

HISTORY OF STOCK-REDUCTION PROGRAM ON NAVAJO RESERVATION

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(Supporting papers: Outline of meetings of Navajo Tribal Council, Fort Wingate, 1933, to Fort Defiance, 1936; resolutions adopted by the Navajo Tribal Council, Fort Wingate, July 7-8, 1933; resolutions of tribal council, Tuba City, Nov. 1, 1933; resolutions of tribal council, Fort Defiance, March 12, 13, 1934; resolutions of tribal council, Crownpoint, April 9, 11, 1934; resolutions covering contract for sale of goats, Keams Canyon, July 10, 12, 1934; minutes of meeting, tribal council, Keams Canyon, 1934.)

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By Carl Beck, Acting Chief of Extension, Navajo Reservation

Since the beginning of this century the Navajos and the Indian Department have been fighting for more land to care for the rapidly increasing population. Outside interests, because of the steadily growing need for range, have closed all doors to expansion and have forced the Navajos off range immemorially used by them and confined them to the reservation which at the present contains approximately 17,000,000 acres, a large part of which is barren or non-productive range.

In 1928 the Navajos owned a total of 1,100,000 sheep and goats, 65,000 cattle, and 45,000 horses. The sheep and goat count at this time was fairly accurate, being taken from dipping records. The cattle count was very roughly estimated. The horse count, due to the dourine campaign which was in effect at that time, was fairly accurate and the number had decreased materially from several years previous due to the large number of horses condemned and killed by the Government through the dourine program. The reducing plant which had been established in Gallup, N. Mes., had absorbed 3,000 horses and burros up until that time.

At the tribal council at Leupp in November of 1928, range conditions were discussed for the first time by the Indian Department and the Navajo Tribal Council. Assistant Commissioner Merritt represented the Indian Service at this meeting. It was agreed by all present that the range of the Navajo country had reached a very critical condition; that something must be done to protect the depleted area by both the Navajos who were utilizing the range and the Government who was developing water. A resolution was proposed and

2294

WR

and adopted by the council, at that time, which limited the number of sheep and goats owned by any one family to 1,000 head, or if more than this number were owned by one family a grazing fee of 15 cents per head per year would be paid. This resolution has never been carried out. Bob Martin, from Shiprock, who is very strongly against any reduction program at the present time, stated at the meeting that some Navajos owned 1,000 to 2,000 sheep and goats and that he was willing to cut his own herd to 500 head and not "try to hog everything." The delegates from all parts of the reservation urged that water development be expanded and more work be done by the Department in developing water on those areas which could not be used otherwise. This would give relief to overgrazed areas around the water holes already developed.

In spite of the fact that general range conditions in 1931 were better than in any previous year since 1921, it was very evident that very soon some drastic and definite means of range control should be effected.

Mr. Zeh, regional forester, had made a general reconnaissance of the Navajo country in 1931. He very urgently recommended that a large water-development program be put into effect immediately. According to his figures, there was 1 sheep unit to every 8 surface acres on the entire area. After deducting the barren and waste lands the actual range acres available for use were materially lower. His estimate at that time was that there should be not more than 1 sheep unit to 20 to 30 surface acres on the entire area.

When Mr. Collier became Commissioner in 1933, the Navajos and all of the men working with them were well aware of the fact that stock-reduction and range-management practices were more necessary than ever and that something would have to be done immediately to save the Navajo country from total destruction. Prior to Mr. Collier's appointment as Commissioner many recommendations had been made, such as rodent-control projects, elimination of excess horses, elimination of large numbers of goats, development of water on a large scale, education of Navajos in land management and economical handling of livestock, improvement of livestock through culling and breeding methods, but nothing definite had ever been done. We knew that all of these things were absolutely necessary. Range conditions had become steadily worse, due largely to market conditions and to the type of permits which had been issued to the stock buyers by Government agents. Practically all of these permits prohibited the purchase of breeding stock which tended to increase the number of stock. The market, due to the depression, was very poor and buyers did not attempt to remove any stock from the reservation; therefore, a tremendous surplus was continually piling up. By this time not only the range around the water holes

but very large areas had been trampled down and grubbed off to the extent that nothing but absolute rest and moisture could bring them back. Heavy dust storms had whipped these denuded areas into sand dunes, arroyos and bad lands appeared which, by natural means or otherwise, can never be brought back to the rolling hills or valleys covered with grass sod which were common in times past. Suddenly the Nation had become aware of the fact that soil erosion was really a national menace and that the Navajo area was one of the areas which should receive immediate attention. Engineers had already reported that Boulder Dam would be rapidly filled by dirt and sediment from the Navajo country unless drastic steps were taken to check soil erosion on the entire drainage of the Colorado River.

At the council meeting at Fort Wingate in July 1933, the first council meeting held after Mr. Collier had become Commissioner, the tribal council adopted a resolution unanimously approving the Mexican Springs demonstration area to be developed by the Soil Conservation Service.

