

## **Conservation Conversations**

Written by Olivia K. Clark, CSU Extension, Grand County

'Conservation conversations' is a series brought to you by the Middle Park Conservation District, CSU Extension, Grand County Division of Natural Resources, and Grand County Wildfire Council.

Today's article explores winter maintenance and care of livestock in northwest Colorado.

### **Winter Maintenance and Care of Livestock**

Winter maintenance and care of livestock in northwest Colorado can be challenging, particularly with our harsh winters. Here are some important things to keep in mind when caring for livestock in winter months.

Water is the most important nutrient when it comes to animal health and well-being. Livestock need consistent access to clean, fresh water. Water helps our animals digest their feed, and keeps their nutrient levels balanced. Maintaining access to clean, fresh, and unfrozen water in our cold winters can pose quite a challenge. For those who maintain livestock through the winter you will likely need to invest in a good tank heater or heated buckets.

These types of heaters require electricity, and that could mean doing your leg work in the summer months to ensure you have power in your winter watering location. Animals should have free access to water, check your water source a minimum of once daily to ensure it has fresh, clean water available and that your tank heater or heated buckets haven't frozen over or lost power. Keep an extra tank heater, or heated bucket on hand, just in case the one you are using fails on a cold, blustery below zero day. Tank heaters and heated buckets not only provide unfrozen water to your livestock, but they slightly warm the water, making it easier to drink, lessening the chances of your animals becoming dehydrated.

Many of us make our winter feeding plans well in advance of the onset of the season. When you are making plans to purchase hay, grains or minerals for the winter months, make sure you are familiar with the species of animal you will be caring for and feeding. Nutritional needs vary for each species, but something important we can all keep in mind, no matter the species, is to select quality feeds that are free of mold. If you are purchasing bagged feed, read the label and ask yourself, "will this product meet my feeding objectives?" Animals need the right balance of vitamins and minerals in their diet, be sure you are selecting the right feed for the species of livestock you are caring for.

Salt is an important mineral, make sure your animals have access to salt, the intake of salt can encourage the consumption of water and help deter dehydration. As winter blows in and the temperatures drop, caloric requirements rise for all livestock. Windy, wet, or cold days (temperatures dropping below 20°F) will require additional feedstuffs to provide the extra energy needed to keep warm. Providing more roughage for sheep, goats, horses, and cattle is a great way to provide extra calories. Make a daily

evaluation of your animal's body condition and adjust your feeding program according to your animal's needs.

We all need to take shelter from the weather, and livestock do too. Make sure you have adequate space in shelters for all the animals that could be housed there. Providing our animals a safe place to get out of the elements makes for happier, healthier animals. A shelter could look like a wind break, three sided shed (preferably with a roof), stabling or a natural land feature such as a hill, willows or trees. For smaller animals like sheep, goats, and swine you'll need something a little cozier. Make sure the space is well ventilated. For sheep, goats, and swine provide bedding like straw to help insulate animals laying down from the cold ground.

Install shelters on south facing slopes wherever possible, these areas tend to be slightly warmer, and the snow comes off of these areas faster. Orient livestock shelters to protect animals from prevailing winds. Check your fences, fences tend to become encumbered by snow and there could be areas where your livestock could get free. You may have to use a snow blower or heavy equipment to remove snow from your fence to prevent unwanted escapes.

\*For more information on a variety of natural resources and rural living topics, check out Middle Park Conservation District's "High Country Rural Living & Land Management" guide at [www.middleparkcd.com/ultimate-landowner-guide/](http://www.middleparkcd.com/ultimate-landowner-guide/).