



# Cattle Producer's Handbook

Range and Pasture Section

520

## Photo Monitoring Your Range

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Much of the following discussion of photo monitoring is written in the context of a federal allotment permit situation. Monitoring has been a contentious issue on federal allotments for quite some time. However, the practices described and the benefits derived from photo monitoring are directly applicable to private lands as well. Monitoring in general and photo monitoring in particular can be valuable planning and assessment tools for grazing management regardless of land ownership.

Photo monitoring is simple, low tech, and, if done properly, provides a good visual perspective of what is happening on the ground. Photo monitoring should accompany any other monitoring technique being used. If no other monitoring is being done, photo monitoring should be a minimum effort on any allotment or management unit for which Goals and Objectives exist. Goals and Objectives are essential and should be explicitly stated for any management unit, public or private.

### Why Monitor?

With an increasing nonfarm/ranch population, and with an apparent increase among that population of individuals and organizations interested in natural resource issues, monitoring becomes increasingly important. Monitoring provides a source of information and an opportunity to present an educational program about how management affects rangelands and other natural resources. If properly done, pictures and data can show response to management.

With respect to photo monitoring, pictures, when accompanied by observational notes, are particularly useful for displaying and describing changes. Whether change occurs quickly, as it can in some riparian areas, or more slowly, which is more typical of upland rangelands, a series of photographs can display changes over

time. An additional benefit of monitoring is that it helps the individuals doing the monitoring to become more observant of changes on the lands they are managing.

Cattle producers with federal grazing permits will likely find it necessary to start monitoring their allotments. Agencies are going through a period of downsizing of both budgets and personnel. Although monitoring should be among the highest of priorities, it often is not. Under special circumstances (for example allotments with species of concern under the Endangered Species Act), it may be necessary for the permittees to actually conduct much of the monitoring necessary to document allotment response to grazing and for agency personnel to spot check to validate monitoring processes and results. However, in most cases a well designed photo monitoring program with recorded observations (field notes) will provide sufficient information to guide management decisions. Photos with field notes to help interpret the photos can be a useful planning and evaluation tool for private land as well as public land management.

The following list includes examples of goals for a monitoring program:

- Determine the effectiveness of management practices (must be based on management unit Goals and Objectives).
- Establish a record of range "condition."
- Document the effect of livestock grazing on key areas.
- Document the effect of wildlife use on key areas.
- Detect a trend toward (or away from) a desired condition, plant community, etc. (and identify the factors most likely causing the detected trend).
- Provide justification for maintaining or changing grazing management.