DESSERT NOTEBOOK
by Denzel and Nancy Ferguson

When Spaniards brought cows to the New World and set them loose on the American West, they began what has become a “tradition” of open-range grazing. No one considered the long-range consequences - the social, economic, and environmental impacts. No doubt it seemed like a good idea at the time.

Today, we are forced to live with the results. Bringing cows to the arid west has turned out to be a monumental and costly blunder, an act of vandalism that has turned the west into a gigantic cow ghetto.

As a consequence, we dare not put down a tent or sleeping bag in the dark, our public wildlands swarm with flies, former riparian zones are trashed, and the stench of cows overwhelms nature’s fragrances, even in the most remote places. While Easterners drink from Appalachian streams, we choose to parch, rather than risk the cattle excrement, bacteria, and giardia contaminating western streams.

Our big-game animals are forced to compete with bellowing droves of alien cows in the summer, then come away malnourished, and too often perish in ordinary winters. Today in the west, cows alone devour more forage than did all native grazing animals before Columbus. Take away the cows, and the Blue Mountains could support ten times as many elk.

Our highways are obstructed by cows and splattered with manure. Collide with a cow and you are at fault and must pay. In most western states, antiquated open-range laws dating back to horse-and-buggy days continue to grant cows right-of-way over motorists on public highways.

For the sake of alien livestock on public wildlands, we have slaughtered, at enormous public expense, millions of magnificent predators and have driven wolves and grizzlies to the brink of extinction, with many other species close behind.

Thousands of western streams are dry or flow only a trickle in the dry season. Other streams are too wide, too shallow, too hot, filled with sediments, devoid of riparian cover, and laden with excrement. But when Harold Winegar fenced cows out of a dry gully, a permanent stream reappeared with beaver, ducks, and a rich biotic community. The message is clear. We can have cows or abundant water, cover, fish, and wildlife. It’s a simple matter of priorities!

In recent years the west has been ravaged by wildfires. Bureaucrats fret and mumble about drought, while conveniently ignoring the fact that livestock abuse has converted millions of acres of public lands to cheat grass, tumble mustard, Russian thistle, and other tinder. Cheat grass is 500 times more combustible than the native grasses it displaced and is credited with extending Idaho’s fire season by two months.

Today, cows are stomping and chomping many of Oregon’s state parks and state lands purchased as habitat for big-game animals. We are told that cows must clear away decadent vegetation so that game animals can get to the good stuff! How do you suppose our native grazers managed to survive during those thousands of years before Spaniards showed up with cows? The fact is, many public agencies and other cow apologists resort to absurd fantasy attempting to justify the nonsensical tradition of grazing public lands. The current strategy is to contend that cows are good for everything - water, fish, wildlife, vegetation, soils, etc. It seems only a matter of time before we hear that a cow in your back seat will result in better gas mileage! The point is, critics (continued on pg. 3)
Why a boycott of public lands beef?

Reform of grazing practices on our public lands has been almost nonexistent in the 100 plus years since livestock first set hoof on our public lands. Yet the cowboy carnage on our public land continues. The most recent figures for BLM lands show that 68% are in unsatisfactory condition. Only 2% are in excellent condition. Streamside habitats, which make up only 1% of our western landscape, are the Hiroshimas of the American West. Feedlots without fences. Countless small streams have been turned into dry and lifeless skeletons. Recovery within our grandchildren’s lifetimes is wishful thinking.

How can it be so bad? Worse, why have we passively watched this pillage of our public lands by these Hell’s Angels on horseback? First, the cowboy myth ranks as wholesome as Hostess Twinkies in the collective mind of the American public. Second, the “old west” has left us a legacy of conquest over the land and its native inhabitants (wolves, bears, bison, Indians, wild rivers). Today, this pioneer attitude lingers perveting the thinking of the western public lands rancher, the political minions that represent them; and, unfortunately, the public.

Federal agencies can write all the Environmental Impact Statements in the world. But cows will jump over the moon before they kick them off our public lands. Why? Because they believe livestock grazing is a legitimate activity on our public lands of the west; much the way slavery was considered a traditional and common practice in the south years ago. Bovine bondage. The west and its native inhabitants have been held in servitude for too long.

