

Pocket Gophers on Rangeland

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What lies beneath the surface of your rangeland? Recently I came across something I do not usually see. I visited a couple different pastures here in eastern Colorado where I found switchgrass plants and a variety of other perennial grasses uprooted. Their carcasses were strewn and windblown across the range. On yet another property, sand sagebrush plants stood dead, slowly decaying beneath the sun's rays. Between the dead and surviving plants were sandy mounds, stretching in all directions. Silently and hidden beneath the soil something had been killing the range plants. The culprit? Pocket gophers. In their wake, weedy annual grasses and forbs were pioneering the freshly stripped soil.

Pocket gophers live by eating the roots of plants. Almost 100% of their diet is plant roots, and they rarely ever drink water. Most of the water they need to survive comes from the plants they eat. They are active year round and spend most of their time underground. Under snow or when forage is limiting, they may venture above ground to girdle shrubs and other plants. Why does this matter to you as a livestock producer or rancher? When conditions are right, their numbers can expand, increasing their footprint on the landscape. Studies done in Nebraska have found that plains pocket gophers (*Geomys bursarius*; the very same ones we have here in eastern Colorado) can reduce the forage production of rangelands by 21% to 49%. Impacts like that could really hamper the amount of forage available for your cattle. This may be of importance to you, since it appears pocket gopher damage is already showing up on the radar this year. If you combine this information with the fact that the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) is predicting a record boom in grasshopper numbers in eastern Colorado this year, you might start to feel a little nervous about this year's rangeland forage production. If you are getting nervous, there are a few things you can do.

Monitor your rangeland for pocket gopher activity. If you see a noticeable rise in pocket gopher activity and it appears that range is showing signs of extensive plant death, consider treating your rangeland or pastures. There are a few different methods available to you for controlling pocket gophers: baits, fumigation, and traps. Below is some information online that you may find useful. If you still have more questions, contact your local CSU Extension office.

[Colorado State University Extension: Managing Pocket Gophers](#)

[Internet Center for Wildlife Damage Management: Pocket Gophers](#)

Check the [USDA grasshopper forecast](#) for this year.

If you are in a high risk area for grasshoppers, contact your local CSU Extension office as soon as you can, many counties in eastern Colorado are putting together funds and are gearing up to do some control spraying that targets grasshoppers.