

# Snakeweed on Ranges in Central New Mexico

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Heavy stands of snakeweed were the legacy of the droughts of the 1970s and early 1980s on many New Mexico ranges. However, not all ranges exhibited the same snakeweed densities. Some areas were characterized by dense, low-growing stands while others had only scattered snakeweed plants. Past grazing history and the severity of the drought are two factors that might influence these densities, but differences in snakeweed densities on different soil types and plant communities are not known for many areas of the state.

When NMSU acquired the Corona Range Livestock Research Center, one of the initial studies was a vegetation inventory of the Ranch. During the summer of 1991, vegetation was sampled intensively in a grid pattern over the grassland portion of the Ranch. These data were analyzed to determine plant communities present on the Ranch. These analyses revealed five main grassland communities: the blue grama, sideoats grama, wolftail, New Mexico feathergrass, and the blue grama-threeawn-snakeweed communities. Snakeweed was most abundant on the blue grama-threeawn-snakeweed community, where it contributed 20% of the total plant cover, and least abundant on the New Mexico feathergrass community (Figure 1).

The communities where snakeweed was abundant did not occur on a consistent soil type, indicating that other factors such as grazing or drought may have been more influential than soil type in controlling snakeweed densities. Blue grama communities form the background of the Corona Ranch vegetation with all the other communities interspersed depending on disturbance or soil type.

*Snakeweed varied from about 20% of the plant cover to less than 5% in different plant communities at the Corona Range Livestock Research Center.*

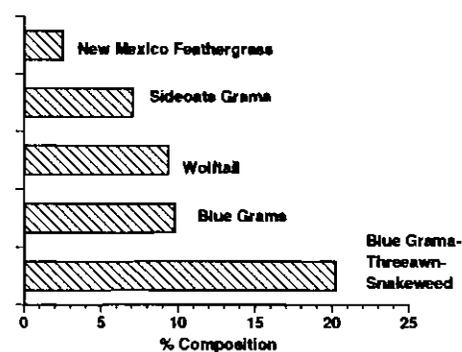


Figure 1. Composition of snakeweed on different communities in central New Mexico.

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