



Muddy Creek Coordinated Resource Management Project: Cattle Ranches and Trout Streams Can Coexist

The Muddy Creek Coordinated Resource Management (CRM) project is one of the original national "Seeking Common Ground" demonstration projects. It encompasses nearly 300,000 acres of mixed federal, state, and private lands in Carbon County, Wyoming. Using the philosophy of ecosystem management on a watershed basis, the local conservation district initiated the CRM process to get all affected interests in the watershed working on consensus management of the natural resources in the project area. To date, more than 25 members representing private landowners; federal, state, and local agencies; environmental and conservation organizations; industry; and the public at large have worked on the project.

Many conservation and land management tools have been implemented to restore, enhance, and maintain the abundant natural resources in the area while maintaining the economic stability and cultural heritage of the people on the land. The ecosystem management philosophy dictates that before any action is taken or management practice implemented, all impacts and users of the area must be addressed. It is because of this philosophy and spirit of cooperation that the wildlife, livestock, and all the associated natural resources in the watershed have shown improvement since the project began. A comment from Millicent Sanger, whose family has been in the area since the 1930s, sums up the progress made: "I have never seen the water as clear and clean as it is now."

The CRM project contains several grazing allotments established when the Bureau of Land Management first began to permit grazing on federal lands. The following are some examples of the cooperation among people and the coordination of management practices implemented on grazing allotments that have contributed to the success of the Muddy Creek CRM project.

Doty Mountain Allotment

"Getting to know the land, building relationships through communication, earning the trust so that people can identify their common ground and work together to achieve success" is what the CRM process means to Ray Weber of the Doty Mountain Allotment. Weber believes that "it takes commitment to not just work hard but to deal with the many diverse people and their interests" to make successful improvements on the land. In this case, just a simple change from spring to fall grazing was the solution. "What this CRM group and many others have found out is that our 'common ground' is much greater than our differences," Weber says, "so let's set our differences aside for the moment and work together to be successful."



In 1989 vegetation cover on the banks of Muddy Creek was only about 5 percent.

Grizzly and Daly Allotments

Other types of changes in grazing practices have been implemented throughout the project area. For example, the Wyoming Game and Fish Department (WGFD) purchased the base property of the Grizzly and Daly Allotments and designated it as part of a wildlife and livestock demonstration project. Historical use of these allotments allowed for season-long grazing by cattle and sheep. Once the WGFD took ownership of the Grizzly Allotment, it implemented a short-duration grazing season. Each of the eight pastures was grazed for 7 to 21 days rather than the usual 60 to 90 days. This type of management promotes recovery of healthy riparian areas by giving plants plenty of time to grow.

Muddy Creek

But simply moving to a short-duration grazing rotation wasn't good enough for Jim Chant of the Desert Cattle Company. As the lessee of the Grizzly and Daly Allotments, Chant has shown a strong commitment to improving the resources and proving that wildlife and cattle can coexist beneficially. He and two full-time cowboys implement the WGFD's short-duration grazing season by herding the cattle out of the riparian areas and onto the uplands each afternoon. Not only does this approach improve utilization within each pasture, but it also reduces time spent in the lush riparian zones. In addition, improvements to facilitate livestock management such as spring developments, off-site watering, electric fencing (much of it solar-powered), high-tension fencing, and vegetation management are ongoing. A primary goal of the CRM group is to reintroduce the Colorado River cutthroat trout into Muddy Creek, whose headwaters are in the Grizzly Allotment. Once these upper portions of the watershed are in proper condition, trout will thrive. Chant says he wants to be the first rancher to run cattle next to a Colorado cutthroat trout stream, "to show it can be done."

Prescribed burning has proved extremely beneficial for livestock, wildlife, and vegetation communities in the Muddy Creek drainage. Burning upland areas allows sagebrush seedlings to sprout, thereby creating a more diverse age class of sagebrush. Also, the livestock are enticed away from the riparian areas to graze on the more desirable grasses produced by the burning. Fire removes the sagebrush competition so that aspen can expand its area in both riparian and upland sites. After burning, regrowth occurs quickly, and within a few years a larger, healthier community emerges.

Sulphur Springs Allotment

The Sulphur Springs Allotment is managed by Millicent and Kathryn Sanger, a mother and daughter whose family has used this area since the 1930s. It was one of the first allotments for which management plans were developed in conjunction with the Bureau of Land Management during the 1960s. The various pastures in the allotment are used to control grazing time and use. This approach allows the Sangers to congregate the cattle in smaller areas, resulting in improved conception rates, easier management of the cattle, and overall increased beef production. Plant cover on the streambanks increased from only 5 percent in 1989 to more than 90 percent in 1995. Most of this change occurred after pasture fencing and managed grazing rotation were implemented. The Sangers appreciate how the land looks when they leave in the fall, knowing there is plenty of forage left for the elk and mule deer indigenous to the area.



By installing pasture fencing and using managed grazing rotations, ranchers were able to increase vegetative cover by 85 percent from 1989 conditions.

Working together to be successful

Using various conservation and land management tools, a coalition of government agencies, private organizations, and individuals are making a difference in Carbon County. Their cooperative effort has resulted in benefits for waters, wildlife, and cattle ranches alike.

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