

UNDERSTANDING WORKING RANGELANDS

Grazing Systems Management

ACHIEVING MANAGEMENT GOALS BY BALANCING LIVESTOCK GRAZING WITH TIME AND SPACE

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The earliest grazing systems date back to the domestication of livestock. Nomadic herds men moved livestock from one range site to another, probably following the patterns of forage quality and quantity and the availability of water. Grazing systems became more structured, employing fencing and developed water, over 500 years ago in Europe, when human population pressures demanded greater productivity from agricultural land.

Early ranchers in North America herded or turned livestock loose across open range. Without fences and with natural sources of water found only in limited locations, livestock moved from one site to the next based on the availability of forage and water. The invention of barbed wire in the late 1800s led to better control of livestock and the development of grazing systems in North America. Specialized grazing systems, such as rotation of grazing between pastures, were first conceptualized before the turn of the twentieth century (Smith 1895) and became a focus of range researchers and managers



Photo: Lawrence Ford

Working rangelands are public or privately owned open space lands that are managed with livestock grazing and rancher stewardship. Their management contributes to the production of a variety of ecosystem services, including: food, clean water, weed control, wildlife habitat, fire fuel reduction, carbon sequestration, pollination, aesthetic views, cultural heritage, recreational and educational opportunities, and open space conservation.