

MOB GRAZING

Assessing Its Impacts in Southern Oregon

What is “mob grazing”? Definitions vary widely, making it difficult to standardize discussions and research into the topic. For this trial, we used a minimum stock density of 200,000 pounds per acre. This density remained the same whether sheep or cattle were used, but far more sheep were needed to achieve the same impact. Many people practicing mob grazing use 500,000 or even 1 million pounds per acre!



The Trial: This was a three-year field trial with five co-operating producers. Two producers were in the Ashland area, two in Eagle Point and one in Central Point. One producer grazed sheep and the remaining four grazed cattle. There was a control at each location (Ashland, Eagle Point and Central Point). Results were analyzed based on changes at each site, with no comparisons done between sites. A variety of soil and forage factors were analyzed. However, animal performance and financial affects were beyond the scope of this trial.

Results: We were unable to find any statistical difference between areas that had been mob grazed and those that had been grazed using management intensive grazing. We analyzed a variety of soil factors including infiltration rate, bulk density (compaction), soil microbes (number of bacteria and fungi and ratios), and temperature. We also examined forage species and type (broadleaf or grass) and soil cover.

Observations: Although no statistical differences were noted, some differences were observed. For example, it was far easier to insert the soil probe into the mob plots (after the first year of the trial) than the other plots immediately adjacent. Mob plots, due to the taller forage and less frequent disturbance, did appear to increase pheasant counts. Also, the three producers with mob plots on their property did change management practices to “graze taller” (provided longer rest) than prior to the study.



The results of this trial do not conclusively support or contradict claims regarding mob grazing. Three years may not be long enough to create statistically measurable change. It is possible that higher stocking densities may result in faster change. It is also possible that different tests might show more change than those chosen for this study. Producers should carefully consider their goals and management skills prior to using this tool.