

Desert Ramblings

the newsletter of the
oregon
Natural Desert
association

Volume 7, Number 4

Winter 1994/95

FROM THE OUTBACK

by Bill Marlett



Down for another count, Secretary of Interior Bruce Babbitt recently backed off on the grazing fee increase proposed as part of his Rangeland Reform debacle. The fee increase was an end-around Congress when last year's grazing fee bill in Congress was stymied in the Senate. Whether this sacrificial offering was an attempt to pacify hostile western members of Congress is irrelevant. What he did is less germane than why. Our political institutions are wanting a collective vision and commitment to the land that, according to the polls, the American public holds dear. I do not berate Secretary Babbitt, he did what had to do to keep his job: kowtow to the corporate cowboy welfare system. Former BLM Director Jim Baca didn't and was given the boot. Lacking a deep and thoughtful vision, politicians cling to the vestiges of a unique experience; the myth of the independent, self-effacing rancher. That we know better than to treat the land with such disrespect by allowing domestic livestock to graze on arid lands is beside the point. We crave the myth. But I believe what we Americans really crave is the image of living on the land. It is not the rancher or cowboy per se, but the backdrop. Unspoiled places. Wild Nature. Freedom.

The West is changing. Our vision for

wild places has been blurred by the forces of darkness clinging to the past and denying the future. Livestock grazing on the public lands will be phased out. In some places, it will be replaced by the return of bison. In others, by the pronghorn. And in others, lifestyles in sync with the land. The ecological unraveling of the western landscape has taken a short 100 years,

give or take a few. If left to her ways, Nature will reweave the fabric in a much shorter time. The ranchers have a future in this fabric. But not grazing livestock. Many interpret our efforts to toss the cows off public lands as a mean spirited attempt to put cowboys in the soup line. Hardly, but this is the burden we must bear as people lash out in defense of their way of life. We now understand

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OWYHEE CANYONLANDS UPDATE

ONDA's plan to lease state land in the Owyhee Canyonlands has been put on hold pending resolution of a lawsuit filed by ranchers against the State of Oregon. The case, filed in Harney County Circuit Court, requested compensation for loss



PHOTO COURTESY OF GARY TEPFER

of state lease and requested that existing leases be granted a 20-year term with a 20-year extension. The ranchers' claim was based on the fact that some of the state lands leased for grazing had been traded from the BLM where grazing privileges are more secure (grazing permits on federal land are not subject to public bidding or any other market forces), and therefore, should be compensated.

In December, the judge granted the ranchers' lease terms, effectively shutting out any other interested party from bidding on the leases for

the next 30 years (the leases were granted ten years ago, so the request extends the leases for another 30 years). At the same time, the judge denied the ranchers' request for compensation in the event they lose their lease in a competitive bidding situation. Because the court's decision effectively

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Oregon Natural Desert Association

Mission Statement

The purpose of the Oregon Natural Desert Association is to promote the preservation, protection and rehabilitation of Oregon's arid-land environment and to educate the general population on the values of preserving the natural arid-land environment.

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FROM THE DEN



by Elaine Rees

It's winter on the desert. Snow will fall, gently at times, at other times wind-driven, biting, across the high plateaus. It will lodge in the bunchgrass, drift in the lee of rimrock, swirl and eddy over hardpan playas.

There will be days of shattering brilliance, of hard-edged blue, vibrant gold, and long, crisp shadows—abbreviated days in which the mule deer will stretch for brittle twigs and unwary mice

will disappear down the throats of coyotes.

In winter Orion joins the cougar on nocturnal hunts.

I imagine the desert enjoys its winter solitude. It clothes itself in bleakness to guard its secrets. It guards them well. Who knows the rhythms of the somnolence of snakes, of patient roots? Who sees the purling of waters beneath the ice?

