

Livestock management during drought

Drought years can create severe hardships for the livestock industry. Forage production is reduced, plant health is compromised and stocking rates are adjusted. The following range management options can help you get through a drought:

1. **Visually evaluate the available forage** remaining in each pasture. Use this information to determine locations for supplemental feeding areas or use electric fencing and attractants to improve livestock distribution.
2. **Move cattle to pastures** with pinegrass, sedge meadows, aspen stands or more northerly aspects to make more drought-resistant forage available to grazing livestock.
3. **Ensure that you meet the stubble height criteria** described in your Range Use Plan. Maintaining an adequate amount of plant residue will assist plant recovery and it is critical for mitigating successive years of drought.
4. **Poisonous plants** may be perceived as desirable forage by animals when they're hungry. Identify all areas containing poisonous plants and exclude cattle from them if possible.
5. **High-quality, accessible water** is extremely important to livestock under drought conditions. Consider developing all possible sources of water. Install water tanks, fence and pump dugouts, and drill wells. Hauling water to grazing areas may be a short-term option.
6. **Evaluate your options for partial destocking.** This could include: weaning your calves as early as possible; removing bulls; and pulling and selling cull cows and feeder animals early. This could potentially extend the time that breeding stock can stay on Crown range.
7. **Fire risk is high during drought periods.** Power equipment should be equipped with spark arrestors and basic firefighting equipment should be prepared and available for use. Consider using horses to redistribute your livestock instead of using all-terrain vehicles.
8. **Wildfire area restrictions** may be implemented by the Ministry of Forests, Lands and Natural Resource Operations due to wildfire hazards.
9. **Have a livestock evacuation plan** in place in case a wildfire threatens your range.
10. **Good range management will minimize the impacts of drought when it occurs.** To successfully mitigate the effects of a drought, producers need to know how drought will affect plants and livestock. Where feasible, adjust your range management practices.
11. **Keep records** of all changes to your grazing schedule, receipts for extra costs incurred and any extraordinary efforts you have taken to mitigate the drought.
12. **Contact district range staff** from the Ministry of Forests, Lands and Natural Resource Operations and tell them about any changes you have implemented to deal with drought conditions.