“Strategic Grazing Management for Complex Adaptive Systems” is being hosted by The Society for Range Management Colorado Section. The meeting will run from 8 a.m. Thursday, Nov. 29 through 3 p.m. Friday, Nov. 30. The majority of the meeting will be on the CSU campus in the Lory Student Center Ballroom area. There will be a tour and dinner at the Sylvan Dale Ranch Thursday afternoon for an additional fee.

This will be a unique meeting experience. Each session will open with a general presentation on the topic. Then, someone (usually a rancher) will share real life, on the ground experience. The opening session is the only exception to this arrangement.

Fred Provenza will open the meeting with a look at how complex grazing systems really are. He spent his career studying how animals learn what to eat. His work has lead to incredible breakthroughs in the understanding of landscape management. There are four major factors that influence how grazing affects rangelands. These include overall intensity, time, space and animal behavior. These all, in turn, impact soils, vegetation, herbivores and people.

The second part of the morning program will focus on stocking rate. Stocking rate (SR) is the number of animals per unit area for a unit of time. This is true whether on a ranch for the grazing season or full year or for a pasture while it is being grazed. In economic terms, optimum SR occurs when profit, not production, is maximized. Determining the optimum stocking rate is complex and not constant.

Speakers will explore how one can find the optimum stocking rate and the importance of monitoring the variation in stocking rate through the years.

Thursday afternoon the group will travel to and tour the Sylvan Dale Ranch near Loveland. Dinner will feature ranch-raised, grass-finished beef.

Friday morning will open with an exploration of plant recovery from grazing with Tim Steffens. Steffens is both knowledgeable and entertaining to listen to. He will explore what plant recovery is and what it is not. He will share insights to the many factors influencing plant recovery and the affects of grazing before the plants are ready.

After break, the topic will turn to grazing distribution, its importance and influences. Unmanaged livestock repeatedly graze preferred plants in preferred areas. This results in overgrazed patches that expand over time, even at low stocking rates. Grazing management has the power to alter this pattern and improve distribution.

After lunch, the last session will take a look at diet selection and stocking density. How the two relate is not as simple as many people think. Time and space in a pasture have huge impacts on grazing habits of animals. The end result can be either positive or negative for both plants and animals.

Registration includes lunches both days.

A full agenda and registration information is available from the web at www.cssrm.org . Click on the “newsletters and other information” link in the top left menu. The links to the agenda and registration form are on the left hand side about halfway down.

Holyoke Enterprise November 29, 2012