

# STOP 1: POST-FIRE GRAZING

## BACKGROUND *Chet and Tara Porterfield, TC Ranch*

### TC Ranch History

- Commercial cow/calf operation established 35 years ago in Butte Valley, owned and operated by Chet & Tara Porterfield and their daughters Kady & Kara.
- Angus x Hereford cowherd, calve April-May to match spring grass season. Calves marketed through the Harris Ranch Partnership for Quality program.
- Acquired Bray Allotment grazing permit in 1994 after purchasing the home ranch (172 AUMs, 139-day season).



Spring turnout, Sink Pasture

### Bray Allotment History

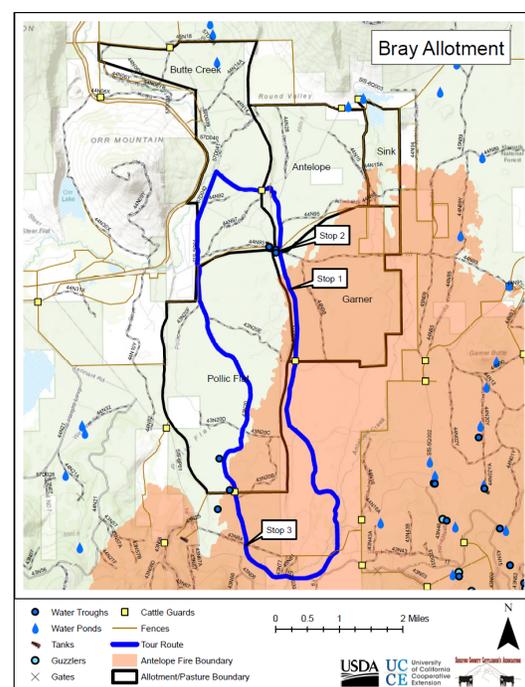
Allotment divided into pasture units (see map): Pollic, Garner, Sink, Antelope, Butte Creek.

- **Pre-1943:** Run as two separate allotments, Sink grazed by sheep until 1938.
- **1938-1947:** 2-3 cattle permittees used Bray/Sink as one allotment. AUMs decreased from 1523 to 463 as it was overstocked.
- **1955:** Permittees began hauling water; AUMs raised to 600. Pollic was overused while Garner was lightly grazed due to lack of water.
- **1958- 2000:** Bray Allotment is 11,700 acres total, most of which are National Forest System lands.
- **1973:** Rim Rock Water System installed to provide water to multiple units.
- **2000- present:** Allotment managed with a season-of-use rotation where each unit is grazed at a different time throughout the grazing season.

### Antelope Fire: August 1 - October 15, 2021

*Burned 3,227 acres (28% of allotment). ~8 ½ mi. fence + key water pipeline destroyed.*

- **Aug 4:** Fire made a huge (~20,000+ acres) wind-driven run north through Tennant and into Pollic, then suddenly turned east through Garner and beyond. Sudden change in direction saved cattle and the rest of the allotment.
- **Aug 4- mid Sep, Key challenges:**
  - Water availability: Butte Creek, the only water source, dried up just past pump. Installed temporary trough along Rim Rock waterline as a secondary water source.
  - Fire crew traffic: Temporary signs to “watch for cattle”. Communication with local USFS range personnel was key.
  - Mutual aid & varying knowledge of livestock/range: attended daily briefings to remain connected to team/coordinate access.



## **GRAZING DECISIONS: BRAY ALLOTMENT** *Chet & Tara Porterfield, TC Ranch*

- **2021 grazing season:** Reduced AUMs to 120 due to drought.
  - Prior to Antelope Fire, Garner & Antelope were grazed. Cattle were in Pollic when fire started.
  - Cows started trailing home in mid-August due to open gates, down fences, & fire crew activity.
- **2022 grazing season:** Kept AUMs at 120 due to drought + fire. Total carrying capacity reduced 28%.
  - Garner completely rested per USFS requirements. Only north end of Pollic grazed due to fence repairs and destroyed water system. Butte Creek, Antelope, and Sink units grazed.
- **2023 grazing season:** Winter and spring weather substantially improved grazing conditions!
  - Completed water trough installation to service the Antelope & Garner units (first priority).
  - Garner approved for grazing pending fence repairs on south and east boundaries. Due to time and labor shortages, unable to complete all the burned fence repairs and thus could not graze. Plan to complete fence repairs for 2024 grazing season in Garner.
- **Antelope & Tennant Fire Recovery Plan:** once plan is finalized, communication/coordination between USFS and permittees will be critical during project implementation phase.

## **POST-FIRE GRAZING** *David Lile, UCCE Lassen County*

### **Key Considerations**

- Rangeland vegetation response following fire is highly variable. Rest from grazing after wildfire may or may not be beneficial depending on circumstances surrounding the fire. Use field assessments rather than blanket policies or rules of thumb to make grazing decisions.
- A robust perennial grass component prior to the fire, low intensity burn, and good seasonal moisture are likely to reduce the need for grazing rest; conversely a struggling perennial grass component prior to the fire, high intensity burning, and drought conditions all may slow the rate perennial grass recovery and thus require grazing rest.
- Start work on repair or replacement of grazing infrastructure as soon as possible after the fire is out. Damaged fences and water developments may limit grazing opportunity even with a positive vegetation response.
- Livestock often prefer to graze burned areas over unburned areas, so grazing patterns might change following a fire. Timing of grazing use and livestock distribution strategies can help avoid concentrated use of perennial grasses during the growing season.

### **Intermountain Region Specifics**

- Range management objective is to maintain perennial grass dominance and minimize invasive annuals such as cheatgrass and medusahead.
- Wildfires on grazing land in the intermountain region often occur on federally managed lands, thus the grazing plan must be developed with both the livestock operator and agency personnel to optimize short-term forage need and long-term rangeland health objectives.

**Additional Resources** (*hover smartphone camera over QR code to open link*)



**Post-Fire Veg.  
Response on Diverse  
Rangelands in NE CA**



**Postfire Grazing  
Effects on Mesic  
Sage-Steppe Veg.**



**Controlling  
Soil Erosion  
After Wildfire**

