

COPY

DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
 United States Indian Service

Polacca, Ariz.
 August 29, 1929.

Mr. John G. Hunter,
 Supt. So. Navajo Agency,
 Ft. Defiance, Arizona.

Dear Mr. Hunter:

Referring to our recent conversation, it would seem to me, that the general reservation conditions are about as follows:

Just at the present we are blessed with something near a normal growth of grass as compared with a growth of a few years ago, which is the first normal growth of Grammar grass, (which is the main dependable forage for stock growing in the Navajo country) for the past three or four years.

It is well understood that this country has suffered from a lack of precipitation for the past few years, which is believed to be what is known as the last half of a cycle, as our weather records will show that the seasons run in cycles from the wettest to the driest, covering a period averaging ten to twelve years in length. It is to be hoped that we are, or soon will be able to enjoy a greater precipitation in accordance with the coming of the last half of the cycle, assuming that we have passed the peak of the dry period.

Even though we may expect more precipitation in the future, and a greater growth of forage, it would be dangerous for us to take for granted that the present amount of stock now ranging on the Navajo reservation can be with safety maintained indefinitely, as the range is badly overstocked and is being depleted with an alarming degree of rapidity.

There appears to be but few people who realize the seriousness of this to the Navajo people, there are many things which combining their forces in destroying the range for stock growing purposes as follows:

First --- Overgrazing has the bad effect of not only eating off the grass to a point where it is not allowed to develop seed and automatically reproduce itself, but is tramped out in many places and the natural sod is even destroyed, and the place of the original grass is partly or wholly displaced by a plant which has no food value, and grows undisturbed, where it finally takes the entire control of the overgrazed section.

Yours

Second—The devastation by overgrazing causes another very destructive element, as when the surface is partly or completely bare, there is nothing to retard the flow of rain water, etc., therefore the degree of penetration of moisture is much less than would be under normal conditions, for instance - it would be reasonable to expect moisture to penetrate to a depth of twenty-four to thirty-six inches, provided the normal growth existed, but to develop all of the natural springs and build surface reservoirs of sufficient size to insure permanent water from season to season, and in addition to this drill wells were possible with a view of making the entire range of the Navajo country available for grazing, and even if it is possible to get money with which to do this increased work, we will still be a long ways short of sufficient grazing area to maintain even the present number of stock in the future, for the reason that it is a well known fact that during the last eighteen years the stock has increased to a point where the Indians are now selling annually more sheep and cattle than existed all together on the reservation in the year of 1911, it is also true that the grazing land has gradually deteriorated during these years, further proof of this is, last year great numbers of sheep, cattle and horses actually perished on account of overgrazed conditions of range.

Therefore there should be a careful plan worked out to continue the water development in places where there is feed, and a thoroughly organized system of scientific supervision of grazing and the movement of stock.

After we have reached this fact, it only requires the use of a few figures to show that with the present rate of deterioration to our grazing lands, it will be only a few years until the Navajo country will be reduced to what is known as a bad land, and when this is done and the problem of re-seeding and restoring the natural grasses becomes necessary, it will be found exceedingly difficult (if at all possible), and the great resource of the Navajos will be ruined and the real Indian problem begun. This may seem pessimistic, but when you take so many acres of grazing land and allow the necessary acreage for each animal, and divide that by forty thousand Indians, you will see how many sheep or cattle it is possible for each Indian to have; then ask yourself how much higher an ambition it is possible to maintain above the present civilization with this as a resource.

Some of these statements may seem to people who have not been familiar with reservation conditions over a period of several years, as being far fetched or off hand conclusions, but I am sure judging from past eighteen years of climatic conditions, and assuming that it is unsafe to expect any material change of climatic conditions, we had better conform to our experience of the past and make the necessary plans to safe-guard the range in every way possible, by increasing the value and breed of animals rather than increasing numbers, developing water in places where needed to make all grazing land available, also supervising the movements and grazing of stock, and make every effort to get more land from the Public Domain adjacent to reservations, such as blocking together railroad land and Public Domain, similar to the plan already used by some of the energetic superintendents.

As to the water development program, much can be done to further protect the grazing country, but the process is rather slow, and much of the country will continue to suffer from congested conditions, until more funds can be had to carry on the development to those above mentioned districts.

Also there are many Indians who were unfortunate enough to be living on Public Domain prior to the establishment of Indian reservation, and therefore reservation lines appeared to be established leaving them out of the reservation, which deprives them of the use of any appropriation by Congress to be used on Indian reservations.

These people are very much in need of assistance along water development lines and since they are not entitled to any benefits from the appropriation made for the benefit of the Navajo country, therefore in order to protect the Indians now established on the reservation from an influx of Indians from communities, such as the Navajos residing outside of the Reservation at Remah, Canyon Ceto, Perdo Ceto and other places, it will be well to work out a program similar to the water and grazing development on the Navajo reservations, in order to prevent the above mentioned infiltration from the out-lying tribes.

It is well to remember that prior to 1910 there was no water development work done in the Navajo country, the Indians being dependent on the few natural watering places, including a few undeveloped springs and water holes, it was perfectly natural that when the Indian herds was favored with a few favorable seasons, that their herds would increase considerably, and when a dry period existed their herds would naturally perish down to an equal to the water available, this was taken by the Indians as an unavoidable condition, and but little was said about it, later on as more and pure water was developed they could see the possibility of safely increasing their herd, and as more permanent water was developed they took advantage of it, and through the encouragement and help received from their different superintendents they have both improved the grade of their stock and the numbers to a point, that at least is approaching the limit as above stated.

The problem now appears to be a matter of maintaining the amount they have with a careful system of selling it as soon as possible after it has reached a marketable age, thus relieving the range of any unnecessary increase.

The worthlessness of burros and horses is fairly well understood by the Indians, as all superintendents have made a strenuous effort to free the reservation of these animals.

I have tried to make plain that regardless of how much water can be developed or how much more valuable an individual animal can be made, a civilization dependent on this stock country as a main resource for existence, can not be expected to raise a much higher plain of civilization than now exists, and any talk of the Indians being in possession of more land than they are using is simply an unfounded statement.

Very respectfully,

(Signed) A. H. Womack