Herding and Handling

If you have young children, learning low-stress livestock handling is a gift to your kids because if you learn the technique well, it will be passed on relatively effortlessly to your children.

Low-Stress Livestock Handling (LSLH) can:

- Increase livestock weight gains, particularly on the range.
- Increase weight gains of weaned calves by reducing stress at weaning.
- Retrain animals to use uplands. Over time, effort required to move and place animals will decrease as you and your animals learn the new system.
- Prevent livestock from overusing riparian and increasing time on allotments even during drought.
- Improve handling and behavior of stock.
- Improve sorting and shipping.
- Decrease costs by reducing the need for high-tech handling facilities.
- Reduce fencing because stock can be moved and placed in large pastures.
- Pasture units may be divided and grazed separately without cross fences.
- Improve gains and health of high-strung and low-condition stock.
- Allow greater flexibility in pasture management.
- Increase carrying capacity on rangelands.
- Improve utilization of forage on uplands.
- Increase the number of animals that can be handled efficiently by an individual.
- Save time in gathering stock.
- Reduce dark cutters and bruising of meat caused by bumping, crowding, and shoving during sorting, loading, and routine handling.
- Reduce damage to facilities such as loosened gateposts, bent panels, etc.
- Improve safety of livestock handlers.
- Improve conception rates.
- Reduce drug costs and the number of sick animals.

Is using a rider for you? Things to consider:

1. Are your riparian areas overgrazed year after year even though you've cut the number of animals grazing a pasture or allotment?
2. Is part of your rangeland not grazed or is underutilized year after year?
    a. Is the forage quality on these sites adequate?
    b. How much will it increase your carrying capacity or lengthen your grazing season if these areas are used?
    c. How much is that additional forage worth?
3. Herding is likely to improve conditions on rangelands that contain miles of riparian areas with surrounding uplands that have ample forage.
4. Herding is less likely to be helpful in pastures with no riparian areas and gentle terrain. Also, if riparian areas are a small percentage of the pasture, it may be easier to fence them.

One Economic Analysis of Herding
On one allotment, the Forest Service demanded a change in grazing management due to degradation of riparian areas. Range economist, Neil Rimbey, looked at the cost of four different scenarios to reduce use in riparian areas. Output from the model dictated the number of cows and the amount of forage available for each scenario. The ranch typically ran around 300 head of mother cows and grazed the FS allotment from mid-June to the end of September. Here's what he found:

1. No early summer grazing (6/15 to 7/15) meant reducing the number of cows by 12, forage was reduced by 193 AUMs and net income was reduced by $9,064.
2. No late summer grazing - (9/1 - 9/30) meant reducing the number of cows by 24, forage was reduced by 324 AUMs, and net income was reduced by $1,941.
3. No summer grazing - (6/15 – 9/30) meant reducing the number of cows by 104, forage was reduced by 1,884 AUMs and net income was reduced by $11,526.
4. Herding every other day for two and a half months – (7/15 – 9/30) meant cattle could stay on the allotment through September. Cattle numbers increased by 19, and available forage increased by 336 AUMs. However, net income was reduced by $2,454 assuming FS grazing costs increased by $3.30/AUM due to the cost of the rider (labor, horse and vehicle use).

This analysis only looks at the costs of herding for one year and does not assume changes in behavior of cattle due to herding and culling cattle that refuse to use uplands. Nor does it assume any increases in animal performance as is often reported with LSLH. Over time, consistently moving cattle to uplands will likely require less time and effort as cows learn new places to forage and they are not bothered by herders as long as they're in the uplands. Their daughters (replacement heifers) will learn to forage in the uplands. They will acquire preferences for upland forage because dietary experiences early in life have a major effect on food preferences. Early dietary experiences can improve feed efficiency and intake, change the physiology, neurology and/or structure of the body and may even change gene expression.

How I can learn more about low-stress livestock handling?
Attending a workshop on LSLH is probably the best method to learn about LSLH. There are also a number of resources available:

Websites:
Budd Williams: www.stockmanship.com/
Tim Westfall: http://www.lowstressstockmanship.com/
Cattle Expressions: http://www.cattlexpressions.com/index.htm
Effective Stockmanship: http://www.effectivestockmanship.com

Books:
Stockmanship: A Powerful Tool For Grazing Lands Management by Steve Cote included in the resources folder of LSLH.
Moving 'Em: A Guide to Low Stress Animal Handling by Burt Smith

Low-Stress Cattle Handling DVD:
Order online: http://store.beefusa.org/Low-Stress-Cattle-Handling-DVD-P194C12.aspx
or call Grace Webb at 800-525-3085
Price: $35.00 or $20.00 for National Cattleman's Beef Association members.

Description of DVD:
Curt Pate, Montana Although there are many popular horse clinicians across the country today, not all are career cowboys and even fewer are cattle producers – Curt Pate is both. This Montana native understands proper cattle handling. He knows cattle production is a "for profit" business with increased economic benefits from handling cattle properly. Whether it be doctoring, gathering or sorting, Curt demonstrates how mounted cowboys can handle cattle in a manner that minimizes stress, to save time and horsepower, while maximizing cattle productivity.

Charlie Trayer, Kansas Charlie Trayer wears many hats – rancher, horseman, dog trainer, just to name a few. For more than 35 years, Charlie has managed the Cottonwood Ranch in Chase County, Kansas. Charlie invested in his first Hangin' Tree Cowdogs almost a decade ago as an alternative to hiring cowboys to work yearling cattle. He quickly found the dogs to be irreplaceable assets on the ranch. Today, Charlie not only raises and trains Hangin' Tree Cowdogs, he educates ranchers on using dogs in their cattle operations and on their proper handling and training.

Joel Ham, Texas Joel Ham is a 4th-generation rancher raised in West Texas who has extensive experience with cattle, sheep and horses. Joel was inspired to learn better stockmanship skills after meeting Bud and Eunice Williams in 1989. He makes his living using low-stress handling principles everyday…and is highly recommended as an expert by the master…Bud Williams. Joel is confident that low-stress handling techniques are economically prudent in many ways. His message is clear: "When your cattle handling skills actually reduce or remove stress…you save time, money and livestock – period. That's good business."