Who will ever see the whole of the web or plumb the spinner? □



ANNOUNCEMENTS

DESERT CONFERENCE SET

Mark your calendars for the 17th annual Desert Conference at Malheur Field Station, April 22, 23, & 24. Friday will feature exciting hikes and fieldtrips. Saturday and Sunday will provide stimulating presentations dealing with the science, politics and mystique of the desert. Brochures will be mailed in late March.

EVENINGS WITH NATURE SERIES



Sponsored by Central Oregon Audubon Society, Native Plant Society of Oregon, Oregon Natural Desert Association and Sierra Club Juniper Group

All events take place at the Central Oregon Environmental Center, 16 NW Kansas St. in Bend. 6:30 refreshments, 7pm program.

WED., JANUARY 18: EXPLORING THE NATURE PRESERVES OF CENTRAL OREGON

A slide presentation by Reid Schuller, director of The Nature Conservancy's high desert preserves. Come and find out about The Conservancy's important work at Borax Lake, Crump Lake, and along the John Day River.

WED., FEBRUARY 15: SALMON ON THE BRINK



Slide show presentation which looks at the reasons for the salmon decline and at the various recovery programs, concluding with what is necessary to save our salmon. Jonathan Poisner, Columbia Group Sierra Club.

WED., MARCH 15: EXPLORING OUR HIGH DESERT HOME

With naturalist/herpetologist and local author Al St. John. Al has been delighting audiences for years with his lively slide presentations and live critters (when available).

WED., APRIL 19: BATS IN CENTRAL OREGON

Slides and museum specimens will highlight this informative program which will focus on the Townsend's Big Eared Bat, Central Oregon's most threatened bat species. Mark Perkins is a biologist with over 20 years experience in the Pacific Northwest.

WED., MAY 17: CENTRAL OREGON LANDSCAPE, THEN AND NOW

Stu Garrett will show a series of historic photographs of early Central Oregon along with modern re-shoots. Important lessons can be learned about our impacts on local ecosystems.



ONDA ACTIVISTS IN EUGENE: UP AND RUNNING

by Dave "Rimrock" Stone

Can a Webfoot really learn to love the desert? You bet! Sure, this transplanted Midwesterner found it hard to believe there could be a desert on the other side of those mountains. But one trip to Steens Mountain was all it took to feel that juniper sap start running through my veins. Whenever things got too soggy over here, I'd head east to Malheur or Hart Mountain Refuge, Leslie Gulch, Alvord Desert—some-where dry.

What didn't come so quickly was an understanding of how fragile these lands are. After years of trips, I finally caught one of ONDA's slide shows, the one with the great pictures and the devastating message: the desert was being destroyed by the hand of "man" and the hoof of cow. Along with that message was the call to action—learn about the land, study the issues, spread the word, and work to influence the policy makers.

Over the past year ONDA has provided numerous opportunities in Eugene to take some of those actions. It began with a slide show at the Bijou Arts Theatre to run between movies. This has been appearing daily since February and has really raised our visibility, at least among local movie-goers.

In April, ONDA hosted Ron Cronin's inspirational creation, "The Poet in the Desert." Over 100 people attended and left with a new appreciation of the Oregon High Desert (and a few left with dandy raffle prizes donated by local businesses).

In August, ONDA threw a party—an Ice Cream Social, Book and Bake Sale to be exact—featuring the first annual Cowchip Cookie Bake-off. Mari Baldwin of Eugene won the Grand Champion Award with her secret ingredient: taxpayer subsidy. An appearance by State Senator Pete Sorenson was another highlight of the day. Lots of people learned about the desert and ONDA raised over \$300 in the process. A special thanks goes to

ONDA members John Ebeling and Geri Baxter of Sandpiper Automotive for lending us their business parking lot at 13th and Lincoln for this event.

