

Fixed Point Photographs

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You may have heard exciting stories about changes ranchers see from applying “rotational” grazing. Some say that they are seeing more cover, fewer weeds and desirable species grow where they’ve never seen them before. It could be that they see these changes because the range is actually improving. But sometimes the reason they see things they never saw before is because they never looked this closely. *If you want to know if your management is working, you must document range conditions.*

Monitoring and documenting changes doesn’t have to be complicated or difficult. As a minimum we suggest taking some pictures of key areas on the ranch once each year.

Pick sites where you anticipate change, or would like to see changes. For instance, you might select bare areas, eroded areas, heavy brush, or old moribund grass. You may also want to pick some sites to show your typical range in its typical condition.

Once you’ve found the right spot, mark it with a post. If you use steel posts, it’s a good idea to paint the top of the post white or to slip white PVC pipe over it so it will be easy to locate in the future. Since animals and birds tend to use posts as perches or as marking and rubbing posts, thus unduly influencing the immediate area, you’ll have to move out from the post to take your picture. Make a note recording the distance and direction you walked so you can walk to approximately the same spot next year.

Aim the camera toward a recognizable feature on the horizon. This will make it easier to locate the photo point location next year. Take the picture with approximately one third sky and two thirds landscape within your viewfinder. Now angle the camera downward at a 45 degree angle to get a close-up of the same site. Make sure you are far enough from the post so that the site is not abnormally disturbed. Always take these two photographs in the same order as you go from one site to the next so you’ll know which close-ups go with which landscape shots.

Establish 12 photo points on your property so you can take all the photos on one roll of film with 24 exposures. Use a roll of 36 when you first establish the points so you can take a shot of the photo point itself. That will make it a lot easier to find next year.

Keep a good description of the spot from which you take the photo point pictures. You may even want to make a little map showing the distance and direction of each photo point from permanent features like buildings and unique trees. It’s a good idea to include the compass bearing from landscape features.

Keep a photo album just for these pictures. The pictures may be worth more than a thousand words when it comes to assessing the impacts of your management. They also establish a history for your property and can help show others how you’ve used grazing to improve range health. Some clients use their pictures as evidence of their track record of good stewardship and range improvement to land owners with whom they are negotiating leases. Put the extra picture of the photo point site and the written description of where each photo point is located in the photo album.

Your foot prints out in the pasture are the best monitoring tool there is, but a camera is a close second.