

WILDLIFE HISTORY OF NORTHERN NEVADA FROM SCARCITY, TO ABUNDANCE AND NOW DECLINE

In past years, I made presentations to public school classes and I always started with the question, "Were there more deer in 1830 or are there more deer today?" The answer was always unanimously that there were more deer in 1830. I challenge you to ask this question to your children, your spouses and your friends, and then educate them on the following facts.

SHOOTING AND EATING THEIR HORSES!!

In 1828, Peter Skene Ogden, leader of the Hudson Bay trapping and exploration expedition, was the first to record conditions in Northern Nevada. He reports that his trappers were shooting and eating their horses to survive and to escape the harsh environment. They were surprised that they could not live off the land. Ogden kept a daily journal and reported their journey which took them from the Oregon border to Winnemucca, then east along the Humboldt River through present-day Elko. They then left the river crossing into the Spring Creek/Lamoille Valley and through Secret Pass into Ruby Valley, then north to Montello and into Northern Utah and Southern Idaho during the fall and early winter of 1828:

"...critical situation, our horses are starving and our stock of provisions low, ... trappers and hunters out in all directions ... provisions very low, not a trace of an animal to be seen in any direction; ... impossible for the whole party to remain here and feed on horse flesh for four months. ... Two horses again killed for food."

After wintering in Idaho, Ogden's expedition retraced their route in reverse through Nevada and back into Oregon to the Columbia River in 1829. There were over 20 trappers in the expedition, plus others handling the pack train. During four months in Nevada, they trapped 1,000 beaver, but never killed a deer, elk, buffalo, big horn sheep or wild horse in Nevada. The reason they wintered in Idaho was so they could get big game. When they traveled through Nevada the second time they had brought sufficient dried elk and buffalo meat so they could avoid shooting and eating their horses.

Either government agents do not know this story or they intentionally avoid it. They follow the mantra of the radical environmentalists that they need to return the land to its natural state because they claim a natural state was somehow better for wildlife. The truth is that agriculture is responsible for creating abundance for man and for creating abundant wildlife.

Three years after Ogden's expedition, Milton Sublette, leader of the American Fur Company, brought an expedition of 45 trappers from Utah. They, too, were surprised that they were unable to live off the land. They also had to shoot and eat horses and mules to survive.

Others began crossing the area in the great westward migration. At first a trickle and then a flood of emigrants crossed this "Great American Desert" on their way to California. The journals of all of these visitors indicate that there was a lack of big game animals in Northern Nevada.

With emigrants came settlers and soon ranching and irrigation changed the landscape to support wildlife. Hundreds of thousands of cattle and sheep were herded across every mile of the valleys

and mountains. The land itself was changed. The sharp hooves of the cattle, sheep and horses plowed the ground. The land was fertilized by the livestock. This plowing and fertilizing continued year after year, decade after decade, and the land became increasingly productive. Irrigation spread the water from the creeks into broad meadows.

As agriculture improved the landscape, wildlife populations began to increase. Up until the early 1900's, predators were scarce, but with the great sheep flocks and increasing wildlife populations, predators were also on the rise. Predator control was essential to protect the great bands of sheep. This predator control also protected wildlife and allowed wildlife numbers to increase, especially around the irrigated lands and in proximity with people where there was intense predator control.

A great explosion of wildlife occurred so that by the late 1950's and 1960's tens of thousands of hunters were taking deer and other wildlife and the livestock industry was flourishing. Unfortunately, the Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management began making massive cuts in the number of cattle and sheep eating the fuel. As a result of the cuts, which the radical environmentalists have demanded, the number of sheep grazing the land is down by over 80% and the number of cattle grazing off the fuel is less than half the number it was in 1980. These policies have resulted in massive wildfires, loss of habitat and the deaths of millions of animals. Before 1980 less than 25,000 acres of Nevada were burning in wildfires each year. That number has now increased to over 600,000 acres burning each year, a twenty four fold increase.

The above facts are never mentioned by Forest Rangers or other government agents. Instead, they parrot the mantra of the radical environmentalists. That mantra is that the land and wildlife must be returned to that wonderful state that it was in before ranchers changed the land with those hundreds of thousands of livestock plowing and fertilizing. Have they been deceiving the public or are they blinded by the political correctness of the day?

So ask your children, your spouses and your friends, "Were there more deer in 1830 or are there more deer today?" and see what they say. Ask them, "Are you aware that there are over 600,000 acres burning, on an average, each year in Nevada and that as a result there are millions of animals dying needlessly?" If anyone can cite a time when anyone in the Forest Service explained the truth about deer and wildfire in Nevada, I would appreciate if they would tell me.

By: Grant Gerber

The goal of the Smoked Bear Initiative is to stop the wildfires that are burning millions of animals. With your help we can do it. Please make your contribution to:

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