At the council meeting held at Tuba City in November of 1933 the general program of Mr. Collier and his associates was put before the tribal council for approval. Emergency conservation work had already started on the reservation and due to years of hunger and want, almost a hundred percent of the employable Navajos sought work. Their expressions to the Commissioner were entirely appreciative of the things that had already been accomplished in regard to their welfare.

At this time the reduction of livestock was definitely brought before the tribal council with the proposal that they adopt (1) a resolution sanctioning a widespread reduction program; (2) that an attempt be made to secure additional land for them; (3) that soil conservation carry on with their vast undertaking among the Navajos; (4) that emergency conservation work continue; (5) that the day-school program, which has subsequently been completed, should be started. The above, expenditures were promised by the Commissioner in return for the Navajo's cooperation in a livestock reduction and range-management program. Tom Dodge, chairman of the council, urged that the Navajos adopt the resolution and to take the initiative on range control and soil erosion matters rather than to expect the Government to do so, since the Indians were the ones primarily interested. A chart was shown to the council which explained that through the reduction program the Indian's income would not be decreased because of the vast amounts of money being expended in wages. Also that livestock improvement would increase the income from livestock per head and this would more than off-set the income derived from the low standard of stock which would be sold through reduction measures.

Arrangements were made through Mr. Collier and the relief administration to buy 100,000 head of sheep from the Navajos immediately following this meeting at Tuba City in November 1933. Prices to be paid for these sheep were discussed in detail. Due to the exceptionally low prices on the market at that time, \$1 to \$1.50 was offered for ewes and \$2.25 to \$3 for wethers. Chee Dodge encouraged the purchase of good breeding ewes at an increase in price, explaining that if culls were taken no material reduction could be made, because the Navajos would sell only old ewes and non-productive stock. However, due to the prices set by the relief administration an increased price was impossible. Therefore, the culling of the herds which Mr. Dodge had warned them against turned out as he had predicted and actually no reduction was made.

The quotas for the different reservations were Northern, 20,000 head; Southern, 32,000 head; Eastern, 15,000; Western, 15,000; Hopi, 10,000; and Leupp, 8,000. No definite plan was decided upon by the council as to whether these sheep should be bought entirely from large herds; however, this was indicated but seemingly left up to the different reservations and chapters to work out. With the money available, and the Government ready to start buying immediately, the proposition of selling was first placed before the Navajos at a Yabechai dance in the Bodaway country west of Tuba City by Superintendent Balmer of the Western Navajo Reservation. The large owners very flatly refused to make all the reduction from their herds. After an all-night discussion, it was agreed by a council member, Mr. Bancroft, and other leaders present that every Navajo should sell 10 percent of his sheep, at least 75 percent of which should be ewes and the balance wethers. This same agreement became widespread immediately over the entire reservation, since the large owners consistently refused to make the total reduction from their flocks and felt that everyone owning sheep should sell on a percentage basis. Their argument was that the Navajos owning small flocks of sheep were the ones who were getting full advantage of the money being spent on the reservation; that the larger owners did not need the work nor relief. One Government man buying sheep during this campaign from the most remote section of the reservation found that many Indians did not realize that there was a tribal organization having the power and authority which was invested in the Navajo Tribal Council. The women were especially resentful, feeling that the disposition of their stock was a personal matter, and that no one had the right to promise the Government that the Navajos would sell.

This first attempt at reduction was a complete failure, the enforcement of which was left in the hands of the tribal council. It merely took stock from the smaller owners, who should not have sold, and took cull stock from the larger owners, where the real reduction

2297

WR

should have been made. By thus providing a market for cull stock, he was able to hold his herd to the highest possible productive point.

It also made the entire tribe suspicious of the Government's program. The people, not realizing the necessity for an intelligent and planned reduction, saw in the removal of livestock a loss of income which, in their mind, was not compensated by millions being spent in the land rehabilitation and water development. They believed that since the money being paid the men was being spent almost as rapidly as it was earned, that they were not being given anything upon which they could depend permanently for a livelihood. Livestock, not money, is their measure of wealth.

Approximately 90,000 sheep were bought the winter of 1933-34, which was 10,000 head under the quota. Another council meeting was held at Fort Defiance, March 12-13, 1934. The Navajos were told that a further reduction would be necessary in order that the Indian Department could go before Congress and ask for additional funds to buy land for the Navajos. It was suggested that this further reduction be taken up mostly by the selling of goats. The deplorable existing range conditions were brought out by the Commissioner, Mr. Stewart, Mr. Marshall, and Mr. Zeh. They stated that if range management was not effected destruction of the range was inevitable. Reduction had consistently been fought by practically all members of the tribe, and even though the council members realized that they must cooperate with the Department in saving the range of their people, they knew they would be severely criticized by their people when they returned home if they made any concessions in the matter. It was amazing to realize to what extent the entire tribe had become conscious of their tribal organization by this time, and the council members had opinions of their constituents in regard to reduction and would not adopt a resolution at that time without first consulting their people as to means and ways of disposing of the goats. A resolution was adopted, however, in part, which stated that the Navajo council agreed that erosion control and range control should be carried on as explained by the Commissioner and his staff, and further stated that reduction as explained by the Commissioner and his staff should take place with the understanding that the council would return to their people in order to explain the proposal so that the Navajo people might consider the matter and devise ways of effecting the stock- or goat-reduction plan.