But how do we reform the public lands livestock tradition? A trail of failures winds its way through Congress, the courts, and the agencies. With such a dismal history, is there anything we can do to stop the liquidation of our western public lands by livestock?

YES!

We propose a nationwide boycott of livestock grazed on public lands.

What is our goal with the boycott?

We want livestock off our western public lands! It isn’t enough to take them off of our national parks and wilderness areas (that’s right, livestock lunch in even our most cherished landscapes!) Livestock are not adapted to live in our arid wildlands. They did not evolve with elk, pronghorn, and bison much less grizzly bears and wolves (who were exterminated to make the land “safe” for livestock). They are domesticated animals. Alien species, forced to live on public lands at the expense of all other wildlife (and at your expense as a taxpayer).

Public lands should be managed under multiple use: for the millions of wildlife that lived harmoniously on our public lands before the introduction of livestock and for the millions of Americans who appreciate them being there.

How do I make this boycott work?

1. Don’t eat any beef unless you know the beef was not grazed on public lands. (Because the vast majority of public lands livestock are cattle, the focus of the boycott is on beef.) Substitute fish or some other suitable protein in your diet. While this impact will be small, you’ll have a clear conscience when taking the next three steps.

2. Place the enclosed bumper sticker on your vehicle. If making such a bold statement in public makes you uncomfortable, give it to someone who will. As a last resort, place it in the bathroom of your favorite restaurant (with their permission!) or other strategic location.

3. Ask: “Is this beef from public lands?”. Whether at a restaurant, supermarket or fast food shop. The likely response will be: “We don’t know.” That’s fine. Kindly tell them that unfortunately you can’t buy their beef product and tell them why. Then order your tuna sandwich (dolphin safe, of course). The progressive stores and restaurants will soon pick up on the message and order only beef raised on private lands.

4. Write letters to the large consumers (for example, McDonalds, Burger King, Safeway, etc.). This is the most important step! These are the folks that can and will make a difference. For the boycott to be effective, we need them on our side. Appeal to their post earthday consciousness. They need to hear, first hand, why you want them to carry the beef boycott banner.

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How will the store or restaurant owner know where the beef came from?

They won’t, initially. Almost all beef in the U.S. is shipped out of several large meat-packing plants. The ultimate responsibility for identifying tainted public lands beef will be with the packing house. Only after they receive pressure in the form of requests for beef not grazed on public lands, however, will they respond.

What if I don’t eat beef?

This is a public lands issue. Whether you eat beef doesn’t matter. Vegetarians and beef eaters are on common ground. All can help by informing family and friends about the beef boycott and by following the simple steps outlined above.

Will a boycott of public lands beef work?

It will if you participate. The public lands ranching industry, while incredibly vocal and politically powerful, is small. Only 31,000 permittees—less than 2% of the nation’s livestock producers—hold grazing permits on public land. Their names and the names of their corporations are public record. It will be easy for the meat packing houses or anyone else to identify who is selling tainted public lands beef and isolate them in the marketplace.

How much land in the west is impacted by grazing?

Grazing occurs on 306 million acres or 73% of all public land in the 11 western states. No area is immune and few areas have escaped the onslaught of livestock including national parks, wilderness areas, national wildlife refuges, and wild and scenic rivers!

What about the ranchers?

Let’s get one fact straight: we are not going to run all ranchers out of business. Ranchers using public lands represent only 2% of this nation’s 1.6 million livestock producers.

Most small ranches have long since evaporated, victims of the same economic and market forces that make growing bananas in Alaska unprofitable.

Many livestock operations today are vast empires. On public lands, 40% of all grazing is controlled by only 3% of the permit holders. Many big spreads are owned by the wealthy who use their ranching operation as a convenient tax write-off or vacation retreat. The biggest ranch operator in Oregon controls over 1,000,000 acres of public lands. He also owns Vail

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Ski Resort. These people are blindly taking your money (actually, we are giving it to them in the form of subsidies and tax write-offs) while destroying your public lands! Other big ranches are subsidiaries of multi-national corporations. Do you think they need to run livestock on our public lands?

