

Management aids for rangeland pastoralists

Ruth Maxey¹ and Lori McGarva²

¹NSW Agriculture Cobar

²Technical Officer Natural Heritage Trust, Cobar

What pasture species is that and how do I manage it? Are two questions we hope to assist graziers in western NSW to answer. Funded by the National Heritage Trust, the Management Aids for Rangeland Pastoralists project aims to produce a pasture identification field guide and a pasture management guide.

The development of such extension aids which will better help graziers identify and manage their pastures have been priority for a number of people including agencies, landholders and the Western Catchment Management Committee in the rangelands. This project is a collaborative effort between NSW Agriculture and the Department of Land and Water Conservation, to develop in conjunction with landholders workable and practical resources to assist pasture management.

Pastures managers in western NSW must contend with extreme seasonal variation, grazing by non-domestic stock and pasture invasion by opportunistic plants. Knowledge about the pasture species and how they respond to management in conjunction with sound observations form the basis of good management decisions. The Glovebox Guide and the Pasture Management Guide will assist in providing references on species identification and pasture management strategies, specifically for these managers.

The Glovebox Guide

to plants of the Western Division will feature 130 plants common and important to the western area of NSW. Portability and ease of reference have been a focus in its development. It will be small enough to fit in a glove box (A5), easy to flick through (ring bound) and of high durability for bumping around the paddock. The booklet will separate plants into 4 classes: grasses, herbs, low shrubs and tall shrubs as a first stage search aid. Common general information will be profiled

followed by examples of the more common species. Clear colour photographs of the plant habit and seed head (if appropriate) of each plant will be used. Graziers rate photographs as most important for identification. Information provided will include family and scientific names, common names, a brief description of appearance, flowering time, distribution, palatability and notes for management. Plants will be indexed by both scientific and common names. It will also be possible to reference plants common to a particular landtype by the index.

The Pasture Management Guide

will be developed in collaboration with landholders as individuals and also with groups such as Landcare groups. The aim will be to provide a range of simple field techniques which will assist graziers interpret their observations of vegetation changes? (and possibly animal response) in terms of current knowledge in the process of making stock decisions. The proposed management guide could contain:

- Photographic standards for estimating forage availability, fuel availability, ground cover, shrub cover, utilisation level of important pasture species and animal condition scores.
- A procedure for estimating the total grazing pressure in the paddock based on known sheep numbers and dung composition.
- How to set up a monitoring system on a property to utilise observations.
- A procedure for using observations to estimate short term stocking rates.

The guide will be a process based document that will assist graziers develop an understanding of how their decisions affect both pasture and animal production systems and how they can influence this rather than being victims of seasonal events.