

Grazing on Public Lands

Pros and Cons

Pros:

- You have the ability to develop long term contracts and reduce administrative time and grazing calendar complications
- Contracts are already prepared - you only have to cover your basis
- You have the opportunity to educate the public with community education events and with 1 on 1 conversations to members of the public using the open space
- You can develop stream lined tactics in communication, signage and awareness to improve your grazing situation annual
- These jobs can pay quite well
- These jobs are usually larger parcels and can provide long term jobs

Cons:

- You do not employed by the individuals of the public, yet you must address their concerns
- There can be large conflicts in which you need to walk away and you do not have the ability to remedy. You may be put in a position that is very difficult to manage
- They require very high insurance coverage, which is one of your biggest expenses
- Many projects require you to have a shepherd there 24/7
- Many projects require you to bring in your own water

Relationship building, Education and Contract Structure

To successfully build and sustain a contract grazing business on public lands you need to have an understanding that it will take more time to develop relationships, but if you demonstrate the patience to do so, you can establish long term (many year) contracts and very fulfilling work. This begins with developing your skills at contract negotiation. Protect yourself and your business by making sure your needs are expressed in the contract as well as the public entity that is hiring you. In grazing public lands you have the unique opportunity to educate the public on the value of grazing. But you also have to use appropriate signage and be patient in your interaction with the public. Meeting deadlines on when you are expected to arrive and how long you will be there will greatly improve your likelihood of obtaining multi-year contracts.

Planning and Timeframe of Each Project

Get sophisticated at knowing how long each job will take, hone these skills. You will need to be very good at understanding how long each job will take to successfully plan out your grazing calendar [provide link to template]. Customers need to know when you will arrive and how long you will be grazing their property. You need to know this as well! As you build more work and more clients you will have to plan for up to 6 months of work. If you are delayed with one client because you have underestimated how long it will take, you are delayed for the entire 6 month period. This can put a strain on you, your livestock and your relationships with your customers. When planning how long each job will take you it is important to take the following list into consideration.

Planning and Timeframe list

- Stocking Density
 - How many animals will you be using? The number of animals will greatly impact how often you will need to move them and how quickly you will complete a job. On average 250 sheep or goats can graze about one acre a day. This average will vary depending on the vegetation type and density.
- Acreage
 - How many acres will you be grazing?
- Type and Density of Vegetation
 - The type and density of vegetation will greatly impact the amount each grazing site will take. It is important to assess the density of vegetation each year, even on sites that you have grazed in the past. Weather and rainfall patterns will affect the amount of vegetation grown each year meaning your jobs could take a longer or shorter amount of time when compared to previous years.
- Moving Livestock
 - It is important to relay to the client how often you expect to move your livestock and where and when you plan to move them. This is especially important if livestock need to cross a road for any reason. When crossing public roads, you may only have a specific time a day you are allowed to move animals. You are also typically required to have signs, flaggers and traffic control to maintain safety of your livestock, employees and the public.
- Time Frame:
 - It is important to communicate with your client a realistic estimated timeline for your grazing services. Not only will this help you plan your schedule as a contract grazer but this will also help you maintain good relationships with your clients. When using the grazing calendar template to map out your calendar, give yourself an extra day or two on large or unpredictable jobs. Be patient with yourself and your clients. It is better to overestimate how long a job will take rather than underestimate it. If you are running behind and know that you will be late to some jobs. Contact those clients immediately, apologize for the change in scheduling and ask if you can push the job back to a...

Planning and Timeframe list, cont'd

- Time Frame, cont'd:
 - ...time when you know you can get there. One of the most important things you can do as a business owner and service provider is acknowledge that things are not going as scheduled and take responsibility for that. Your customers will be far more receptive and willing to be flexible if you approach changes in this way.
 - To help you plan your grazing schedule, we have provided a free template for you to use! [Grazing Calendar Template](#) [provide hyperlink]

Relationship Building

Public land grazing also grants you the ability to develop long term relationships with clients, in this case public land entities. Build relationships, develop rapport and potentially build interest in your services, all while having long term contracts. Take the time when you are bidding on a public land contract, to ask all of the same questions you asked the private landowner, these are still critical questions to ask to have an understanding built in with your public client. See the questions below in which additions have been made to cover material you need to know when bidding on a public land contract.