ONDA also participated in the 1994 Eugene Celebration. There we launched our campaign to Save the Cryptobiotic Crust. That brought in a

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Society for Conservation Biology adopts position statement on livestock grazing in the West

EXTENT OF LIVESTOCK GRAZING IN THE REGION



Grazing by domestic livestock is the most ubiquitous land management practice in the western United States. Approximately 70% of the eleven western states are currently grazed, including virtually all western ecosystem types—subalpine meadows, forests, grasslands, deserts, woodlands, and chaparral and other shrublands. All types of public lands are grazed, including national forests, lands managed by the Bureau of Land Management, wildlife refuges, military installations, wilderness areas, even national parks and monuments, as well as a variety of state, regional, and county lands. This represents a dramatic ecological change because most western ecosystems supported few, if any, large grazing mammals before Euro-American settlement. Those large mammals that did exist previously, such as bison and pronghorn, had very different food habits, behavior, and ecological effects.

ECOLOGICAL CAUSES FOR CONCERN

Most rangelands are currently in deteriorated ecological conditions. Past grazing practices have had detrimental effects on the composition, function, and structure of native ecosystems.

Livestock grazing has led to a decrease in native species richness in a broad array of ecosystem types. Additionally, a wide variety of taxa has experienced a decrease in population densities under grazing pressure. In addition to the more conspicuous megafauna and flora, microbiotic taxa, such as mycorrhizae which are essential for higher plants, have been affected. Of particular concern are rare taxa, which can be put at high risk by livestock. Other causes for concern about the ecological influence of livestock grazing include increases in alien species, alteration of animal foraging guilds, control of native predators and grassland species for economic gains, and increases in livestock-borne diseases among native wildlife species such as bighorn sheep.

Livestock grazing also affects several ecosystem functions, such as nutrient and hydrologic cycling, and succession. The cycling of nitrogen, the most important limiting nutrient in arid and semiarid ecosystem, is disrupted through trampling damage to microbiotic soil crusts. Western ecosystems also lose nutrients because they are tied up in livestock feces, which in some cases cannot be recycled due to lack of appropriate decomposers (for example, dung beetles in the Great Basin). When livestock are exported to markets, nutrients are lost from western ecosystems on a massive scale. Livestock interfere with ecological succession, especially in riparian communities. The quality and availability of water is also diminished by the presence of livestock. Overall, these activities lead to increased evapotranspiration rates and desertification.

Physical structure of livestock-influenced ecosystems is also altered. In many cases, vegetation strata are lost because plant regeneration is disrupted by foraging and trampling by livestock. The activity of livestock removes residual ground cover and soil litter, and compacts soil, leading to decreased water infiltration, and thus increased water

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THE HART MOUNTAIN STORY - AN UPDATE

by Elaine Rees

ONDA's goal of showing the world what real wildlands untrammelled by livestock grazing can and should look like claimed a major victory in May of 1990 when the U.S. Fish and Wildlife (USFWS) banished grazing from the 250,000-acre Hart Mountain National Wildlife Refuge. The stated goal of Hart Mountain NWR is to provide a range and breeding ground for antelope and other species of wildlife.

In a suit brought by ONDA and The Wilderness Society, Portland Audubon Society and Oregon Wildlife Federation, we asserted that the USFWS violated the National Environmental Policy Act by neglecting to determine the compatibility of livestock grazing with the stated goal. The

suit also challenged grazing on the Shirk Ranch portion of the refuge, which had been designated "an inviolate sanctuary for migratory birds." Grazing at the Shirk Ranch was clearly a violation of the Migratory Bird Conservation Act, as well as the National Wildlife Refuge System Administration Act.

The court decided in our favor, and issued an injunction against further grazing until an environmental impact statement (EIS) was prepared.

Upon release of the draft EIS, ONDA members and conservationists from around the state flooded the refuge's mailbox with letters supporting the cow-free alternatives. Ultimately, the USFWS recommended the no-grazing alternative, which, besides banning cows over the life of the 15-year plan, includes road closures, prescribed

burns, seeding and planting of native plants to restore degraded habitat. Possible re-introduction of the Columbian sharp-tailed grouse and the study of additional acreage for wilderness and for scientific research were also included.

