



Chihuahua Cattle Industry and a Decade of Drought: Economical and Ecological Implications

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The State of Chihuahua is in northern Mexico, with 798 kilometers of common border with southern Texas and New Mexico. Mexico's largest state, Chihuahua, covers 247,200 square kilometers. Because of its geographic position, drought in Chihuahua is common; however, the drought cycle of the 1990's extended for more than a decade without relief. The objectives of this study were to illustrate the effects of a decade of drought on Chihuahua's rangelands and cattle production using published technical reports, personal experiences, direct observations, and ranchers' comments. The study concluded that 10 years of drought and negative economic situation affected profitability of Chihuahua cow/calf operation. The ecological impact of a decade of drought and livestock mismanagement on Chihuahua rangelands was severe, causing significant changes in ecosystem structure and function in all plant communities studied. Long-term effects of this degradation are likely to persist due to soil degradation. Rangeland productivity in some areas fall below level needed to sustain viable wildlife and livestock populations. Financial analyses of individual and state-wide cattle operations and broad state survey showed that a decade of drought harmed cattle industry in Chihuahua. Production parameters dropped and production costs increased turning cattle operations into non-profitable enterprises. Ten years of under average precipitation illustrates that below long-term average precipitation is the rule rather than the exception on Chihuahua rangelands. Thus, range management should be adequate to this new reality in order to still be productive.

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