Grazing Public Lands- What to be aware of and questions to ask if not listed in the RFP

- How many years is the contract?
 - Most public contracts are 3 years long with the option to extend if the public agency is happy with your services. However, if it is not specifically stated in the RFP it is important to ask if you need to reapply or fill out paperwork each year or if the contract is binding for the full 3 years.
 - Some contracts have the options for extensions going out as far as ten years. If this is the case it is important to increase your cost to account for inflation each extension year.
- Has this property been grazed in the past and how did the public using this space respond?
 - If the public agency has grazed this location in the past, ask for insight to how the project went and how the public responded. This will help you be informed of what conducting the project will be like prior to being there if you are awarded the bid. If there was any interference, conflict or problems between the public and the...

Grazing Public Lands- What to be aware of and questions to ask if not listed in the RFP, cont'd

- Has this property been grazed in the past and how did the public using this space respond, (cont'd)?
 - ... previously contracted grazer ask how the conflict was handled and if they have a plan in...place to support the grazier if the public is concerned or angry about the grazing?
- Is the public space already fenced?
 - Does the property you are going to be grazing at have fencing? If so, is that fencing adequate for your livestock or will you need to provide additional fencing? It is always best practice to conduct a site visit to confirm that the established fencing is or is not usable for your livestock.
- What type of livestock can be utilized on the project?
 - Some public land projects are specific about what species of animals may be utilized on the project. If the species is not listed in the request for proposal (RFP) it is recommended that you submit this question for clarification.
- What do you want accomplished through targeted grazing services?
 - It is important to understand the goals of your client to be able to meet their expectations as a paying customer. Clients may have one, or multiple goals. Goals can include, but are not limited to, grazing for firebreaks, providing a vegetation management solution, carbon sequestration and or enhancing natural resources. It is important for you as a grazer to know how to best manage and reach the goals of your clients. If there is something that you will not be able to do, it is best to be honest with your client and work together to find an alternate solution to meet their goals.
- Location:
 - What is the location of the property needed to be grazed?
 - If you are outside your normal locational range, you may not be able to do the clients project or you may need to increase your cost for mobilization. It is also important to assess the property to see if trucks and trailers can get into the property location or if the property is suitable for the type of fencing you have. It is best practice to conduct a site visit on lands that you have not grazed in the past to make recommendations to the client based on what you have the ability to do.
- Acreage:
 - What is the size of the client's property and how many acres are they interested in grazing?
 - It is important for a contract grazer to know both the size of the property and the...

Grazing Public Lands- What to be aware of and questions to ask if not listed in the RFP, cont'd

- Acreage, (cont'd):
 - ...amount of acres the client is interested in grazing. Knowing this, you may be able to provide your client with a more cost effective solution based on your price scale.
- What is the flora of your land? (forested, meadows, etc)
 - It is important for contract grazers to know the flora of the land to be able to make recommendations. These recommendations may include species of animal (sheep, goats, cattle) and stocking density.
- Access to property
 - In order to graze properties efficiently, trucks and trailers will be delivering animals to the property. If you are not transporting your own animals, it is important to know the length for the trailer and type of transportation your animals will be arriving in. Not knowing if the type of transportation you choose can access the property will create issues when it is time to deliver the animals.
- Access to water
 - Contract grazers should provide everything they need to complete the project. However, contract grazers will typically ask the client if there is access to water on the property that they may utilize. Contract grazers will use this water source to supply water to their animals throughout the duration of the project. You may choose to supply water through a garden hose, or by filling up water trailers and leaving them closer to the animals to supply constant access to water. If no access to water can be provided you may be unable to do your project, or you may be able to haul water in for an additional service charge.
- Predator issues and Guardian Dogs
 - Having a livestock guardian dog can be difficult to utilize in some public spaces due to the large number of people and pets. Familiarizing yourself with the park is key in making the right decision for your client and your livestock.
 - Ask your client if they are aware of any predators on or near their property. To help with predator issues, contract grazers may utilize guardian dogs to keep livestock safe. However, it is important to share with your client that livestock guardian dogs are working animals that may bark throughout the night. It is also important to relay to the client to pets on a leash and maintain a safe distance at all times around guardian dogs and livestock.
- Can a shepherd stay on the property?
 - If you choose to hire shepherds, it is extremely important to ask the client if they...

