

Ass't Comm'r  
EBM

Southern Navajo Agency,  
Fort Defiance, Arizona,  
April 12, 1930.

The Commissioner of Indian Affairs,  
Washington, D. C.

Dear Sir:

Reference is made to Office letter of above citation, dated April 3, 1929, and to the transcript of the proceedings of the General Navajo Tribal Council held at the Leupp Indian School, Leupp, Arizona, November 12 and 13, 1928.

A study of these proceedings discloses that at least 50 per cent of the time the Council was taken up with questions pertaining to the Navajo livestock business, and to range management problems. Of the sixteen topics suggested by Mr. Meritt for discussion by the Council, six of them were concerning livestock and range.

Number one of these suggestions is "Overgrazing in the Navajo Country, and Steps Necessary for Proper Conservation of the Range." During the past two years this question has received a great amount of my attention. It has been necessary for me to observe and study our range conditions through several seasons in order to be in a position to make corrective recommendations.

As brought out in the testimony of Council members at the Council meeting, the livestock business constitutes about 90 per cent of the Navajos' income and livelihood. To maintain this industry is no doubt the most vital problem of the Navajos. As stated by the former Assistant Commissioner, Mr. Meritt, the Navajo population has increased by 400 per cent since 1868, and their livestock has increased from a few small herds and bands to 1,100,000 head of sheep and goats, 65,000 head of cattle and 45,000 horses. Their land area has not increased in proportion to increases in population and livestock. While this is true that land additions have been made through Executive Orders and leases, no great amount of range has been added, and long before the Executive Order and lease additions were made, the Navajos were using these lands.

The figures quoted above are for the entire Navajo country. The Southern Navajo reservation has had its proportionate share of the increases in both population and livestock, and the range conditions which obtain over the Navajo country, as brought out and well described by the Council members, apply particularly to the Southern Navajo jurisdiction.

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It has been thought for a number of years that our range was overgrazed, but as is quite natural, one does not realize the seriousness of a situation until he sets out to investigate a particular thing.

In accordance with the suggestion of Mr. Merritt, and with a desire to formulate a plan or policy aiming to correct this overgrazed condition, and to stabilize the livestock business on the Southern Navajo reservation, I have been gathering information on range conditions. The field force of this jurisdiction has been instructed to carefully observe range and livestock conditions over the entire reservation, and to report their findings to me.

The reports from the farmers and livestock men are to the effect that the average lamb crop ranges from 35 per cent to 45 per cent. A lamb crop of such low percentage reflects quite vividly the range condition, and is accounted for by the fact that during the gestation period of the ewes, the feed is so scarce that the ewes are reduced in flesh and vitality to such an extent that they are unable to bear the strain of reproducing.

The wool crop is also far below what is considered average by a white sheep man. The average fleece weighs 3 to 4 pounds, while among sheep raisers off the reservation, a 7 pound fleece is the average. The matter of producing heavier fleece has been partially corrected by the introduction of better rams.

The clip of mohair averages 1 pound per goat. The same corrective measures have been taken to increase the mohair clip as have been taken to increase the wool clip. However, regardless of how highly bred the stock is, it is impossible to increase and maintain a reasonable lamb crop and wool clip without sufficient feed. In view of this it is believed that our first problem is to bring our range back to its maximum forage production capacity before encouraging the introduction of more highly bred stock.

The Forestry personnel on this jurisdiction is greatly concerned over the grazing condition, as reflected by the condition of the tree seedlings over the entire timbered area. Forestry, being charged with the responsibility of harvesting the present crop of timber, and providing for future crops, feels that the present methods of handling livestock must be changed in order to assure the growing of timber for future cutting. Forestry estimates that the timberlands have been overgrazed for the past twenty years, as but very little reproduction of any age under twenty years can be found on the timbered area, and that which is found is so badly mutilated by sheep and goat grazing that it is doubtful if it will ever grow into trees of commercial size. This in itself, in view of the logging operations which will begin on the Defiance Plateau Timber Unit this summer, makes it imperative that measures to correct the grazing abuses be worked out and put into effect at the very earliest possible date.

