

Snakeweed on Ranges in Central New Mexico

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(Key Words: Plant Composition, Plant Distribution)

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 and 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 5 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 more than 20% of the total plant cover and least abundant on the New Mexico feathergrass community.

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 within the blue grama community depending on disturbance or soil type.

Influence of Season and Sex on Botanical Content of Cattle Diets

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A study was conducted in southern New Mexico to determine seasonal variation in botanical diet composition of cattle and to compare cow and steer diets. The climate and vegetation is typical of semidesert grassland. Fecal samples were obtained from a group of cows and steers during spring, summer, fall, 1989; winter and summer, 1990. The results showed that cattle diets were highest in grass content during spring (57%), summer (78%), and winter (54%), while forbs comprised the highest proportion of cattle diets during the fall (47%). Shrubs have moderate importance during winter (18%). Dropseeds (*Sporobolus* spp.), black grama (*Bouteloua eriopoda*), threeawn species (*Aristida* spp.), and leatherweed croton (*Croton pottsii*) were the key forage species for cattle. The importance of these species varied with