

INTEGRATED RIPARIAN AREA MANAGEMENT ON THE TULE LAKE ALLOTMENT, LASSEN COUNTY¹

Bill Flourney, Don Lancaster, Paul Roush²

Abstract: The Bureau of Land Management, Alturas Resource Area with the cooperation of the Tule Lake Allotment permittees and private landowners has embarked on a riparian enhancement program for the allotment which crosses many traditional boundaries and barriers in land management and land management planning. Currently in the plan development stages the concept provides for a multi-disciplinary planning document which includes all program management in one plan, the development of which is guided by a thirteen member steering committee drawn from the general public representative of a broad range of resource interests. The planning concept recognizes the interplay of all resources in the proper and effective management of riparian systems as well as the importance of proper management of adjacent private lands. The private lands controlled by the permittees in the allotment (10,433 acres) will be included in the planning effort and public access to these parcels will be guaranteed.

I would like to share with you today a large-scale riparian improvement project we have undertaken on BLM and private lands near Madeline, California. I would like to emphasize at the outset that we have actually accomplished very little on the ground so far, but we have a unique opportunity to make major strides in enhancing our riparian areas, improving our wildlife habitats, and providing more feed for our livestock all in one stroke. We believe this is possible because we are working in a large allotment with lots of diversity in range and wildlife habitats; we have developed a planning process which can incorporate all of our needs; and we have a dedicated group of individuals from both the private and public sectors who are working hard to see the process through.

Project Location

The Tule Lake Allotment lies in Modoc and Lassen Counties, east of U.S. Highway 395 between the towns of Likely and Madeline.

The allotment is managed by the Alturas Resource Area of the Susanville District, Bureau of Land Management. It encompasses 59,600 acres of land including

10,433 acres of private land and a 16,950 acre Wilderness Study Area.

This allotment is made up of relatively high elevation topography flanking the southern and western tip of the Warner Mountains. The elevation varies from 4,500 feet in the north to 6,200 feet in the east, while the peak of Tule Mountain rises to 7,098 feet.

Allotment History

This allotment lies in the direct path of the historical major sheep trail to the Madeline Rail head of the late eighties, early nineteen hundreds and was first managed by the BLM in 1938. In the late 1950's a major reduction of 50 percent of the permitted livestock was made by BLM and a rest-rotation grazing system implemented. The system did not work in this allotment as all pastures could not be grazed late in the season due to lack of late water. Also high elevation pastures could not be used early due to snow conditions. Late water was available only in the perennial riparian areas which were, by necessity, grazed late each year. This resulted in extensive degradation of the riparian zone. Cedar Creek, the primary perennial creek which flows into Tule Reservoir crosses on private lands and is now entrenched in a 10'-20' cutbank. The creek flows across the hardpan and supports virtually no riparian vegetation. Former large spawning runs of both rainbow and brown trout have virtually disappeared. Compounding the grazing and riparian management problem was the heavy encroachment of juniper and proliferation of big sagebrush in the uplands which curbed forage production and availability. Recognizing the dwindling carrying capacity, the operators took an additional 30 percent voluntary reduction in the late 70's at which time a deferred-rotation system was initiated. This system alternated early use between the two early pastures and used the lowland pasture after seed ripe each year. This system has been adhered to for over ten years and has resulted in modest riparian/meadow improvement in the early use pastures and has improved aspen regeneration throughout the allotment. However, the basic problems in the allotment persist; juniper and big sagebrush continue to dominate the uplands and the perennial riparian systems continue to deteriorate.

¹ Presented at the California Riparian Systems Conference; September 22-24, 1988; Davis, California.

² Rancher, Likely, California; Farm Advisor, U.C. Cooperative Extension, Modoc County; Wildlife Biologist, BLM, Alturas, California.

BLM Riparian Initiative

In 1986 the BLM Washington Office reviewed its riparian policy and directed each State Director to select certain riparian "Demonstration Areas" to evaluate and demonstrate riparian improvement techniques. Then in 1987 the Bureau issued an updated Riparian Area Management Policy which reaffirmed BLM's commitment to maintain, restore, and improve riparian areas (U.S. Department of Interior, Bureau of Land Management; Instruction Memorandum No. 87-279; September 30, 1988). The Susanville BLM District Manager, reacting to this riparian emphasis, selected the Alturas Resource Area to undertake a "Riparian Initiative." The Resource Area expanded the "Demonstration Area" idea. Though the development of individual riparian projects is a good means of demonstrating techniques and accomplishments on a small scale, we believe it does not demonstrate the broad range of resource interaction and spectrum of user groups affected by and involved in riparian management. The riparian issue needs to be addressed on a broad front which includes meadows, ephemeral drainages, seeps and springs, perennial streams, and of equal importance - effective management of the uplands to provide forage and high quality water yield. We found that to address riparian management properly we needed to look at entire watersheds or complexes of watersheds to see how all resource use affected or was being affected by riparian management. The Tule Lake Allotment was chosen as the first Demonstration Area; it has diverse riparian systems to work with; it has a somewhat problematic history with respect to managing livestock; and it has permittees and private landowners willing to cooperate.