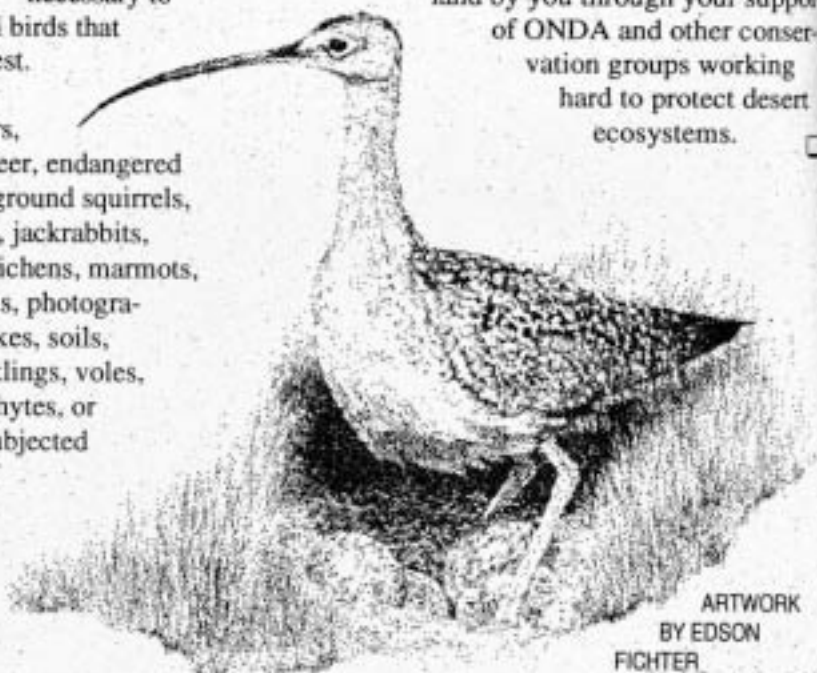
Including the cow-free year the refuge lands experienced as a result of "drought" conditions just prior to the injunction, there have now been four complete years without cows on Hart Mountain. As much as 10.5 million pounds of grass annually have thus been made available as forage and cover for a wide variety of wildlife. Streams are running clean and stream banks are beginning to rebuild the multi-storied riparian structure so necessary to

the neo-tropical birds that come here to nest. No longer will antelope, birders, cultural sites, deer, endangered species, frogs, ground squirrels, hunters, insects, jackrabbits, kangaroo rats, lichens, marmots, nematodes, owls, photographers, rattlesnakes, soils, trout, ugly ducklings, voles, wild rye, xerophytes, or zoologists be subjected to the effects of industrial livestock grazing over 400 square miles of high desert landscape.

Practicing conservation with a pen is important and effective, but it's more fun to get out on the land and take some direct action. Last summer the ONDA Restoration Brigade helped remove several miles of unnecessary fencing near the Blue Sky pine grove, which had become a hazard to wildlife. In July, ONDA's Air Scouts took a flight over the remote eastern portion of the Refuge and discovered trespassing livestock, which were immediately reported to refuge personnel. ONDA continues to use legal avenues to enforce removal of livestock grazing from disjunct refuge lands, including Shirk Ranch and Jacobs Reservoir.

The Hart Mountain victory is sending ripples beyond the refuge boundaries. The Sheldon National Wildlife Refuge in northern Nevada, the companion antelope range to Hart Mountain, has also gone cow-free, thanks to a wholesale buy-out of grazing permits by The Conservation Fund. Together the two refuges, totaling almost 1,300 square miles, are setting the standard for high desert restoration in the 21st century: A big victory, given to the land by you through your support of ONDA and other conservation groups working hard to protect desert ecosystems. □

Ultimately
the USFWS
recommended
the no-grazing
alternative.



