

Case Study: Morgan Creek, Challis, Idaho

The Morgan Creek allotment was converted from season-long grazing to a rest-rotation system in 1972. A collaborative approach, considered state of the art at the time, improved upland conditions, but improvements in riparian conditions were not well documented or apparent.

Chinook salmon were added to the Federal Endangered Species List in 1992. Numerous requirements were put in place to ensure compliance under the Endangered Species Act. Permittees found it difficult to impossible to comply with the new requirements, which were developed without their participation.

By 1994 the management changes on the allotment resulted in:

- Up to 13 riders to patrol drainages each day to move cattle off riparian areas.
- Failing to meet grazing standards in 7 of 7 key areas.
- A 68% reduction in animal unit months (AUMs) on the allotment.
- Dissatisfaction in both the agricultural and environmental communities.
- An impasse between permittees, agencies, and others.

The Morgan Creek Team was formed. Through a combination of collaboration and low-stress stockmanship, it planned:

- On-the-ground management that emphasized shared vision and goals.
- Continuing to rest a third of the pastures, but with greater flexibility.
- Subdividing the three-pasture system into smaller grazing units divided by topography rather than fences.
- Maintaining stubble height standards within riparian areas.
- Active monitoring, including photo points, stream sediment, willow abundance, bank stability, and disturbance.
- Flexible management with ongoing adjustments as the grazing season progressed.

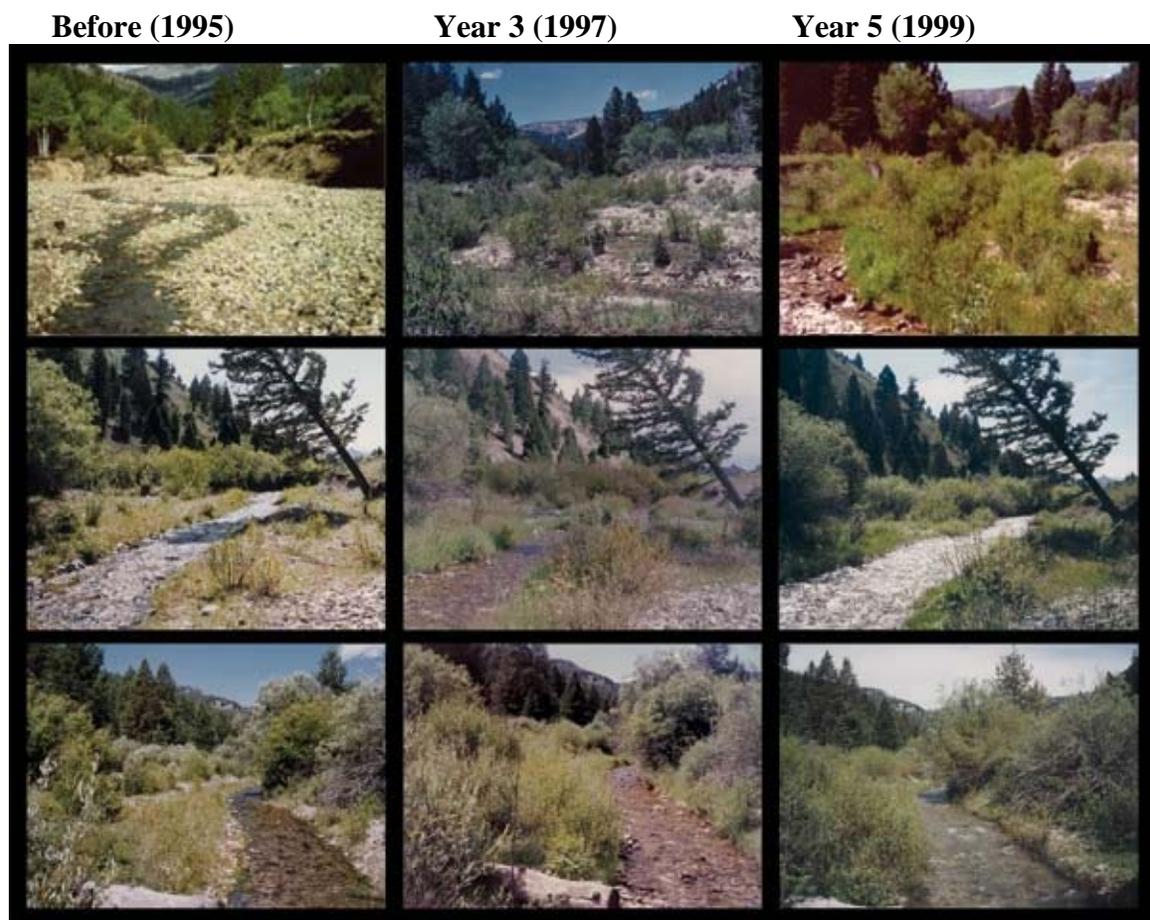
Results (See photos at the end of the section):

- Standards were met or exceeded on 8 of 11 key areas the first year; greater success was achieved in later years.
- Cattle were able to graze the full season.
- Consultation between interested parties was shorter and less contentious.
- Costs were decreased. The Morgan Creek Cattleman's Association saved \$10,000 in three months over one season, even with the cost of hiring two full-time riders.
- A positive environment for working together was established.
- Stress on both livestock and the environment was reduced.
- Livestock production increased; riparian conditions improved.
- The Forest Service received the Forest Service Chief's Award for Excellence in Rangeland Management.
- The system worked as long as there was institutional support and the collaborative process was followed.

Morgan Creek Team requirements for applying low-stress stockmanship:

- Use livestock to mimic impacts of prehistoric wild ungulates.
- Allow animals to bite a plant only one time.
- Adopt Bud William’s low-stress stockmanship techniques.
- Use livestock as a vegetation management tool.

Today the Morgan Creek Team still strives for sustainable resource management. Turnover in participating agency personnel and decreased institutional support in the collaborative process have created new obstacles for the group to overcome. As with any collaborative process, continued support by all parties is the key to long-term changes on the land.



Reference: Wyman, S., D. Bailey, M. Borman, S. Cote, J. Eisner, W. Elmore, B. Leinard, S. Leonard, F. Reed, S. Swanson, L. Van Riper, T. Westfall, R. Wiley, and A. Winward. 2006. Riparian area management: Grazing management processes and strategies for riparian-wetland areas. Tech. Ref. 1737-20. U.S. Depart. Interior, Bureau of Land Management, National Science and Technology Center, Denver, CO. 105 pp.