

Holistic Management – Overview

By Cary Farley.

Holistic Management manages resources (people, land and money) in ‘wholes’, as one indivisible unit. It reaches decisions through a holistic ‘process’ approach using knowledge blocks learning (setting aside the dominant mechanical ‘systems’ approach to decision making). Complexities of such an approach are taken into account and dealt with. Decisions made are tested to ensure that they are economically, socially and environmentally sound.

Originally developed by Allan Savoury of Holistic Management International (www.holisticmanagement.org) to reverse biodiversity loss and consequent land degradation, four key ‘insights’ provide the basis for the holistic management process:

1. The holistic perspective is essential in management.
2. Environments may be classified on a continuum from non-brittle to very brittle according to annual humidity distribution and how quickly dead vegetation breaks down.
3. In brittle environments (normally arid and semi-arid), relatively high numbers of large, concentrated and moving herding animals (wildlife or livestock) are vital to maintaining the health of the land.
4. In any environment, overgrazing and damage from trampling bears little relationship to the number of animals, but rather to the amount of time plants and soils are exposed to them.

Those living on the land play a central role in the planning of the management required. To do this, three steps are followed: 1) A determination of the quality of life they seek to have; 2) Identification of the forms of production required from the land to sustain that quality of life including food, products, profit and aesthetics; and 3) A description and mapping of the landscape for the future in terms of the fundamental processes that define an ecosystem – biological succession, mineral and water cycles and energy flow. This forms the basis of a management plan utilizing a range of tools (range influences including the resting of pastures, fire, animal impact, wildlife, grazing and man) and the establishment of a monitoring plan that will provide earliest possible warning that the work is off course.

Holistic Management Planned grazing will often form an intricate part of a holistically managed environment. This will include taking into account plant abundance, diversity and land cover; infiltration, capture and retention of rainfall; controlled plant exposure to grazing; hoof action of animals; effective dung and urine use; and improved livestock quality and productivity for sustained livelihoods. Land sometimes also needs to rest and plants need to recover to produce abundant healthy soils and plants. Further, low stress animal handling is promoted.

For additional information on Holistic Management kindly check out the following websites:

- 1) <http://www.savoryinstitute.com>
- 2) [http:// www.holisticmanagement.org](http://www.holisticmanagement.org)
- 3) <http://www.managingwholes.com>
- 4) <http://www.communitydynamics.net>