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*The Australian Rangeland Society*

## VICTORIAN ALPINE AND SUB ALPINE GRAZING

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Ensay, Victoria

### LAND USERS

Cattle graziers, loggers, miners, 4 wheel drivers, campers, bushwalkers, hunters, brumby runners, bee keepers and tour groups.

### FROM A MOUNTAIN CATTLE GRAZIER'S PERSPECTIVE

For over 150 years mountain cattlemen and their families have grazed their cattle on the high alpine and sub alpine pastures in Victoria.

Today the same pattern exists. In early summer the cattle are taken up to each families run country. The cattle graze the grassy glades of the snowgum forests, and the natural open snowplains for four months. In autumn, ahead of the on coming snow, the cattlemen muster the cattle together and bring them down.

### CONFLICT OR PERCEIVED CONFLICT IN LAND USE

Some elements of the conservation movement have brought political pressures to bear on high country grazing, putting forward hypotheses of potential environmental damage.

Research has shown that alleged damage by grazing is grossly overstated and further reports have shown that the environment is in fact protected by well managed grazing. (1)

By memorandum of agreement in Parliament grazing is to continue within most of the Alpine National Park, however a decision taken by the previous state government to terminate grazing on parts of the Alpine National Park has been upheld.

### MANAGEMENT OF PUBLIC LANDS

The Alpine Sub alpine region takes in approximately seven million hectares of crown land. This area has been used for a variety of land uses depending on the terrain and vegetation. Logging, bushwalking, mining, camping. 4 wheel driving, hunting, bee keeping, and cattle grazing.

A public land area is valued by the people for the ways in which they can use it and also for the knowledge that there are a reservoir of species and genes that we do not want lost.

For the public land area to maintain its value, it must be managed correctly, otherwise changes will occur that will downgrade the area.

Unmanaged the alpine, sub alpine land area will become overrun with blackberries and briers, which out compete natural species along stream banks and in moist areas. Rabbits and wild horses heavily overgraze areas because they are uncontrolled, putting pressure on native species. There is also a great threat of wild pigs invading the area as they have in the Kosciusko National Park.

The Victorian government has recently proclaimed much of the Victorian Alpine sub alpine area into a large National Park of some 709,560 ha. The government is proposing to phase out grazing from some of the best run country in Victoria which falls in the Park.

However, the government can not afford to manage these extensive areas, because they do not have the financial resources or the practical knowledge. This has

been shown in NSW where the Kosciusko Park has become considerably downgraded since cattle grazing was phased out in the nineteen fifties.

Mountain cattlemen subscribe to a multi-use concept of Alpine areas, with some special areas to be designated as National Park.

multi-use and the continuation of grazing would mean, as in the past, that cattlemen would be aware of and control vermin and noxious weeds.

#### BENEFITS ACCRUED THROUGH MULTI-USE

Grazing by cattle maintains a vigorous sward, enhances wild flower displays, keeps the bush open and decreases fire hazards.

Cattle grazing is the only agency that can regularly, and efficiently reduce the fire hazard in the forest areas, thus keeping the region much less at risk of devastation by wild fire, and subsequent soil erosion.

The risk of damaging wild fire is always greatest in years of drought and these circumstances are often followed by heavy rainfall which cause the worst erosion on bare, burnt ground.

Regular, well managed grazed, prevents the vegetation becoming overgrown and senescent, this allows sunlight to penetrate the sward resulting in a dense ground cover that decreases erosion by water or wind.

The controlled tooth and hoof action of cattle keeps the bush in an open park like state enhancing the displays of wildflowers. These plants do not flower so prolifically where they have to push through mats of overgrown senescent grass.

Cattlemen provide a public service by leaving their huts open for people to shelter in, helping in search parties for missing persons and providing local knowledge to people who are visiting the area.

Logging and mining provide good access roads for leisure activities, as well as providing economic benefits to the local community.

Recreational activities provide pleasure for increasing numbers of people.

multi-use of these areas provides better care and management of the vast tracts of land, and provides many people with a great deal of pleasure. Properly managed, multi-use also allows the renewable natural resources to be utilized for the benefit of the nation.

#### CONCLUSION

The conflict between conservation groups and mountain grazing is not one of proven conservation issues but rather one of philosophy. When this point is understood by governments between land use decisions might be made, balancing real conservation concerns with the need for sustainable economic return.

#### REFERENCES

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