

Group Working for Healthy Lands



Shoesole Group reviewing grazing plans

People describe committee work as unproductive but sometimes a group can produce good results. A good example is the collaborative effort of the Shoesole Resource Management Group that recently met to receive an update from the Cottonwood Ranch and Boies Ranch on their 2008 grazing operations and management.

Shoesole acts as an advisory group to these two ranches, bringing together area ranchers, agency people and concerned public to combine expertise. The 20 people attending the meeting represented area ranchers, Bureau of Land Management (BLM), U.S. Forest Service (USFS), Nevada Department of Wildlife, Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS), University of Nevada Cooperative Extension, Northeastern Nevada Stewardship Group and Nevada Cattlemen's Association. The group was facilitated by Chuck Petersen, Elko NRCS Range conservationist.

Each spring the two ranch operators create yearly grazing plans that balance concerns for the cattle and ranch economics with rangeland health, wildlife and agency concerns. The Shoesole group looks at the plans and offers refinements and holistic based recommendations before the ranchers turn their plans into the BLM and USFS for approval. The plans are not automatically accepted because of Shoesole's recommendations but it certainly helps. In the fall the collaborative team reviews that year's grazing results, how the plans actually worked out and how they could be improved for the next year. During the summer, Shoesole also tours the ranches looking at specific problems and successes.

Collaboration offers better communication between ranchers, agencies and other participants. A knowledge exchange takes place as agency employees learn the actual conditions, real results and problems encountered on the ground and gain a better understanding of ranch operations. The ranchers learn about agency concerns, policies and receive advice on the inevitable problems when managing cattle and the land. The meetings also provide socializing between all the entities, helping cement empathy for all areas of interest and developing friendships. The group works constantly to refine the collaborative process, improve public relations and maintain trust among the different members.

Collaborative holistic management is a complicated process and there are always problems to work through. The ranchers need to open their operations to scrutiny by outsiders. All members say a problem with this process is the time and money required to participate. There is also the occasional difficulty in arriving at a consensus on management questions.

Twenty heads are better than one. The rangelands are the clear winners of this Shoesole process, but also the Cottonwood and Boies Ranches receive advice while refining their grazing plans. The agencies get to work in a non-combative atmosphere with interested and willing partners.

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