

**FLOYD W. RATHBUN**

**CERTIFIED RANGE MANAGEMENT CONSULTANT**

**(775)423-4267**

**P.O. BOX 1612  
Fallon, NV 89407  
rathbun@phonewave.net**

August 19, 2015

Marianne Leinassar asked me to attend today's conference for FIM Corporation. Marianne, her father Fred Fulstone, and son Kris own and operate their family's sheep ranch with irrigated croplands producing hay in Smith Valley, pasture in Bridgeport Valley, and extensive rangeland grazing allotments on BLM and Forest Service controlled areas.

1. Western Nevada ranches suffer drought in two possible ways. First is the obvious lack of snow pack that normally produces the water needed for irrigation of crops and for livestock water from springs or creeks on rangelands. Second is lack of rainfall in April and May that is needed for production of range forages.
2. Churchill County farms received less than 20% of average water which provided a single irrigation for most producers. Unusual amounts of rainfall kept many alfalfa and pasture fields productive into July. April and May rainfall resulted in average or above average range forage production.
3. Pershing County farms received no irrigation water from the Humboldt River. Some areas received rainfall that produced rangeland plants as forage but other areas only received May and June rainfall which favored certain weeds such as Russian thistle and Halogeton.
4. Lyon County received a fraction of normal water for irrigation from both forks of the Walker River.
  - Smith Valley farms had a small amount of water from storage and decree from the Walker River.
  - State Engineer threatened to also cut off irrigation from "supplemental" wells.
  - Rangelands received spring rainfall that produced abundant forages so there is no detrimental affect of drought on rangeland forages.
  - However springs and streams dried up and water has to be hauled to livestock at great expense.

5. Mismanagement of upstream watersheds has greatly reduced the amount of water yield that used to flow into our reservoirs and recharge our valley aquifers. Forest Service and BLM have failed to restrict the spread of Pinyon-Juniper trees and have allowed willows and other species to plug up the streams so badly that even without the drought we did not receive the normal water flow. This drought has made the effect of badly managed rangelands all the worse.
6. Water for irrigation in Lyon County comes from irrigation reservoirs built in Bridgeport and Topaz. Those reservoirs and others have been assigned a minimum pool for the frivolous purpose of providing fish and wildlife for recreation. When water is abundant that is not an issue but with drought the water rights for agriculture need to take first place.
7. For years requests that BLM and Forest Service spend some money to drill wells, develop springs, and other water developments have either been ignored or have been answered with statements about how NEPA will take a long time to complete so nothing can be done for a long time. If new developments and needed repairs had been done when requested the water resources for both livestock and wildlife may have been adequate for this drought.
8. Nevada has the best water law in the West. Our law protects citizens as owners of permitted (statutory) water rights and protects the owners of pre-statutory vested water rights as well. This drought is inconvenient but it is not worth compromising Nevada Water Law for some short-term gain. Please work through this situation starting from the fact that water rights and other private existing rights on federally controlled lands and on patented lands must be protected and must be intact when the drought ends.