices to:  
Improve and sustain forage production.  
Improve water quality and quantity.  
Properly manage forage harvest to protect the soil resource.*
- *Develop a stable funding source to support activities of the Coalition and promote Agriculture Resource Development Loans (ARDL) and other activities to improve grazing lands.*
- *Promote a long-term research program to protect basic soil and plant resources and improve forage productivity and harvest.*
- *Educate owners, managers, and the general public concerning proper, economically viable grazing management practices.*
- *Encourage private landowners to become actively involved in the Utah GLCI Coalition and its activities.*

### **Utah State University is an Equal Opportunity/Affirmative Action Institution**

Issued in furtherance of Cooperative Extension work, Acts of May 8 and June 30, 1914, in cooperation with the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Robert L. Gilliland, Vice President and Director, Cooperative Extension Service, Utah State University.

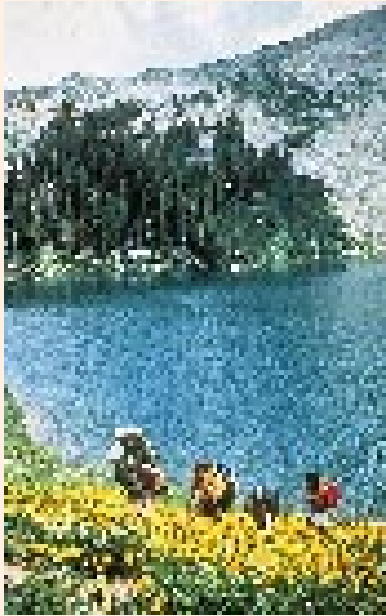
## What are the Public Benefits?

The Utah GLCI Coalition provides benefits to the urban as well as the rural population of the state. Private grazing lands managed by applying necessary land conservation treatments, as recognized by this initiative, protect natural resources of direct concern to the public.



### Water Quality and Quantity

A growing urban population represents an increasing need for clean water. Conservation of water quantity and preservation of water quality are both enhanced by healthy grazing lands which provide optimum retention of moisture in the soil profile. Healthy grazing lands are the foundation of watershed values as well as scenic qualities important to the urban community.



### Wildlife

Many wildlife species are dependent upon the habitat provided by private grazing lands. According to recent estimates, approximately two-thirds of all wildlife in the U.S. are produced on private lands. Adequate grazing resources on private lands throughout the year are essential for both wildlife and domestic livestock. Where publicly owned lands are a major factor, wildlife rely on neighboring private grazing lands for forage and habitat needs during many parts of the year. Riparian zone management relies heavily upon the proper management of grazing lands to sustain these unique and important systems.



### Recreation

The Utah GLCI Coalition not only supports programs that provide technical information and assistance to land owners wishing to improve the quality of their basic grazing land resources, but also supports opportunities to help meet Utah's growing demand for outdoor recreation.

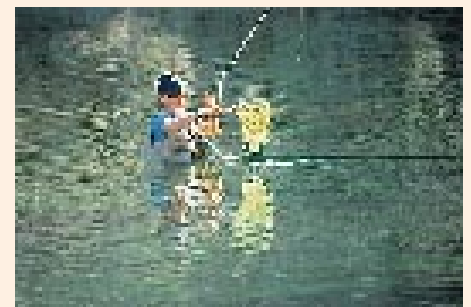
Recreational use of grazing lands has increased dramatically during the past 20 years. These opportunities include such activities as hunting, cross-country skiing, camping, hiking, fishing, photography, birdwatching, horseback riding, and off-road vehicle driving. Many people are seeking "back to nature" experiences.

Many benefits, usually at no cost, are passed on to the recreationist and the public at large by landowners practicing conservation on private grazing lands. Some of these benefits are open space, scenery, and aesthetic values. The demands of our urban population for high quality recreational experiences continues to increase.

### Air Quality

Grazing land's vegetation and soils are great reservoirs for organic carbon. The top three feet of soil, world-wide, contains nearly double the quantity of carbon contained in the world's vegetation and atmosphere. Grasses and legumes use atmospheric carbon as plant tissue building blocks. The non-utilized and undecomposed plant tissue returns to the soil and becomes a part of the soil's stored carbon.

Properly managed grazing lands help reduce atmospheric levels of carbon dioxide and may reduce the risk of greenhouse gas accumulation.





### **The Relationship Between Public and Privately Owned Grazing Lands**

About 80 percent of Utah's lands is owned by the public and managed by the Forest Service or the Bureau of Land Management. The grazing permittees that work with these agencies in managing livestock on these lands have complex management plans. The success of these plans relies heavily on cooperation among the permittees, the agency managers, and others.

The various agencies and the private land owners must continue to cooperate in resource planning on grazing land resources of intermingled ownership. Many wildlife species are dependent upon the habitat provided by the combination of public and private lands.

Migrating species are especially dependent upon this relationship.

Management of riparian areas relies heavily upon the proper management and balance between the public and private grazing lands. Timely technical assistance is crucial in meeting the resource concerns of the soil, water, air, plants, and animals while providing alternatives that maintain economic and social stability for livestock enterprises, as well as the supporting businesses within the communities. The Utah GLCI Coalition promotes and supports programs to provide this assistance.

## **How to Support Utah GLCI Programs**

Listed on the next page are the member organizations of the Utah GLCI Coalition. Although any of them may be contacted for more information, contacting your local Natural Resource Conservation Service Office or the Utah State University Extension Service will facilitate your interest.

## **Who Supports GLCI in Utah?**

**National Association of Conservation Districts**  
c/o Robert Raschke  
9150 West Jewell, Suite 102, Lakewood, CO 80232-6469

**Utah Association of Conservation Districts** 10751/2  
North Main, Logan, UT 84321-2215

**U.S.D.A. Natural Resources Conservation Service**  
P.O. Box 11350, Salt Lake City 84147-0350

**Utah Department of Agriculture**  
350 North Redwood Road, Salt Lake City 84116

**Utah State University Extension**  
College of Natural Resources, Logan 84322-5200

**Utah Farm Bureau**  
5300 South 360 West, Salt Lake City 84123-4680

**Utah Section of the Society for Range Management**  
399 "E" Street, Helper, UT 84526

**Utah Cattlemen's Association**  
150 South 600 East, #10B, Salt Lake City, UT 84102

**Utah Woolgrower's Association**  
150 South 600 East, #10B, Salt Lake City, UT 84102

**Utah Farmer's Union**  
5284 South 320 West, #C-144, Murray, UT 84107

**Utah Dairymen's Association**  
1000 South Main, Pleasant Grove, UT 84062