

Grazing on the Tahoe National Forest

On any given day during grazing season, cattle and sheep amble across areas of the Tahoe National Forest, busy turning forage into food and fiber for people. At the same time, they are supporting local agriculture based economies and traditional lifestyles. Since the Forest Service's creation in 1905, Congress has authorized regulated grazing on national forests through permits. Public land grazing is an important part of local livestock ranches, often going back many generations for some families. In some cases the establishment of these family operated ranches pre-dates establishment of the Tahoe National Forest.

Visitors from all over the world travel to the Tahoe National Forest for camping, hiking, fishing, skiing, sightseeing, and other recreation opportunities. Sometimes, visitors encountering livestock in the woods are not aware that public land grazing plays a role in the Forest Service's multiple use work.

Grazing permits allow individuals or organizations the privilege of grazing their livestock on particular areas, called "grazing allotments," within the Tahoe National Forest. With public input and through land management plans, national forest managers determine what uses are feasible and appropriate for different areas. Grazing permits are awarded on lands suitable for grazing, based on applicants meeting certain requirements, including the capacity of a permittee to manage their livestock to maintain healthy ecosystems and minimize user conflicts. Land managers work closely with permittees to ensure specific, measurable rangeland condition standards are met. These standards are designed to achieve land management objectives for clean water, sustainable fish and wildlife habitat, scenic recreation opportunities, and healthy ecosystems.

All grazing permittees on the Tahoe National Forest have an active interest in the long-term health of their grazing allotments. In combination with grazing on their home ranches, most permittee families have been producing cattle or sheep for many generations. They understand national forests are used by many people for different reasons, and sometimes there are conflicts between users. It is in everyone's best interest to work cooperatively with all who enjoy the national forests, and to keep the land healthy for a variety of uses.

"Grazing management on the Tahoe National Forest is a collaborative effort involving landowners, land managers, permittees, universities, other agencies and the public," said Karen Hayden, District Ranger for the Yuba River Ranger District on the Tahoe National Forest. "Livestock grazing at an appropriate level is part of our mission. Please exercise caution when driving, hiking, mountain biking or engaging in other recreational activities in the vicinity of grazing animals and associated herd dogs, and please be respectful of permittee property."

For more information about the Tahoe National Forest Range Program, you can contact David Fournier in Nevada City at (530) 478-6238, or Brianne Boan in Sierraville at (530) 994-3401.