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## Inspection of alpine grazing leases

Cattle grazing is an important forest use in the Victorian Alps, according to a senior Forests Commission official.

Dr Ron Grose, who is the chief of the Division of Forest Management, said this during a discussion held as part of a two-day inspection of grazing leases held recently in the Mansfield alpine areas.

Dr Grose said that the Forests Commission was satisfied with the state of the grazing areas in the Mansfield area, and he congratulated the Mountain District Cattlemen's Association for the refreshing light they have thrown, through their publicity, on the land use of grazing in the alps throughout Victoria.

"I am impressed with the serious way the cattlemen have faced up to their problems and challenges to their way of life, and they deserve every respect and help as their future will be determined in the next year or so," Dr Grose said.

Dr Grose explained that the present inspection was particularly important because the area comprises the alpine study area at present being studied by the Land Conservation Council, and the alpine report should be published by the end of the year.

### ORGANISED BY CATTLEMEN

The biennial inspections of the Mansfield area have been organised by the local Mountain Cattlemen's Association since 1958, and at present about 1,600 head of cattle each summer graze in areas controlled by the Mansfield Forests Commission.

### CRITICS

Critics of cattle grazing in the alpine areas have claimed that such problems as soil erosion, changes in botanical status, altered water runoff regimes and damage to moss beds have come about because of grazing

in the alpine regions. All observers in this inspection agreed that there was very little evidence of any of these problems and the state of the areas appear to improve at every inspection.

One problem commented on by Dr Grose and other members of the inspecting party was the condition of many of the four-wheel drive tracks in the area.

Dr Grose said that re-grading and realignment was being carried out in some places to alleviate the problem. Some tracks were to be closed permanently and others temporarily to allow regeneration.

### COMMENTS

Mr Jack Gilmore, a member of the Soil Conservation Authority, congratulated the cattlemen and Forests Commission on their flexible management of the areas, and he also expressed concern at the state of some of the tracks in the area.

Cr Bostock, who represented the Shire Council, and has been on many inspections over the years, felt that the stocking rate for the area was correct because the grazing conditions had improved, and

he said in his opinion the way to judge this was the improvement each year in the condition of the cattle, which was an excellent guide to the quality of the feed cover.

Mr David Nicholls, of the Mansfield District Conservation Group, said that the Forests Commission and cattlemen had helped him gain greater knowledge and awareness of forest areas. He said he would like to see some alpine areas completely free of all commercial enterprise. He hoped that next year would see a rational and amicable solution for all parties with interests in the alpine region. He agreed that when cattle were in good condition it was a sign of good management.

Groups represented on the inspection were the Soil Conservation Authority, the Upper Goulburn Regional Advisory Committee, Forests Commission, Lands Department, Department of Agriculture, Mansfield District Conservation Advisory Committee, Mansfield Shire Council and the Mountain District Cattlemen's Association of Victoria.

It was generally agreed that from the discussion and comments from all present that much of the emotion had disappeared from the debate on the use of alpine areas. All parties seemed to be now taking a more mature and rational approach to the problems.

Michael R. Wallace

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Pictured relaxing after an intensive day inspecting the state of the alpine grazing leases in the Mansfield area are (from left): Dr Ron Grose (Forests Commission), Mr Norm Chester (Heyfield) and Mr Jack Lovick (Mansfield).  
Photo courtesy Mr R. Bostock.