

Roundtable highlights rancher responsibilities

Cuts to federal agencies lead to more interaction

By **ALEX POWERS**
H&N Staff Reporter

Ranchers and landowners likely will have to become more involved with the government as federal funding sources and staff numbers shrink, and as environmental issues keep coming to the forefront in interactions between cattlemen and agencies.

At a roundtable discussion Saturday at the Klamath County Fairgrounds, Burns-area rancher Susan Doverspike said cattle ranchers can't ignore land-use requirements on permits or grazing allotments on public lands.

Federal land managers, she said, have increasingly required her to take measurements of grass height and water levels in riparian areas as the BLM and U.S. Forest Service continue to contend with budget shortfalls.

"It's very important to make those measurements ... and again when you take your cows off," she told a small audience at the discussion.



H&N photo by Alex Powers

J-Spear Ranch manager Joe Villagrana discusses Oregon cattle ranching on Saturday during a roundtable discussion at the Klamath County Fairgrounds.

U.S. Forest Service representative Martina Keil said ranchers shouldn't take for granted permitting agencies fully understand both sides of an environmental issue.

Often, she said, government agencies are willing to listen, but ranchers have to be willing to come forward with problems. It'll become increasingly crucial as budgets decline and

more responsibility falls on ranchers to understand their permits.

Getting federal grants
Joe Villagrana, manager at J-Spear Ranch in Lakeview, talked about the cattle industry as a changing business as ranchers scramble to get cattle recognized as a renewable resource.

The ranch's cows, he said, are certified with

federal standards such as Good Agricultural Practices and Non-Hormone Treated Cattle among others.

"It sounds like a lot of bullcrap, but we've got to be competitive," he said.

The ranch has seen technological advancements, like microchipped cattle and computer catalogs that allow cattlemen to be more flexible and make

Permitting rules constantly changing

Klamath Falls Bureau of Land Management representative Dana Eckert reminded ranchers that permitting will change each year as factors such as conservation efforts, invasive species and drought or fire play into how public land is used.

Locally, ranchers who graze cattle on public land could see impacts in available acreage while invasive wire grass crowds

out native vegetation, including grass that cows graze on.

Wire grass has exploded into local grazing lands, Eckert said.

BLM abatement is limited by a court injunction, he said. The agency can only use a limited amount of herbicides on the grass.

"Our management of those areas is fairly limited right now," he said.

quick health-related decisions about their herds.

Complying with such standards allows ranchers to apply for federal credits or projects like riparian fencing and roadway culverts over streams, he said.

By being open-minded, Villagrana said, J-Spear ranch managers have found and applied for grants through numerous government and private conservation entities such as the Natural Resources Conservation Service, Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife, and Ducks Unlimited.

"You name it, we've done it," he said.

Others criticized government policy, saying the goal

of conservation law isn't always clear to ranchers.

"It's our responsibility ... to define the benefit, and then the cost," said Klamath Cattlemen's Association President Nathan Jackson. "And the cost side of the equation is missing all the time."

Jackson believes the public, too, isn't always aware of both sides of environmental concerns. He said ranchers spend time and money fighting issues that have come to them from regulatory agencies, rather than promoting their side.

"We need to be proactive in this stuff," he said.