Further reference is here made to the talk given before the Council meeting by Mr. D. H. Wattson, Director of Agriculture at that time, appearing on page 10 of the report. Mr. Wattson has very ably presented the grazing situation, and has suggested remedies. Mr. Guy Hobgood, the present Director of Agriculture, with headquarters at Fort Defiance, has been over a large portion of this reservation, and thoroughly agrees with Mr. Wattson in his views on the grazing situation. Mr. Hobgood is doing very good work in establishing experimental plots over the reservation, on which he hopes to be able to demonstrate what farm crops, and particularly forage crops, can be raised. This with a view to raising crops for feed, and thus relieve the present overgrazed condition of the range. Mr. Hobgood states he is confident that the Navajo people will be financially ahead if they reduce their herds and flocks to the point where the range will provide sufficient feed, thereby tending to increase the lamb crop, and, by better breeding, increasing the wool clip. Experiments in raising forage are being conducted at different altitudes on the reservation. We are hoping that these will be successful, and, if so, will, of course, tend to relieve the heavy demands made on the range.

At present sheet and gully erosion is taking place everywhere. For this feature of the range condition you are referred to the attached copy of a letter addressed to me by Mr. A. H. Womack of the Indian Irrigation Service, dated August 29, 1929. Mr. Womack has been in the Navajo country since 1914. He being a very careful observer, and a man in whom I have the utmost confidence, I feel that his letter gives a true and concise picture of the effects of overgrazing on the soil conditions, and ultimately on the Navajo people, as it is a fact that under the present population distribution, they can not be permanently lifted above their present state when their chief resource is rapidly decreasing. However, as water development work progresses, it is believed that better use of the range can be made, and with the aid of a reconnaissance and range management plan providing for seasonal use, and deferred and rotation grazing, that some of the damage already done can be corrected.

I have attempted to set forth the range condition on this reservation as seen by these members of our organization who are most familiar with the situation. In view of the foregoing statements, the following remedies for the correction of the situation are urgently recommended:

1st. That a range reconnaissance of the entire reservation be made at the earliest possible opportunity. In the range and livestock business, it is as necessary to know what the resources are, as in any other business - what the resources (forage) are, and what the market (livestock) is, and where located. To obtain this information, a reconnaissance of the range must be made.

2nd. Following the reconnaissance, a range management plan must be made, using the information gathered by the reconnaissance.

In order to build up the range to its potential productive ability, plans for utilizing the range must be worked out so that those portions

of the range which are most in need of a rest can be relieved; seasonal use made of winter and summer ranges; water developments completed in order to use range which is now unavailable because of lack of stock water; salting, etc. These and <sup>many</sup> other features of range use would be provided for in a range management plan.

3rd. The creation of the position of Range Examiner on this reservation, who would have charge of working the plan and improving it.

The range and livestock industry on this reservation is so large that the placing of a competent technical Range Examiner here for permanent duty is justified. No other Navajo activity is comparable to his livestock industry, and no other activity is in as great a danger of destruction as is the livestock industry.

A copy of a letter addressed to the Deputy Supervisor of Forests of this jurisdiction, from the District Forester of District 3, of the U. S. Forest Service at Albuquerque, New Mexico, designated G-Cooperation, Indian Service, and dated March 19, 1930, is attached hereto. This letter sets forth in detail the procedure followed in making a reconnaissance, cost of working up the data obtained, and suggests a way of training a personnel for conducting the work. It is suggested that if your Office can not send a reconnaissance crew on to this reservation this year, that advantage be taken of the offer by the Forest Service to take men from our Service as trainees. These men to be later used on the work here.

I earnestly urge that the recommendations contained herein be given your careful consideration.

Very truly yours,

John G. Hunter,  
Superintendent.

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cc: H. J. Hagerman, Special Commissioner,  
C. E. Ferris, Supervisor of Indian Industries.