A council meeting was held at Crown Point, N. Mex., April 9-11, 1934, at which time it was agreed that 150,000 goats would be sold by the Navajos and the means of selling would be worked out by the Washington office.

WR 2298

Another council meeting was held at Keams Canyon, July 10-12, 1934, at which time funds had been secured from the Relief Administration to purchase 150,000 goats and 50,000 sheep. The Navajos had agreed to sell the 150,000 goats, but the selling of 50,000 sheep was optional. Not even the council members realized the criticism which would come from the Navajos, especially the women, from all parts of the reservation. Apparently all preparations had been made to carry out this goat-buying program, with the final agreement that the Navajos would sell 50 percent of their goats at \$1 per head to the Relief Administration and that these goats should be she stock. It was planned that these goats would be delivered to the packing plants in small lots between September and December of 1934. Men in the field and the Navajos cooperated in this buying program; but since the goats were a long distance from shipping points and range and water conditions unfavorable, it was almost impossible to deliver the goats to the railroad regularly as had been anticipated. At times more goats were delivered at one time than the packing houses could take care of; therefore, permission was received for the Navajos themselves to slaughter as many goats as they could use. Goats were slaughtered by the wagonloads and the meat was jerked and used by the Navajos for food. Others were shot and left in heaps to rot. In Navajo Canyon 3,500 head were shot at one time. This created a bad effect upon the Navajos, who have always looked to sheep and goats for their subsistence. Men in the field realized that these goats had been held on very poor range and were not fit for human consumption but, nevertheless, it was regarded as inexcusable waste by the Navajos. Through this campaign goats were reduced from 294,851 in 1934 to 146,507 in 1935. The Navajos also sold voluntarily approximately 50,000 sheep during this campaign.

In the fall of 1935 money was made available through the Relief Administration to buy additional sheep and goats from the Navajos. These sales were not preceded by a definite agreement with the Council and the Navajos only sold 13,314 head of goats and 13,866 head of sheep other than regular sales made to the traders.

The total reduction on sheep and goats made from the time they were dipped in 1930 until they were dipped in 1935, due to the losses in the severe winter of 1931-32, the reduction program, and natural sales was from 1,297,589 to 944,910, a reduction of 60.8 percent in goats and 28.9 percent in sheep.

From this summary the following pertinent facts are a matter of record:

1. In 1928 the tribal council agreed that a reduction in stock was necessary; that a water-development program affecting the

entire reservation should be put into operation; that the Navajos would further cooperate in getting rid of excess horses. A resolution was adopted by the council at this time whereby any Navajo family owning over 1,000 head of sheep should pay 15 cents per head per year in excess of the 1,000 head. This regulation has never been put into effect.

2. In 1933 at the first council meeting after Mr. Collier became Commissioner a resolution was adopted whereby the soil conservation program was endorsed and the experiment station at Mexican Springs to be established.

3. At the tribal council meeting in Tuba City in late November 1933 the "Great Program", including the establishing of a central agency, the approval of proposed land purchases, and the vast amounts of money which would subsequently be spent on the reservation, the council agreed to cooperate and urge their people to follow the advice of the administration in a stock-reduction program.

4. At the council meeting at Fort Defiance, March 12-13, 1934, another resolution was adopted whereby the council agreed that the erosion-control and range-control program should be carried on as explained by the Commissioner and his staff, which would involve the sale of goats and sheep in the year 1934, and in which agreement the Navajos were to sell at least 80 percent of their lamb crop, or their equivalent. This part of the agreement has never been carried out. The goat- and sheep-buying campaign was carried out but it left a bad effect upon many of the Navajos because it was provided that the large owners among the Navajos were in control and that a reduction program at that time or any other time, worked out by them or the council, would not be fair to the smaller owners; or, in other words, 90 percent of the members of the tribe. The voluntary stock sales of 1935 also show that the smaller owners are the people who have consistently made the sacrifices in livestock. Large owners were not forced by this agreement to stand the reduction which was made. The general and effective sheep-breeding and improvement program had been mentioned and recommended continually but had never been put into effect. The only funds obtained for this purpose to date have been the meager allotments made from reimbursable funds. This should tie into reduction 100 percent. To put the Navajo country under a range-control system which will be in the least degree effective, a land-management stock-improvement program is being launched, the provisions of which will have to be made by men who thoroughly understand conditions yet who are not interested in person or class conditions which now exist among the Navajo people, but which will be for the economic salvation of the Navajo Tribe.

Funds should be made available for a widespread systematic breeding project. The Government would have absolute control of all rams as to kind and type. Thus far it has been haphazard, with some showing of improvement to some flocks; but as to a uniform type and lambing times there has been absolutely nothing worked out. It would be impossible to accomplish this through Indians or their organizations. It must be done by the Government in a uniform undertaking.

WR 2301