

UNDERSTANDING WORKING RANGELANDS

Cows Need Water, Too: Water Sources, Wetlands, and Riparian Areas

Water is essential to all living things and is the single most important nutrient for both humans and livestock, making up about 65 percent of a cow's body weight (Rastogi 2007). It's no wonder, then, that water quantity and quality is at the forefront of the minds of ranchers, regulatory agencies, and environmentalists. We all have a stake in making sure that adequate clean water is available for all beings and uses.

To ranchers and their livestock, drinking water is more important than forage, because inadequate quantity or quality of water can quickly lead to a decline in livestock health and because forage consumption depends on the availability of clean drinking water. The average cow and calf combined drink about 15 gallons of water per day, and stocker cattle (weaned calves grazing pasture or rangeland or being fed forage) drink about 5 to 10 gallons per day, although water consumption varies with temperature and other factors (Weitkamp 2006). The more cattle drink, the more they can eat. Maximizing forage consumption is especially important for growing animals like calves or

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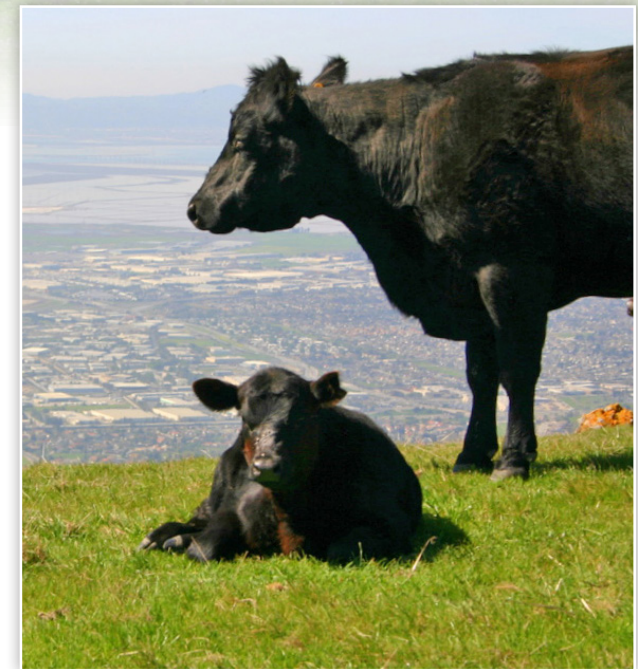


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Working rangelands are public or privately owned open space lands that are managed with livestock grazing and rancher stewardship. Their management contributes to the production of a variety of ecosystem services, including food, clean water, weed control, wildlife habitat, fire fuel reduction, carbon sequestration, pollination, aesthetic views, cultural heritage, recreational and educational opportunities, and open space conservation.

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