"To be successful with sheep, even when you’re not thinking about them, you need to think about them a little."

- Ivan Doig, Dancing at the Rascal Fair

Overview

- Our experience
- Know your primary business
  - Grazing versus lamb/wool
  - Production cycle versus client needs
- Know your vegetation
- Know the setting
- Know the goals of the project
- Know your risk
- Know the public
- Preparing a bid
- Expect the unexpected
Our Experience

• Flying Mule Farm has provided targeted grazing services since 2007.
• Clients have included:
  – Homeowners' Associations
  – Land Trusts
  – Private Landowners
  – Community College
  – PG&E
• We use mostly sheep in our business.
• Joint venture with others to provide goats and/or greater numbers.
• California manager for Prescriptive Livestock Services (2012-2014)

Know your primary business!

• Is targeted grazing a byproduct of your sheep business, or are lamb and wool a byproduct of your grazing business?
• Your answers will help you decide your business priorities
  – Examples
• Creating a forage and management calendar
Know your Vegetation!

- Types of plants
- Growth stages
- Estimating stock days
- Toxicity issues
- Managing the three impacts
  - Grazing carbon vs. trample carbon
  - Nutrient transfer
- Matching animals to the vegetation
- Teaching animals to graze

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Animals can handle small amounts of toxic plants if there is other forage available.

Grazing behavior and preferences can be taught.

Using herd effect to manage annual grasslands.

Using Herd Effect to manage “Trample” Carbon
Sheep will eat blackberries!

Fenceline shot – 450 ewes on starthistle.

Know the Setting

• Urban versus rural
• Wildland settings
• Preparing the neighbors – what do they expect?
• What kinds of predators may be an issue?
• What is the most appropriate predator protection strategy?
Know the goals and motivations of the client

- Fuel reduction
- Weed control
- Environmental enhancement
- Aesthetic goals
  - What does the client want the land to look like at the end of the project? Next year? In 5 years?
- Alternative to mowing or chemical treatment
Know the Risks

- Be up front with your insurance provider!
- Predation
- Trespass
- Property damage
- Injury
- Wildfire
- Poisoning
- Others?
- Production losses
- Know when to say when
Know the Public

- 99.9% supportive!
- Curiosity
- Animal welfare (livestock, guard animals, working dogs)
- Environmental concerns
- Help make the neighbors supportive!
- Using social media
- Dealing with problems
  - Vandalism
  - Complaints
Keys to the Business

• Know what your primary business is!
• Flexibility
• People skills
• Stock-handling skills
• Transportation efficiency
• Estimating vegetation quality and quantity
• Write solid contracts
• Scale
Return to Labor
Canyonview Project
2009 – 67 ewes and 13 goats
• 7.5 acres treated
• 40 days
• 3 loads
• 10 hours transportation
• 58 hours management
• $3200 gross
• $38.10/hour
• $426/acre
2010 – 211 ewes
• 10 acres treated
• 21 days
• 6 loads
• 20 hours transportation
• 64 hours management
• $4400 gross
• $64.70/hour
• $440/acre

Preparing a Bid
• Some considerations
  – Per acre vs. per head/day
  – Forage type(s), quality and quantity
  – How many acres/day can you cover?
  – Access (loading/unloading)
  – Stock water
  – Fencing difficulty
  – Time of year
  – Where will you go if you finish early?
  – Risks (fire, toxic plants, vandalism, etc.)
  – Cost of labor (including management labor)
  – KEEP RECORDS
Monitoring

- We track stock-days/acre (help us estimate acres/day treated).
- Use smart phone to estimate paddock size.
- Use a diary to track actions (I use EverNote – links phone, tablet and computer)
- Photo monitoring works well! We use the GrassSnap app for iPhone.

Expect the Unexpected

- Easter Sunday and Sheep on the Tracks!
- The Kids are Back in School!
- Goats Riding Shotgun
- 4-Legged Landscapers
- Language Barriers
The Next 10 Years

- Targeted grazing will become more common
- Need for larger flocks
- Need for smaller niche producers (if it can be done profitably)
- Will the mid-sized operations be pushed out?
- More multi-species projects
- More wildland projects using sheep
- Transportation will be an issue

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