PROCEEDINGS OF THE AUSTRALIAN RANGELAND SOCIETY BIENNIAL CONFERENCE

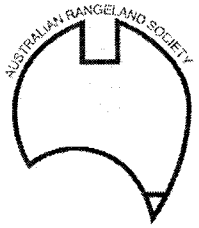
Official publication of The Australian Rangeland Society

Form of Reference

The reference for this article should be in this general form;
Author family name, initials (year). Title. *In*: Proceedings of the nth Australian Rangeland Society Biennial Conference. Pages. (Australian Rangeland Society: Australia).
For example:
Anderson, L., van Klinken, R. D., and Shepherd, D. (2008). Aerially surveying Mesquite *(Prosopis* spp.) in the Pilbara. *In*: 'A Climate of Change in the Rangelands. Proceedings of the 15th Australian Rangeland Society Biennial Conference'. (Ed. D. Orr) 4 pages. (Australian Rangeland Society: Australia).

Disclaimer

The Australian Rangeland Society and Editors cannot be held responsible for errors or any consequences arising from the use of information obtained in this article or in the Proceedings of the Australian Rangeland Society Biennial Conferences. The views and opinions expressed do not necessarily reflect those of the Australian Rangeland Society and Editors, neither does the publication of advertisements constitute any endorsement by the Australian Rangeland Society and Editors of the products advertised.



The Australian Rangeland Society

THE ROLE OF THE NATURAL RESOURCES CONSERVATION SERVICE WITH RANGELANDS IN THE UNITED STATES

R.A. Pearce[1,4], P. Laustsen[2] and S. Perkins[3]

[1]District Conservationist, Natural Resources Conservation Service, 270 See Vee Lane, Bishop, California, 93514 USA.
[2]Public Relation Specialist, Natural Resources Conservation Service, 4500 Glenwood Drive, Building B, Riverside, California, 92501 USA.
[3]Rangeland Specialist, Natural Resources Conservation Service, 17330 Bear Valley Road, Suite 106, Victorville, California, 92395 USA.
[4] Corresponding author. Email: robert.pearce@ca.usda.gov

ABSTRACT

The Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) is an Agency of the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) in the United States of America (USA). The agency provides technical and financial assistance to private land owners and Native American Tribes. The goal of the NRCS is to conserve soil, water, air, plant, animal, and human resources (SWAPA+H) on private agricultural lands and rangelands in the USA. This paper describes our poster which provides an overview of technical and financial assistance available for private and tribal rangelands.

Born out of the Dust Bowl era in the Unites States, NRCS has evolved over its 70 year history to provide the latest technical assistance available to address resource concerns on private lands in the USA.

INTRODUCTION

The Soil Conservation Service (SCS) was established in 1935 by the United States Congress as a result of "the Dust Bowl" era in the Great Plains Region of the US. In 1937 the Conservation Districts were established. The SCS was renamed the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) in 1994. NRCS (a Federal Agency) Service Centers and Field Offices work with local Conservation Districts (often delineated by county boundaries and whose boards are made up of local residents) to establish conservation priorities at the local level. There are nearly 3,000 conservation districts in the USA (Helms 2006).

NRCS provides technical and financial assistance to private landowners in the USA. This paper and associated poster provide information on how that assistance may be applied on rangelands. Not all NRCS financial programs are covered in this paper, but instead the paper addresses those programs most often used on rangelands. NRCS uses a system of "practices" to apply conservation to the land. There are over 600 practices available and each has its own standards and specifications (FOTG 2006).

As part of the process of participating in financial and technical assistance programs, landowners work with NRCS rangeland and natural resource professionals to develop conservation plans for their operations. For rangeland operations, conservation plans may include a natural resource inventory, environmental assessments, cultural surveys, producer goals, rangeland monitoring, grazing systems, description and practices associated with financial assistance, and future planning to assure SWAPA+H conservation goals are met. During the planning and implementation stages land owners will meet with NRCS engineers, biologists, rangeland specialists, or other specialists to address the technical and conservation concerns.

CONSERVATION PLANNING

As mentioned above, conservation planning is a large part of NRCS assistance. Conservation planning is a nine step process which includes the following: 1) Identify Problems and Opportunities, 2) Determine Objectives, 3) Inventory Resources, 4) Analyze Resource Data, 5) Formulate Alternatives, 6) Evaluate Alternatives, 7) Make Decisions, 8) Implement the Plan, and 9) Evaluate the Plan (NPPH 2000). Through this planning process, rangeland operators evaluate environmental and land use impacts so they can achieve their conservation, economic, and land use goals.