Grazing Public Lands- What to be aware of and questions to ask if not listed in the RFP, cont'd

- Can a shepard stay on the property,(cont'd)?
 - ...are able to stay on their property in a self contained travel trailer. It is also important to explain the role of the shepherd and what they will be doing while working on their project. You may mention that your shepherds build pens, move animals, supply water to the animals and help maintain the health of the livestock by evaluating them for illness and injury daily. In addition, if the animals were to escape their pen for any reason, the shepard would be responsible for getting the animals back into the designated area.

After asking the questions above, make sure to follow up with your customer with additional questions you may have. It is your responsibility to understand what your clients are hoping to achieve through grazing. It is also critical that you explain how the land will look like after grazing and why. Know your livestock and know how they graze. Utilize these skills to orchestrate the vision of your client.

If you can understand and achieve the goals of your customers you are more likely to have repeat customers. This will help you plan your annual calendar more easily if you have annual customers. You will find that word of mouth is a fantastic marketing tool and does not cost you anything. You will also spend less time in marketing, providing bids to new customers and constantly changing your grazing calendar. Remember your time is a critical piece of your income. If you manage your time well and continue to have repeat clients you are increasing your annual income and sustainability of your business.

Education and Signage

One of the great opportunities in grazing public land is that it creates a wonderful opportunity for you to educate the public about the benefits of grazing. The benefits to the land, to the animals out grazing and to the safety and health of the communities nearby that will be less threatened by wildfires due to this work. This education piece needs to be a collaborative effort between you, the public entity hiring you and the public utilizing the space. Engage with the public entity with questions about how they will educate the public and how they expect you to do so. Ask the following questions:

Education and Signage questions:

1. Do they have signs to let the public know grazing is taking place?
 - Do they state that you have guard dogs that may react to horses and pet dogs?
 - Do they state that the fence is electrified?
 - Do they state contact information for individuals to call if there is a problem?
2. If they do not have signage - make sure some is made and left at the entrance to the ...

Education and Signage questions, (cont'd):

2. ... park and near and around your grazing sites. Signs should include the following
 - Your company and its contact information
 - Notification that the fence is electrified
 - Notification of guardian dogs on site with livestock
 - Notification to the public to not pet or feed working animals as it may unintentional lead to making animals sick or escaped livestock

Invite them to co-create a public education event prior to grazing to present to the public, answer questions and explain the work and the animals. Emphasize your good animal husbandry and body scaling measures at these events. Hold one of these community education events prior to each grazing event. Education prior to grazing will make all future interactions with the public easier going forward. Continue to see education as a critical piece of your work in grazing public and private lands.

Public Contract Structure

Take the time to review the enclosed sample contract from the East Bay Regional Park district. This is a good example of the contracts you will be dealing with when grazing on public landscapes. There are pros to lengthy contracts, they can provide greater security for each party and will be very clear on your requirements for insurance, animals safety, etc. However, these contracts are created with the purpose to protect the public entity creating them. It is your responsibility to make sure your concerns are covered in these contracts. In order to do so you must be aware of the challenges you will face when grazing on public lands.

Challenges

There are many challenges when it comes to grazing private land. Here are some examples of your greatest challenges.

