

Photo Monitoring for Ranchers Field Guide

STEP 1: Gather your equipment: Camera, photo board, field notebook, map, GPS unit, historic photos.

STEP 2: Take your pictures at the same time every year. Pick a date you will remember (e.g., 4th of July), or take one set of pictures before grazing and one set of pictures after grazing.

STEP 3: Select sites that reflect your management goals. A general suggestion is to take photos of three upland and three riparian locations per pasture. You want photos that are representative of the whole landscape.

STEP 4: Record your locations on a map and on the ground to permanently mark your site. Record the GPS location. Suggested markers:

- Rebar or angle iron
- Rock pile
- Welded stake (washers welded to rebar and painted)
- Half of a potato digger
- Steel posts (T-post can attract livestock)
- *Be careful using wood and plastics like PVC because they can degrade over time*

STEP 5: Include a distinct landscape feature in your photo to help find the site in years to come and to reframe subsequent photos.



Metal washers welded to a piece of rebar cut at an angle make good permanent site markers. Orange implement paint doesn't degrade as quickly as other types.

STEP 6: Always use a photo board! Record date, pasture, plot name, bearing, and GPS coordinates or legal description (township, range, section, quarter) on your photo board (side 2) and place the photo board so that it will be visible and legible in both the landscape and ground photos.

Take two photos at each site: one of the landscape and one of a ground plot. Use yard sticks or folding rulers to outline a 3 foot x 3 foot ground plot and indicate where the photographer should stand. (If you do not permanently mark all four corners of the plot, note in which directions from the permanent marker you placed the rulers and their approximate distances from the marker.)

STEP 7: Make notes in your field notebook about:

- Weather (e.g., drought year, exceptional rain event)
- Weeds (e.g., new weeds, weeds not yet in the area but nearby)
- Dominant plants (most common plants around the area, stages of development)
- Fire (e.g., recent, nearby)
- Grazing (e.g., planned, historical, actual, livestock, wildlife)
- Rodents (e.g., ground squirrels, rabbits, badgers)
- Other relevant information (e.g., range improvements, management changes)

STEP 8: Download electronic photos and print out ALL photos. Keep photos with field notes. Back up your photos!

For more information, see PNW 671, *Photo Monitoring for Ranchers Technical Guide*



Always use a photo board. Frame your photo so one-quarter shows sky and three-quarters shows landscape.

Suggestions:

1. If your photo plot is more than 25 feet from a road or trail, which is strongly suggested, use a witness post (T-post) to mark where to stop and note the distance to your plot.
2. If you are using federal lands, check to see if photo plots already exist; most allotments have them.
3. Put your views in perspective. If a photo point already exists at a stream crossing, retake that photo, then step back and take a photo of the whole stream reach.
4. Don't be afraid to put photo plots in areas that aren't in perfect shape (especially those visible to the public); these areas will show the most change over time.
5. The most important photo is the first one you take, so start today!

REMEMBER: Photo monitoring is cheap insurance!

Author—Amanda Gearhart, Rangeland Extension Specialist, UI Twin Falls Research and Extension Center.

DATE: _____
day, month, year

PASTURE: _____
pasture, allotment, general location

PLOT: _____
unique plot name or number (something you will remember)

BEARING: _____
e.g., 95°, upstream, downstream, southward, etc.

GPS or PLSS: _____
coordinates or legal description (township, range, section)