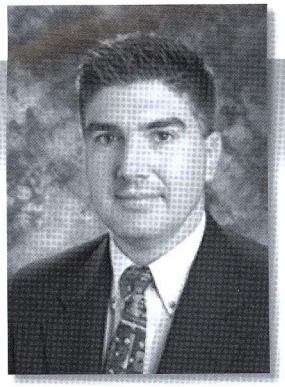

By Justin Derner & Emily Kachergis

Managing For Drought

Earlier this year, 307 producer members of the Wyoming Stock Growers Association (WSGA) shared their thoughts, insight and suggestions on what influences management decisions through the Rangeland Decision-Making Survey. Thanks again to everyone who participated in this survey conducted by the Wyoming Stock Growers Association and the research team (USDA-ARS, University of Wyoming Extension and the University of California-Davis). Survey respondents were from all 23 counties and represented 50 percent of active producer members. We will continue to showcase survey results at the WSGA winter convention in Casper as well as in future issues of *CowCountry*.

Here we summarize some preliminary results from the Rangeland Decision-Making Survey regarding how WSGA members prepare for and respond to drought which remains on the forefront of issues facing ranchers as most of the state remains in Severe to Extreme drought according to the National Drought Monitor.

- Over a third of survey respondents thought drought will be more influential in their management plans and operations in the next 10 years than it has been in the last 10 years.
- During the previous drought (for most producers, roughly 2002-2008), over half of survey respondents had a drought management plan in place (60%).
- The previous drought impacted ranching operations in several ways that were more severe than survey respondents expected. The most severe impacts were to: grazing capacity (75%), profit (54%), and winter feed (53%).
- Survey respondents prepared for drought by: stocking conservatively (48%), resting pastures (47%), increasing flexibility by adding stockers (28%), grass banking/stockpiling forage (22%) and using 1-3 month weather predictions to adjust stocking rates (16%).
- Common ways of responding to drought were: reducing herd size (80%), purchasing feed (63%), weaning early (47%), renting additional pastures (42%), moving livestock to another location (27%) and selling retained yearlings (24%).

In addition to the survey, we are also learning about drought management from interviews and rangeland sampling post-doc Emily Kachergis conducted in southeastern Wyoming this past summer, as well as ongoing analyses of long-term livestock weight gain data by post-doc Justin Reeves. Stay tuned for additional insights about drought management in future issues of *CowCountry*. ●

Rangeland monitoring during drought in SE Wyoming for a follow-up research project on grazing management. Photos: Emily Kachergis.