

The History and Overview of Utah's Grazing Improvement Program

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On the Ground

- Livestock numbers have been declining since the early 1930s but many of the same resource concerns are still present today.
- We must change the way we think about and manage livestock on our own in order to restore and maintain sustainable range resources.
- The Utah Department of Agriculture and Foods Grazing Improvement Program reaches across land ownership and jurisdictional boundaries to foster collaboration among private, federal, and state interests to implement sound grazing management practices that improve rangeland and watershed health.
- The Grazing Improvement Program focuses on three main principles:
 - Time (the duration of grazing), timing (the season of use), frequency (how often the same plant is grazed), and intensity (amount of forage removed);
 - Managing plant succession through grazing, mechanical, fire, chemical, and other means to enhance diversity and production (diversity = sustainability);
 - Monitoring and adaptive management (you cannot manage what you do not measure).

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Livestock grazing in Utah¹ began in earnest with the arrival of the Mormon pioneers in 1847. By 1890, livestock numbers in the state were at an all-time high: the Agriculture Census recorded 3.5 million

sheep and 500,000 cattle.¹ Sheep production peaked around 1930, but since has declined by 89%.² This decline came as a result of several factors, including low wool prices, less consumer preference for lamb, predator control problems, and difficulty finding labor. As the sheep industry declined, cattle took their place on the range: the number of beef cattle in Utah has doubled since 1920, making the industry one of the state's top sources of agricultural revenue.²

Heavy grazing from the late 1800s and early 1900s left Utah's rangelands depleted and watersheds damaged. Overgrazing left behind denuded soils that created additional problems including soil erosion and flooding. In 1932 the first record of vegetation composition changes on the Wasatch Front reported a move from perennial bunch grass systems to more shrub and annual grass.³

In 1905 the federal government moved its forest reserves to the jurisdiction of the renamed United States Forest Service (USFS) with a charge to curtail overgrazing and its harmful effects on watersheds. In 1912, the Great Basin Experiment Station was established in the Manti-LaSal National Forest near Ephraim. The experiment station helped implement research-based grazing models and produced long-term grazing records and studies, which advanced rangeland restoration science. In 1934 the federal Taylor Grazing Act established grazing permits that limited and regulated grazing on the rest of the public lands outside of the national forests. The Taylor Grazing Act marks the beginning of the science-based range management approach that we still see on our public lands today.²

Utah contains nearly 45 million acres of grazing lands. The federal government owns 73% of those lands, while the state owns 9%, and the remaining 18% is private property. Grazing permits on federal lands are allotted in animal unit months (AUMs). An AUM is the amount of forage required to feed a mature, 1,000 pound cow (an animal unit) for 1 month. As the federal government owns nearly three-quarters of Utah's grazing lands, most grazing occurs on federal lands, but the amount of grazing allowed on those lands has been declining for decades. On Bureau of Land Management (BLM) lands, AUMs have declined from 2,749,000 in 1940 to less than 675,000 AUMs in 2009, a four-fold reduction.² The AUMs on Forest Service grazing allotments have fallen from 2.7 million in the 1940s to 614,000 in 2008. The significant

¹ The 70th Annual Society of Range Management Annual Meeting will be held in St. George, Utah 29 January–2 February 2017. This article highlights Utah range science and management. For more information on SRM Red Rock & Rangelands 2017 see <http://rangelands.org/srm17/>.