ARTWORK
BY EDSON
FIGHTER

Heart Mountain

Floats above the desert,
An island in the sky.
Desert creeks,
Life springs,
Wild life oases
Below which grasses undulate in the wind
Lapping along a sagebrush shore.

From far away
Aspen run down folds in the hills
Like shadows in seems.
Up close
They rise up
Climbing the valleys
With bright green leaves
Dancing in the breeze.
And at their feet
Wildflowers are scattered
Like bits of rainbows.

Blue sky.
Pocket of pine.
Hidden in creases
And hemmed in meadows
Until come upon
When it expands
Up an down and in.

Antelope
Turn their heads in unison
To watch us
Watching them.
The vastness of the plains
Engulfs them
Only to spit them up again
To meet eye with eye.

Little blue speckled eggs.
Peek out from their nest
Hiding in the sagebrush.
Vesper sparrow
Sings in the evening stars.

Distant cliffs
Are splattered with chartreuse and
orange lichen.
Brash lichen
Lives with hooved creatures
Who live their lives
Casually
On the precipice.

Heart mountain lingers in the mind's eye
Like the bright image of a shooting star.

by Michele Penner



Hart Mountain in pristine southeastern Oregon

PHOTO COURTESY OF ONDA FILES

ONDA-EUGENE,
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lot of puzzled Eugene Celebraters and gave us a chance to educate people about the land and the tools available to protect it. Our "Support Cow-Free Wilderness" donation jar rapidly filled with greenbacks, too! Thanks to Laura Ohanian, Hilde Cherry, Joseph Minato, Marty McGee, Dave Funk and Kei Yasuda for staffing the booth and to all the folks who stopped by to visit.

Besides the natural inclination Eugeneans seem to have to rouse the rabble over environmental issues, why have we become so actively involved in protecting land on the other side of the state? It turns out that Eugene can play a vital role in saving the desert. The Oregon High Desert Protection Act is ONDA's primary tool for saving the desert. As federal legislation, it must be introduced by a U. S. Congressperson. Fourth District (which includes Eugene) Representative Peter DeFazio has expressed an interest in introducing a desert wilderness bill. ONDA is speaking to local groups, conservation and otherwise, to generate letters to Congressman DeFazio, encouraging him in

his support of desert wilderness.

1994 has been quite a year for ONDA's current cadre of desert rats in Eugene. To all the rest of you Webfeet out there looking for action, ONDA will be the place to be in '95. Join us and we'll make an even bigger difference next year!

Dave is currently Chair of the ONDA Eugene Group, helping to co-ordinate Eugene activists.

ANNOUNCEMENTS, CONTINUED
FROM PAGE 2

FOR SALE: "TRACKS IN THE WILD"

Color Audiovideo of Pacific Northwest wildlife tracks, 95-minute educational video by a professional tracker. \$29.95 + \$2.50 postage/handling.
Contact Barbara Butler,
P. O. Box 1044
Sisters, OR 97759
(503) 382-0755.



Sacred Cows: Why all the fuss?

by Denzel Ferguson



A century ago, we signed treaties with native Americans that were binding "so long as the rivers shall flow." We thought that meant "forever!"

In 1990, the EPA found riparian areas in the West to be in the worst condition in history. A year later, we learned that up to 60% of the large fishing and spawning holes in several rivers in the Northwest had disappeared in the last 50 years. Today, the Umatilla, the upper Grande Ronde, and the Lostine rivers dwindle to mere trickles, and thousands of headwater streams are now intermittent or dry gullies.

Mining, logging, and cows are the main culprits, but cows are the worst. While clearcuts and the falling of ancient trees occur at intervals measured in decades, cows in the West do a clearcut every year on an area twice the size of France.

Today only 3% of Arizona's original riparian zones persist – and of 32 species of native fishes, 26 are extinct or in trouble. Grazing has put more species on the T & E list than any other human activity (grazing in the U.S. has contributed directly or indirectly to the decline of over 340 listed or candidate species – plants and animals.)