CONSERVATION TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE (CTA)

Goals

The Conservation Technical Assistance (CTA) program provides technical assistance to land owners. That assistance may be in the form of developing grazing plans, water development, vegetation management, among many other possibilities. CTA has the following goals: 1) Comprehensive Nutrient Management Plan (CNMP) planning to assist the owners and operators of animal feeding operations to address their conservation needs, 2) Reduction of non-point source pollution, reduction of groundwater contamination, and reduction of point sources such as contamination from confined animal feeding operations, 3) Conservation of ground and surface water resources, 4) Reduction of emissions and ozone precursors and depleters that contribute to air quality impairment violations of National Ambient Air Quality Standards, 5) Reduction in soil erosion and sedimentation from unacceptable levels on agricultural land, and 6) Promotion of at-risk species habitat conservation (NRCS 2006b).

FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE PROGRAMS

Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP)

Funding and Goals

The Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) provides a financial incentive for producers to install conservation practices on a cost-share basis. Typically, EQIP will fund 50 to 90% of the cost of a practice and the producer must pay the remainder. $1,330,775,444 ($US 1,013,277,073) has been allocated in the USA for EQIP projects in 2006.

EQIP goals include: 1) Reduction of non-point source pollution, reduction of groundwater contamination, and reduction of point sources such as contamination from confined animal feeding operations, 2) Conservation of ground and surface water resources, 3) Reduction of emissions and ozone precursors and depleters that contribute to air quality impairment violations of National Ambient Air Quality Standards, 4) Reduction in soil erosion and sedimentation from unacceptable levels on agricultural land, and 5) Promotion of at-risk species habitat conservation (NRCS 2006b).

EQIP provides the opportunity for rangeland improvements through the use of practices such as prescribed grazing, spring development, fencing, and brush management.

Grazing Lands Conservation Initiative (GLCI)

Funding and Goals

The Grazing Lands Conservation Initiative (GLCI) is a nationwide collaborative process of individuals and organizations working to maintain and improve the management, productivity, and health of the nation's privately owned grazing land. The NRCS plays a major role in this initiative by providing technical assistance to private land owners. (NRCS 2006a)

Currently, $5,445,270 ($US 4,146,120) is available through GLCI to study the management and control of invasive species that impact grazing lands. Grant applications can range from $65,667 - $656,958 ($US 50,000 to $US 500,000). NRCS estimates about 40 grants will be awarded. Under the GLCI invasive plants program, a 50% match is required.

Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program (WHIP)

Funding and Goals

Funding for the Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program (WHIP) for the entire USA in 2006 is $43,702,349 ($US 32,509,489).

Within the WHIP program, NRCS has established the following goals: 1) Promote the restoration of declining or important native wildlife habitats, 2) Protect, restore, develop or enhance wildlife habitat of at-risk species (State and Federally listed threatened and endangered species, and candidate species for listing), 3) Reduce the impacts of invasive species on wildlife habitats and, 4) Protect, restore, develop or enhance declining or important aquatic wildlife species' habitats (NRCS 2006b).

WHIP offers cost share and technical assistance to enhance Wildlife Habitat on Rangelands. Practices might include Riparian Herbaceous Cover, Fencing, Stream Channel Stabilization, and Wildlife Watering Facility.

LAND EASEMENTS

Wetland Reserve Program (WRP)

Funding and Goals

$292,235,242 ($US 222,455,571) is available for conservation projects through the Wetland Reserve Program (WRP) in the USA. NRCS purchases an easement from the landowner and maintains a 10 year, 30 year, or permanent easement on the property. Restoration funding is also included in WRP projects. The goal of the WRP is to take lands currently under agriculture production that were once wetlands, and return them to their native condition.

Farm and Ranchland Protection Program (FRPP)

Funding and Goals

The Farm and Ranchland Protection Program (FRPP) is also an easement program where NRCS purchases the land easements. In 2006, $95,192,391 ($US 72,462,437) is available to private landowners through this program. The purpose of the FRPP is to maintain agricultural lands in production and protect them from development.

SUMMARY

Through the use of NRCS Financial and Technical Assistance, rangeland operators in the US may enhance the economic, environmental, and long term sustainability of their livestock operations. NRCS Conservation Planning offers rangeland operations a tool to help them develop long term goals and operation plans to better achieve conservation goals. Through cooperative planning involving landowners, stakeholders, and NRCS employees, rangeland health in the USA will improve and livestock grazing will continue to provide a valuable rangeland commodity.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This paper acknowledges the financial assistance provided by the Australian Rangeland Society through their Travel Grant initiative. For more information about the Australian Rangeland Society, go to www.austrangesoc.com.au.

REFERENCES

FOTG (2006). Field Office Technical Guide. Various Pages.

Helms, D. (2006). Natural Resources Conservation Service Brief History. http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/about/history/articles/briefhistory.html.

National Planning Procedures Handbook (NPPH) Amendment 3. Parts 600.1, 600.2-600.6 United States Department of Agriculture. Natural Resources Conservation Service, pp. 600.1-I - 600.6-11.

NRCS (2006a). Grazing Lands Conservation Initiative. http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/Programs/glci/

NRCS (2006b). NRCS Farm Bill Programs. http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/programs/farmbill/2002/products.html