Change in Utah Federally Permitted AUMs 1940-2005

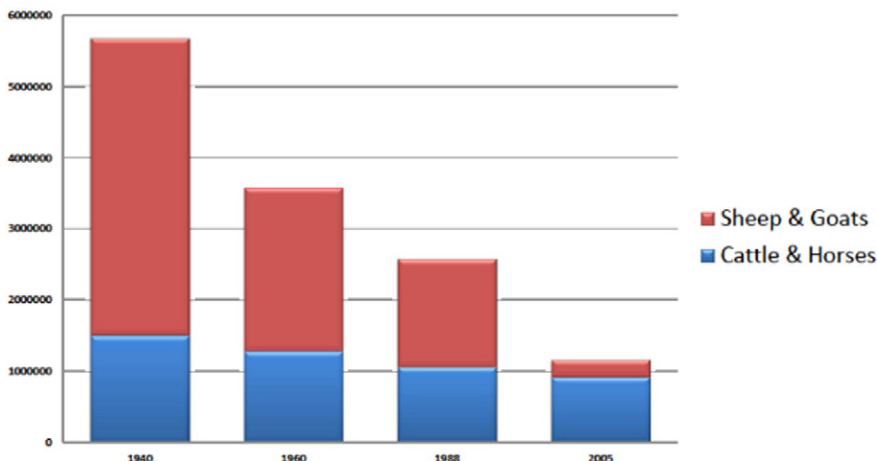


Figure 1. Changes in Federal livestock grazing AUMs permitted on BLM and USFS lands in Utah between 1940 and 2005.

decline in the number of AUMs available for grazing on public lands has increased grazing pressures on private lands (Fig. 1).

The grazing management techniques of the early 1900s reduced AUMs in an attempt to address the resource degradation concerns. Today, AUMs are still being reduced, but in many cases the same resource concerns remain. Often times a change in management practices is required to achieve the desired outcomes, rather than a reduction of AUMs permitted for the grazing allotments. This disconnect between the regulatory regime and good grazing practices motivated grazing experts in Utah to create a program that would promote and facilitate proper grazing techniques.

Considering Utah's changing demographics and the decline in public land grazing opportunity, the need for

state-level representation for the livestock industry became a priority (Fig. 2).

History of Utah's Grazing Improvement Program

In 2006 the Utah Legislature passed HB 145, the Rangeland Improvement Act.⁴ The bill created the Grazing Improvement Program (GIP), along with a State Grazing Advisory Board and Regional Grazing Advisory Boards. The state and regional Grazing Advisory Boards give a voice to grassroots private and public grazing land managers and attracted strong support from the Utah Farm Bureau, Utah Cattlemen's Association, Utah Farmer's Union, Utah Woolgrowers Association, rural county commissioners, the Utah Association of Conservation Districts, and others.

Utah's Urban vs. Rural Population

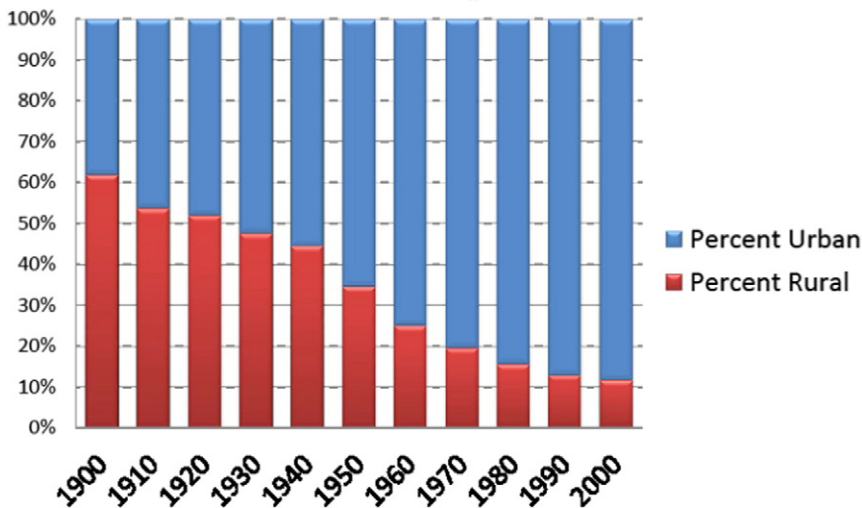


Figure 2. Changes in Utah's population demographics from 1900 to 2000.

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