Peak harvests of all species of salmon in the Columbia River occurred before or around 1900. By 1920, all species were in decline. Rock Island (the first dam) was built in 1933, Bonneville in 1938, and Grand Coulee in 1941. Yes, over-harvesting and dams have been disasters, but habitat destruction came first and has not abated. In Idaho, on the same stream, salmon production was 450% higher on ungrazed than on grazed segments.

Cows evolved in humid parts of the Old World and were introduced into the New World capriciously. Florida, where a cow can exist year-long on a single acre, produces more beef than five western states, where more than 200 acres are sometimes required to feed a cow for one month. So in the West cows loiter at streamside, and because riparian zones are narrow, ranchers pay less than 50 cents a month to graze a mile of riparian zone on public land. But once there, cows stomp, chomp and lounge – setting off a long chain of disastrous events!

Woody and herbaceous riparian vegetation are devoured and trampled. Shade disappears, vital filtering of runoff water is impaired, and aquatic organisms suffer losses of terrestrial

food sources. Soil is compacted, reducing plant growth, hindering moisture penetra-

tion, increasing rapid runoff, and lowering water tables. Banks collapse, adding huge sediment loads to streams and in steeper, terrain, channels become gullies. Urine and feces pollute streams. As shade disappears and streams become excessively wide and shallow, water temperatures climb, evaporative losses increase, and levels of dissolved oxygen drop.

These conditions lead to violent spring runoff, diminished watershed capacities, little or no flow during warm seasons, water that is too hot for most aquatic life, and a short-changing of all users of water downstream. But matters get worse!

Of all water used in the U.S., 84% is used in the 17 western states—primarily to grow cow fodder (i.e. 97.5% of all irrigation water in Montana, and probably 80% in Oregon.) In California it takes 5,218 gallons of water to produce one pound of beef, and cows use more water than the state's human population (but account for less than 1% of the economic income.)

Once streams are ravaged, ranchers and bureaucrats turn the problem over to us (e.g., Oregon anglers pay a \$2 stream restoration fee and BPA ratepayers pay a surcharge.) Millions of dollars have been squandered on voodoo stream restoration projects sponsored (but not paid for) by ranchers and agencies such as the BLM and USFS.

These so-called restoration or rehabilitation projects involve extensive rip-rapping with rock that is usually foreign to the system, tossing logs, rootwads, stumps, and refrigerator-size rocks into the channel, and the construction of in-stream weirs. Most of this is limited to main channels, while springs, tributaries, and watersheds continue to be trashed. Such mayhem is expensive, labor intensive, and requires putting heavy machinery in stream channels. The public gets a false impression that something useful is being done!

But the problem is too high temperatures and too little flow, neither of which is helped. For example: big rocks collect solar radiation and transfer heat or cold to the water day and night. Weirs (at \$750 each) prevent narrowing, sediment accumulation along banks, and re-establishment of woody riparian growth. Formed pools become warmer.

All of these artificial, hard structures foster abnormal

Of all water used in the U.S., 84% is used in the 17 western states—primarily to grow cow fodder.

channel development, prevent natural stream dynamics, and often end up being washed away by high water. When a team of outside experts examined many of these projects in several river basins in eastern Oregon, they reported them to be mainly worthless and frequently detrimental – actually making matters worse. They noted, “unquestionably, complete exclusion of livestock was the most effective habitat restoration management strategy observed in the Grande Ronde and John Day Basins.”

I have emphasized effects on streams, but that is just the tip of the iceberg!

In the 11 western states, 42% of all the land is controlled by the BLM and USFS, and 82% is grazed every year. These lands account for only 2% of the nation's livestock forage and are used by only 22,000 ranchers – 1.5% of all livestock owners. Today, just 10% of the grazing permittees using public land (including Union Oil, Getty Oil, etc.) do 91.7% of the grazing. (In Oregon, J.R. Simplot has the largest public allotment. They pay only 20% of the cost of letting them graze our public lands.)