Let's support the family ranchers who are displaced by taking livestock off public lands; if there are any. We will pay them a family wage to take down fences, repair stream habitats and restore the land.

**What about impacts to public lands ranching communities?**

The future of the west's dying ranching communities lies not in razing the public lands by livestock grazing but in supporting business opportunities in tourism, recreation and retirement. Tourism is not only the fastest growing, but in some cases the only growth industry in many western states. For example, in Oregon, 23 out of 37 counties have chosen tourism to be their regional economic development strategy.

**What will happen to the price of beef if we take livestock off our public lands?**

Roughly 3% of all beef produced in the United States comes from public lands (or 2% of all forage, take your pick). Annual fluctuations in national beef consumption vary more than this. The trend in beef consumption by the American public has seen a stable, significant decline over the past 20 years. In short, we'll never miss it.

To put this in perspective, Florida alone produces more beef than the western states of Washington, Arizona, Utah, and Nevada combined. Nevada, which is 87% public lands, ranks 37th among the states in beef production, putting it on a par with Vermont.
What will happen to the land and its wildlife when we take livestock off our public lands?

Rescued from the destructive tradition of public lands livestock grazing, wildlife populations will explode and the land will begin to heal. Streams will run clear again. Wildflowers, clean water, trout, elk and antelope will once more be common. Americans will take pride in restoring our magnificent western landscapes as vestiges of wild America. We'll also break the bovine barrier; the knee-jerk reaction public lands ranchers have when we want to designate wilderness areas and national parks on our public lands. In Oregon millions of acres of BLM land are now up for wilderness designation plus the Steens and Owyhee National Parks.

Think globally-act locally

Americans are concerned over their own health and that of the planet. We make daily decisions about the content of products. The health hazards of eating too much beef prompted consumers to reduce beef consumption. The inhumane treatment of feed-lot cattle resulted in industry reform. The destruction of the Amazon rainforest for cattle forage has caused policy changes by the World Bank and Burger King.

As a last resort, you must respond to the destruction of your public lands by livestock grazing. Efforts to bring change have failed. You must boycott public lands beef until this destructive, costly practice is stopped.

Where to write...

For the time being, we will give you the addresses of the nation's two largest fast-food consumers of beef. We will provide you with more later. If you have information about companies, important people, or success stories, please pass it on to us and we will share it in these pages.

Vice President for Environmental Affairs
McDonalds Corporation
Kroc Drive
Oak Brook, IL 60521

Burger King, USA
17777 Old Cutler Road
Miami, FL 33157

Editor's Note: To help get this national boycott rolling, we need your help. Please send whatever tax-deductable contribution you can to help germinate this idea. A national press release is planned soon. Make checks payable to ONDA/BOYCOTT.
OPEN vs. CLOSED RANGE
by Rick Braun

It is dark, no moon this night. You are doing about sixty, humming "Uncle John's Band" or maybe the high part to "Pig in a Pen" soothed by the hum of your engine and the tires as miles of open range pass by you. At the same time the foraging black cow a mile ahead at the side of the road gets an urge to be on the other side of the road. And so the cow contemplates this journey long enough to allow you to get close. Then it ambles into the path of your car too late to avoid oblivion. There are five results. Your car is wrecked. You are hurt. The cow is dead. You sue the cow's owner. You lose and have to pay for everything, including the cow. It does not matter that the cow's owner was drunk on champagne and fell asleep watching Lawrence Welk before closing the gate to the corral. Welcome to Oregon's "open range" law. The core of the open range law is simple: livestock owners are not liable for damages caused by their stock on the open range.

Ordinarily, we owe each other a legal duty to act "reasonably," that is, to exercise reasonable care to prevent damage to others. If you don't, you are negligent and liable for damages you cause. You might expect it is negligent to allow cows to run hither and yon, especially on highways. Especially at night. Especially black cows. Negligent, yes. Actionable in court, no. The open range law protects the livestock owner from liability for negligence.

