

Northeast Ranching Area

The Northeastern New Mexico ranching area is primarily a shortgrass prairie, encompassing Union, Harding, Quay, and Guadalupe counties and portions of Curry, De Baca, Torrance, Santa Fe, San Miguel, Mora, and Colfax counties.

This region is bordered by mountains to the west with elevations of around 7,000 feet. To the immediate east, elevations slope down to about 3,900 feet, with relatively flat terrain, consisting of rolling hills and valleys. Soils range from gravel to coarse sands to heavy clays, depending on the area. Although there is some farming on the loamy soils, most of the soil has little organic matter and is susceptible to erosion when exposed to wind and rain. Average annual precipitation ranges from 16 to 18 inches, but can vary from 12 to 20 inches in the north and southwest portions, respectively. Most rainfall occurs between April and September, with July and August being the wettest months.

The length of the growing season depends largely on elevation, and varies from 140 days in the higher elevations of the western side of the region to 180 days in the lower elevations of the southeast portion.

Short grasses are the predominant forages over most of the level or rolling hills area of the northeast region. Pinyon-juniper woodland dominate in the western portion. Snakeweed is the major invading species, and locoweed can be a severe problem in this region.

Most land in the northeast ranching area is state trust land or deeded private land. State lands are scattered throughout the area, except the western and southern portions, which contain several large Spanish land grants. The state owns two to four sections of most townships. The U. S. Forest Service (USFS) administers two small grassland areas in the eastern and central portions of the ranching area.

The northeast ranching area generally has the state's most productive rangeland, with carrying capacities averaging 15 to 24 AU/section. An average of 21 AU/section is defined as representative for the area. Livestock operations are the major agricultural enterprise in the region.