

# Mount 'n Cattle

Article for the Wyoming Livestock Roundup

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## Time and Timing of Grazing

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One thing is for sure, somewhere in the state the grass will grow this year.

From looking at snowpack totals across the state, we will have a good year in many locations. Spring precipitation will determine much of what our rangelands will produce. This past week, I was part of a Wyoming rangeland management school sponsored by the Wyoming Section of the Society for Range Management. This day-long program was filled with great information on basic rangeland management and how you, as livestock managers, can get the most from rangeland. I want to share some of the “take home messages” I gained.

### Timing of Grazing:

The next two months will most likely make the greatest impact on your ranch than any months of the year. While riding around with ranchers, they usually drive quickly by one or two pastures and say, “That’s my spring pasture – let’s not look at that one too close, but let me show you my summer and fall pastures.” Why are spring pastures in poorer condition than other pastures? It has to do with the physiology of the grass and the sensitivity of the grass to grazing during specific times. I’d like to pass on a few “take-home messages” that I gained from attending the Wyoming Rangeland Management School that was recently held in Torrington.

Spring grazing can be damaging to plants if animals remain in one area too long and plants are grazed repeatedly. Grass in the boot stage is the most sensitive to grazing. This occurs a little later in the spring but is often a problem in spring pastures. The boot stage refers to the time when the seedhead is being elevated, but has not yet appeared or expanded.

We can’t manage the weather, but we can manage where the cattle are grazing during specific times. So what is the solution? **Don’t graze the same pasture the same time every year.** It sounds easy but many of us, especially in the largely private land parts of the state, have pastures traditionally used during specific times of the year. Rotate the time of grazing so that each spring cattle are in a different pasture during this critical period for the grass. If you absolutely cannot graze cattle in a different rotation each year, then adjust the duration and intensity of grazing in the pastures. Shorten the period cattle are in the pasture and give the pasture plenty of time to recover before grazing again.

### Stocking Rate:

The age old adage “**Graze half, leave half**” still holds true. Research shows removing more than half the leaf material has a drastic effect on the health of the roots of the plant, which affects its ability for regrowth and persistence through time.

**Develop a Monitoring Program:**

Knowing the effects you are having on rangeland condition is difficult unless there is some type of rangeland monitoring program in place. This can be as simple as a photo point returned to each year at about the same time or as complex as exclosures and transects read on a repeated basis.

The benefits of monitoring certainly include more information for management but monitoring has also proven very useful when working with a variety of agencies regarding grazing permits or threats from outside groups. Good information about the impact grazing management is having on your land provides a leg up on anyone making arbitrary judgments.

At the Wyoming rangeland management school, Paul Meiman, University of Wyoming Cooperative Extension Service range specialist, showed how to manage grazing by focusing on the **time** and **timing** of grazing – **time** being the length of time cattle are allowed in the pasture and **timing** being the time of year the land is grazed. As the grass starts growing this year, think about how the **time** and **timing** of grazing will be managed. Implementing this approach coupled with a monitoring program will help you better manage the resource base of your ranch.