In fact, the open range law is a hidden subsidy to livestock owners. Your auto insurance company ends up paying for the stupid cow that wandered into the road plus your injuries plus damage to your car. Under Oregon law all negligence claims under $3,000 entitle the plaintiff to attorney fees, so cows are almost always valued at less for claim purposes. That way your insurance company figures it isn't worth fighting over and pays the cow owner without doing battle. You pay a higher rate. The cow owner doesn't care; your insurance covers his cows.

Open range law has other quaint features. If an open range cow fancies the neighbor's succulents it can saunter over, munch, and "wander back" as Flatt and Scruggs sang, unless the neighbor has good fences that Mr. Cow breached. One poor soul who killed a cow that was trying to break into his hay barn ended up paying for the cow.

The open range law is a relic of the days when the West was first settled. Back then graziers turned their stock out to wander over road and wagon track and not much except bullets, cannonballs, light, wildfire, wind, and some animals moved faster than twenty miles an hour. The likelihood of a highway disaster was nonexistent. Open range made sense back then.

As times changed the legislature created a category of areas called "livestock districts" where the open range law does not apply and the rules of negligence apply. All incorporated cities are livestock districts. Other areas can become livestock districts if six landowners in the district petition the county commission, a hearing is held, and an election decides in favor of the formation of the district. Elective livestock districts are often formed in unincorporated suburban developments. It is also illegal to let livestock run at large on certain coast highways. The open range law does not apply in the national forests and federal public lands. But that still leaves plenty of open range.

The time has come for the legislature to review and reform the open range law. The existing crazy quilt of statute and court opinion does not serve anyone particularly well. But I write this piece the day after the election and it seems very unlikely that the legislature will consider open range law reform a high priority. Until it does, go slow, keep your eyes wide and your brights on during those moonless night drives in the desert. You might also warn that black cow by singing "Home on the Range" as loud as possible.
MINING
by Mike Sequeira

The potential development of large-scale mining operations in Oregon is quickly moving toward reality. Because Oregon is one of the last western states to be invaded by the mining industry, we believe that it is crucial to act aggressively to control development and to protect our environment before dangerous precedents are set.

Over 60,000 claims have been staked in eastern Oregon under the 1872 Hardrock Mining Law. The many impacts of mining with cyanide heap-leach techniques have been described in this newsletter and elsewhere (see July-Aug., 1989 and Sept.-Oct., 1990).

ONDA is currently developing a policy statement similar in scope to the one on grazing that appears on page five of this issue. That will be published in this column next time.

Mining companies are fond of describing how important gold is to American industry. The realities of gold uses worldwide, however reveal a different picture.

Grassy Mountain, three and a half miles north of the Owyhee Reservoir is one project currently under review. Atlas Precious Metals' plans include leveling Grassy Mountain and replacing it with a pit 2,000 feet across and 1,000 feet deep. Atlas' profits are projected at $25 million per year for the limited lifetime of the mine. And they claim that the reclamation action cannot include backfilling the pit. It's just too expensive!

In an interesting letter from Atlas to Ralph Heft, Northern Resource Area Manager for the Vale District BLM, the BLM is encouraged to consider as less important any requests "for information from groups with only incidental interests and far-removed from the project area...." They argue that such requests can only delay the Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) now being written and the eventual mine development. The delay of one day could result in the loss of $100,000 in production revenues to Atlas. We find these comments interesting. Remember, we are talking about public lands and private profits. And under the provisions of the 1872 Mining Law, not one penny of royalties will be paid to the federal government.

BLM in turn will not be doing any plant or wildlife surveys this spring, even though they admit that previous studies have been inadequate. Instead, they will study "habitats" and attempt to deduce from that what animals live in the region. The reason: time constraints established with the EIS process do not allow for such surveys. They want the draft EIS done by April, 1990.

In other news, ONDA is party to a suit against the BLM, along with several other groups concerning proposed mining at Farewell Bend near Vale. The BLM has authorized the exploration for gold on public lands without preparing an EIS to analyze potential impacts of both exploration and mining that could follow. While an Environmental Assessment (EA) was prepared, it was limited to addressing impacts of exploration at the site. We argue that exploration and mining are connected actions and their impacts need to be addressed as such. More to come on this issue.