Greatest challenges:

1. The public hiking and riding horses on the land
2. Negative feedback from concerned members of the public
3. Pet Dogs
4. Wildlife Predation
5. Noise Complaints
6. Health of your herd (review livestock frame score)
7. Livestock escape
8. Water accessible to livestock at all times
9. Shepherd staying on the property

The main difference between grazing public and private lands is who your client is. When you are grazing a private landscape, your client has approved the job, the contract and considers grazing a valuable input to their property. When you are grazing public landscape your client is the public entity hiring you and agrees to all of the terms of the contract. However, the public utilizing the open space has the closest contact with you, your shepherd, your livestock and your guard animals. It is your responsibility to negotiate an agreement with your client on how conflict with the public will be handled. Work this out concretely prior to signing your contract. Have this agreement highlighted on the contract. These are questions you need to discuss and confirm with your client prior to agreeing to the contract

Questions prior to agreeing to the contract:

1. Who do I call when a member of the public is upset?
2. I will walk away from a verbal or physical threat from a member of the public and refer them to you
3. How will you support me, my livestock and my shepherds if we continue to be harassed by a member of the public
4. Do you have signs to post at the entrance to the park?
 - a. If not, can you make some?
 - b. If not, I will bring some

Conflict Resolution

All of these possible challenges and questions should be addressed in your initial conversation with your client. Make sure you have an agreement with your customer and add it to your contract. These are critical in your ability to be reimbursed for predation or protect yourself from further liability by an escaped animal.

Conflict resolution will also be key in maintaining a healthy relationship with your client in the event an issue were to occur. The main rule of thumb when dealing with conflict resolution is to prepare, listen, apologize, refrain from getting defensive and enforcing your contract obligations.

If a conflict does occur try following these steps to resolve the issue

Steps for Conflict Resolution:

STEP 1 - Be Prepared

Review your contract. ****go back over sample contracts - do they cover all of these issues? Do they have resolutions?***

Are you covering all of the above listed challenges and do you have resolutions and/or responsibilities for all of them? If not, address your contract first. Make sure you have this in your contract and make sure you verbally address each one with your client prior to having them sign the contract.

STEP 2 - Listen

You have a contractual agreement with your client and you both should have an understanding of the roles and responsibilities of each party. Despite this a client may be upset over a situation in which...

Steps for Conflict Resolution, (cont'd):

STEP 2 – Listen, (cont'd)

...you had properly prepared them and they had signed an agreement of understanding. No matter who is at fault it is your responsibility as the service provider and grazier to listen and acknowledge that something went wrong. This does not mean you are assuming responsibility or that you believe it to be your fault. It gives the client the opportunity to state their concerns and express their emotions. 9 times out of 10 all the client needs is to feel heard and they are comfortable to resolve the situation amicably. Listen and be responsive.

STEP 3 - Apologize

When something goes wrong, whether it is your fault or not, apologize. If it was your error or negligence, then you are apologizing for your mistake. If you did nothing wrong you are apologizing for the bad experience your client had. This is key and will help you keep repeat customers!

STEP 4 - Do not get defensive

As you build your business, improve your skills and develop livestock that work well for you, you will also create a deep attachment to what you do. It is very easy to get hurt or offended when a client complains, whether it is a legitimate complaint or not. Take a deep breath, slow down - understand that your client has as much of an emotional attachment to the land and the work being done as you do. This will help you stay in the negotiations without getting hostile or adding conflict.

STEP 5 - Enforce Contract Obligations

After staying calm, listening to your customer and being willing to apologize, you have moderated the conversation into a place where resolution can happen. Continue to keep the conversation open and connected as you point out the obligations of both parties according to the contract you both signed. Show and/or remind your customer what they agreed to in the contract if they are responsible. Also show them what you agreed to if you are responsible. If something happens that you have not yet experienced and therefore were unable to plan for in your contract, it is always best to take the loss at your first experience as you are the service provider. Take the loss and update your contract to make sure you have it stated clearly in the future.

Insurance Recommendations and Providers

Recommendations

The insurance requirements for doing public jobs can vary greatly from client to client. It is extremely important to read the public contracts Request for Proposal (RFP) that will outline the specified minimum insurance requirements needed to bid on and complete the job.

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