

Monitoring for Success

–Kim Barker

Monitoring is the key to knowing what you are doing right and what you are doing wrong. Failure to monitor makes it impossible to learn from our mistakes. If we do not monitor, we don't know what we did wrong, or when we did it. Planned cell grazing for the purpose of improving land is like flying an airplane. It takes practice, you must know what to do with the information you are constantly receiving, and things can happen very fast.

It is important to monitor the land to see that what you planned to happen actually is happening. If it is not, replanning immediately is essential. It is important to monitor finances so you don't get to the end of the year and wonder what went wrong. Monthly monitoring keeps the profits on track. It is also important to monitor socially, or the people. People are the key to the success of the other two pieces we are monitoring. If the people do not understand what is going on, they may be unintentionally sabotaging the plan. The people I am talking about may be family, spouse, employees, or even YOU!

Monitoring simply means deciding what early warning criteria you will use to determine if you are on pace to meet your goal, and then looking at those indicators to see what is happening. On the land, it may be amount of litter on the ground, bare ground, species shift, seedlings, erosion, or most likely all of the above. It is a good idea to do detailed monitoring once a year, but to pick out a handful of indicators you will look at every time you move livestock. Financially, monitoring monthly is usually adequate, unless you know markets are falling, or production is lagging or you have reason to know future cash flow is at risk. Socially, make sure everyone is on the

same page, all the time. Temporary lapses can cause serious problems, and can turn into deeper problems, especially if not handled quickly.

Whatever form your monitoring takes, make sure it is something you will actually do. It does no good to choose an elaborate plan for monitoring that gives you tons of good information, if it is too complicated to do quickly and easily. It is better to choose a simple set of indicators that can be checked quickly and easily that tell you the trends without a lot of time spent in the intricate details that can bog you down.

Success is in the plan you develop for your ranch, and the success of the plan is in the monitoring. Define the terms of your success by developing the plan, then follow through with monitoring to make sure the plan is getting done, and to make sure that the plan was correct to begin with.

Edward De Bono wrote, "Progress comes from thinking about things that are not problems." Planned grazing is thinking about ways to avoid problems, to solve the ones that can't be avoided, and to think about the things that are not problems so progress can be made.

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See p. 44 for Barker's presentation, Introduction to Planned cell Grazing: How I Got Started.