

# Public Lands Grazing: How to Be a Good Permittee and Steward of the Range

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Like many people who live in Utah and across the Intermountain West, I enjoy spending time in the backcountry hunting, fishing, and just enjoying the beauty of our part of the country. I appreciate seeing well-managed cattle on the mountain just as much as I do spotting elk or deer.

Federal and state-owned lands make up over 74% of Utah's 54 million acres. The vast majority of those acres support Utah's 340,000 cows. Millions of people also use these same public lands for hunting, fishing, ORV recreation, hiking, and camping. What do they think of when they see you and your cows on the range?

The partnership between regulatory agencies and cattle producers in the West is critical. Maintaining a positive working relationship is critical to the management of public lands. Ranchers can have a significant positive influence on productivity and long-term health of the range, as well as on public perception.

At the recent Western Ranch Management Academy seminar, ranchers and researchers discussed range management. Southern Utah Rancher and former Forest Service Range Specialist, John Reese discussed Being a Good Permittee. John has the unique perspective of having been both a regulator and a permit holder. With John's permission, I will share a few of my takeaways from his presentation.

First, it's always good to remember that grazing on public lands is not a right. It is a privilege. Although permits have value and are bought and sold, they can be revoked if the permittee fails to comply with the permit conditions. Run

your grazing operation as your grandkids will inherit it, and hopefully they will.

Second, infrastructure maintenance is the permittee's responsibility. That includes fence maintenance, gates, handling facilities, and water infrastructure. Functional and well-maintained infrastructure benefits not only the permit holder but also presents a positive image to the general public. It shows them you care about what you are doing and gives the impression of good stewardship.

Third, consistently communicate with the BLM or Forest Service range specialist. Always avoid trespass and non-compliance issues, but if and when they occur, be the first person your range specialist hears from. Nobody likes surprises. Consistent communication builds trust and leads to greater flexibility when needed. Your range specialist should be in your Favorites.

Lastly, be a good neighbor. Your actions with others reflect on your business including the public land you steward. Be involved in the local community. Develop positive relationships with adjacent landowners, other permittees, and the hunters, hikers, and bird watchers that you encounter as you go about your business. A friendly smile and a wave go a long way. The recreationist who sees you knows that you are a rancher. Make sure your encounter with them is positive. In a very real way, they are your landlord, and many of them see it that way.

I want to leave you with an excellent mantra that John Reese shared to close his presentation: "You become the Rancher you want to be as you make decisions and act like the Rancher you want to become." Thank you, John, for sharing your words of wisdom and allowing me to share your thoughts in this article.

Have a great summer and keep praying for rain!

Please feel free to reach out with any questions or comments.

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