Integrated Planning

To facilitate the planning process for this expanded riparian concept, traditional planning modes needed to be discarded in favor of an integrated planning process. Extending the traditional role of the range conservationists and the rancher planning for the livestock management, the wildlife biologist planning for wildlife management, the hydrologist for watershed management, etc., the process will include on-the-ground strategies for all resource management in a single document. The plan, in addition to crossing the boundaries between resource disciplines, crosses the private/public land boundaries as well. In the Tule Lake Integrated Resource Management Plan the entire 10,433 acres of private lands will be fully included in planning and project implementation.

Public Involvement

Too often the debate over proper management of riparian areas or other habitats takes place only between the rancher and BLM. The remaining spectrum of user groups which may be equally concerned with the proper management of these resources is not heard from or involved in these decisions. To broaden the input into the planning and decision-making process, the Alturas Area Manager appointed a thirteen person Riparian Steering Committee to insure that all aspects of the riparian issue are heard and understood. The committee includes two permittees, and representatives each from Cal Trout, DFG fisheries, DFG big game, California Four-Wheel Drive Association, U.C. Cooperative Extension, local government, Regional Water Quality Control Board, SCS, Organized Sportsmen of Modoc County, Audubon and Sierra Club, and a grant writing specialist. The committee serves as a vehicle for interest group representatives to participate in the shared decision-making process and provides a means for getting information to the public on the benefits of proper riparian management. All phases of plan preparation will involve the Steering Committee from the identification of issues, inventory, survey and design of projects, soliciting of funding, and implementation. The project has attracted the interest of the Izaak Walton League Public Lands Restoration Task Force and The Nature Conservancy who have both attended Steering Committee field trips and are eager to participate in the process.

The Integrated Plan document will carry the signatures of each of the Steering Committee members, indicating the plan is a consensus, supported by the group as a whole and individually. Funding will be solicited in the same manner. Funds will be sought toward implementation of the whole project package rather than for each separate resource.

Project Status

The Steering Committee met first in July, 1987. The mission of the group was determined and a field tour of the area was provided for a general overview. The Alturas Resource Area staff drafted issues for the plan which they presented to the public. These issues were revised by the Steering Committee in June, 1988. The committee directed the Alturas staff to complete an inventory and a draft plan for their review in mid September. The inventory has just been completed and alternatives for the draft plan are currently being formulated.

General features of the draft plan are as follows. Pasture 1, an uplands pasture with very little riparian habitat is a BLM Wilderness Study Area and can not receive significant treatment until final disposition of the wilderness issue by Congress sometime in the 1990's. Pasture 3, the second upland pasture, is recommended to be split into riparian and upland segments. Extensive mechanical juniper removal in the riparian portion coupled with short duration "flash grazing" which removes livestock when meadow utilization reaches prescribed levels will improve water yield and improve meadow cover. The upland portion will receive extensive prescribed burning to provide more forage to support livestock. In Pasture 2, the lowlands pasture with the large perennial drainage Cedar Creek, the permittees who own the private lands along the creek, propose to remove all livestock from the riparian zone through a huge enclosure and to work with BLM to provide a public easement for access along the creek for enjoyment of the recovered fishery. Extensive prescribed burning and mechanical juniper clearing along with further division of the pasture into four separate units, will increase upland forage production and provide a means for resting portions of this pasture which to date is being grazed each year.

The plan further includes specific meadow and spring enhancement through enclosures and water developments, new water sources for livestock, site-specific aspen enhancement prescriptions including juniper removal, prescribed burning, and temporary and permanent enclosures, and extensive mitigation of wildlife habitats such as bitterbrush and mahogany in vegetative treatment areas.

Summary And Conclusions

At this time all of these measures are tentative and subject to review by the Steering Committee in October.

In closing, what we have already come to realize is that the decline of our fisheries, the decline of our riparian systems, the decline of upland water yield, and decadence of browse and forage for both livestock and wildlife are all interrelated. Once the livestock operator, the wildlife advocate and the other interest groups begin to visualize this demise together and begin talking about it in terms they have in common, they find themselves on common ground and receptive to working toward the same goals. This is the essence of the whole effort we have undertaken in the Tule Lake Allotment. Identify your shared problems and their solutions, share the decision-making process, pool your resources to get the work done, then share your successes (and failures) with the public and stimulate them to participate.