OREGON HIGH DESERT PROTECTION ACT
by Alice Elshoff

In October, conservationists from around the state held their third of what will be monthly meetings to put together the Oregon High Desert Protection Act (OHDPA).

OHDPA takes a landscape approach to desert protection, looking at the values of eastern Oregon's public lands and choosing appropriate designations. From the field work data gathered over the last ten years on the 70 Sage Proposal units, thirty general areas have been named and coordinators chosen for each area. Watch this column for updates on the progress of this proposal, which is targeted for introduction at the 1991 Desert Conference in late April.

We still need volunteers to go out in the desert and review many of the sites for potential inclusion in the desert wilderness bill. We hope to have all data ready to present by December 31, 1990. If you are interested in helping, please contact me. There is some money available to help defray the travel expenses and to reimburse for the cost of film. Those funds are available through a grant from the McKenzie River Gathering.
ANNOUNCEMENTS

All meetings are held at The Natural Resource Center, 1005 N.W. Newport on the third Tuesday of the month. Refreshments at 7 P.M., meeting at 7:30 P.M. (NOTE: December meeting to be held Dec.11)

On October 7 members of ONDA held an all-day planning session to look at where we have been and where we are going after being in existence some three years. We felt that it was time to reexamine our mission and come up with some ideas to help keep our focus. It was felt that too many things were being done by too few people and that some restructuring was necessary in order to maintain our effectiveness.

We are trying a new division of tasks within the organization. To begin with, several members have volunteered to take the responsibility to track certain key issues as they evolve and effect the high desert. Members interested in contributing in any way should contact the appropriate person through ONDA. Coordinators currently in place are:

**OHDPA:** Alice Elshoff
**Grazing:** Bill Marlett
**Mining:** Mike Sequeira, Karen Theodore
**Threatened/Endangered Species:** Craig Miller
**Grants:** Alice Elshoff and Nils Eddy

In addition, we are still looking for volunteers to fill the following coordinator positions:

**Program Coordinator:** person to work with other coordinators to develop appropriate public education programs, deal with facility arrangements, local publicity.

**Field-Trip Coordinator:** person to plan, advertise field trips; contact potential leaders of field trips to areas of interest.

**Fundraising Coordinator:** person to develop and pursue ongoing fundraising activities to help ONDA achieve its goals.

In addition, all officers of ONDA must be elected at the January meeting. We encourage members who might be willing to serve as an officer or coordinator or who would like to place someone’s name in nomination to call or write Alice Elshoff, our current President.

The office of the President will be in charge of presiding over board and business meetings, distributing mail to area coordinators, sending meeting agendas, dealing with public relations, and transacting the business of the group.

The Vice-President will assist the President in the above responsibilities.

The Secretary will record minutes of meetings.

The Treasurer will keep records of all financial transactions and issue checks in ONDA’s name.

DESERT SKIES

Mars is at its closest approach to earth every two years as earth overtakes the red planet in its journey around the sun. Mars is said to be in opposition when earth is between the sun and Mars. At that time, Mars will be within 48 million miles of us, offering rare closeup views of the red planet. It won’t be as close again until 2001. Mars will be very bright and visible in the sky all night on November 26 and 27.

During December Venus begins a seven-month period as an evening star. It will be much more prominent by January. Mars continues as an evening star with Jupiter the most prominent morning star in the SW to W. The full moon of December 2 will be the closest in many years, bringing extreme tides.

On December 10 look for two of the moons of Jupiter. The brightest is Ganymede, farther to the west in the early morning. Four moons of Jupiter were discovered by Galileo, who referred to them as the Medicant Stars in his wonderful little book, The Starry Messenger, published in 1610.

On December 13, the peak of the Geminid meteor shower occurs from 10 P.M. on without the interference of moonlight.

Winter begins with the summer solstice on December 21.

Finally, look for Venus and Saturn within the same field of view with 7X binoculars in the eastern evening sky on December 26.