Livestock grazing is the leading impediment to game

production in the West. Cattle alone devour more vegetation than did all native grazing animals before Columbus. In Idaho, the BLM allots 95% of its forage to livestock and only 5% to wildlife. On western public lands, big game animals live in a barbed-wire maze – 600,000 miles of fences, enough to circle the Earth 24 times.

In 1992, the Animal Damage Control Agency spent more than 45 million tax dollars – mainly to protect livestock. States and counties also spend huge sums. That year, they killed 96,158 coyotes, 8,232 foxes, 1,589 bobcats, 234 mountain lions, 206 black bears, 141 wolves, and God knows what else!

Millions of acres of bunchgrass and other native vegetation have been converted into exotic and less desirable plants by grazing. In Idaho, where cheatgrass has taken over much of the state since 1900, because it is 500 times more flammable than the native grasses it supplanted, the fire season is prolonged by two months. Thanks to cows, many native plants are extinct or endangered.

Domestic livestock grazing is the leading cause of soil erosion in the West – both by water and wind. An area larger than the original 13 states has undergone or is suffering from desertification.

It should be clear that we are not just talking about esthetics. Cows are creating monumental changes in the West – disturbances that will alter the pathways of future evolution (as native species adapt or become extinct.) On the Middle Fork of the John Day River, where USFS signs proclaim “Entering Salmon Country – Healthy Streams Keep ‘Em Coming Back,” water temperatures surpass 80 degrees (F) nearly every summer. Salmon, trout and whitefish perish in large numbers, while chubs, squawfish, and suckers survive. And Westerners dare not drink surface waters (because of *Giardia* – a cow-transmitted protozoan), but Easterners hiking the Appalachian Trail still drink at stream crossings and have dippers hanging on trees for that purpose.

Cows are an antiquated tradition. When we zoom down public highways in computer-enhanced cars in the black of night and hit a cow, most state laws (including Oregon's) say

Cows are creating monumental changes in the West – disturbances that will alter the pathways of future evolution



ARTWORK COURTESY OF LYNN JACOB, FROM HIS BOOK, WASTE OF THE WEST. CARTOON BY GREG PENTKOWSKI



runoff and soil erosion. The net effect of such interactions is a loss of available water to biotic communities.

Livestock, especially cattle, spend a disproportionate amount of time in riparian habitats. Thus, these sites, which are among the biologically richest in the region, are easily damaged. Because these communities provide essential habitat for a wide variety of species, this can have severe effects on regional biotas.

In sum, livestock grazing, which occurs throughout a majority of the American West, has a host of negative ecological repercussions. Livestock grazing has reduced densities and biomass of many plant and animal species, reduced biodiversity, aided the spread of exotic species, interrupted ecological succession, impeded the cycling of the most important limiting nutrient, changed habitat structure, disturbed community organization, and has been one of the most severe impacts on one of the biologically richest habitats in the region. While undoubtedly there are exceptions to this theme of destruction, clearly much of the ecological integrity of a variety of North American habitats is at risk from this land management practice.

A CALL FOR ACTION

The ecological evidence is clear that livestock grazing must be drastically reduced in the American West. We urge the public land management agencies to undertake the following for lands and resources under their jurisdiction:

1. Evaluate the ecological costs and appropriateness of livestock grazing on

an ecosystem by ecosystem basis.

The public agencies must analyze the ecological dynamics of each ecosystem type to determine whether, and to what extent, livestock grazing has an ecologically justifiable role. The "litmus test" should be the following: Can livestock grazing be done in such a manner that it helps maintain or improve the health, biological diversity, and long-term productivity of this ecosystem? Livestock grazing on public rangelands is not justifiable unless the answer is a clear and substantiated "yes."

2. Remove livestock immediately from damaged areas, except where it can be shown that grazing provides benefits (as described in #3 below).

The land management agencies should act immediately to remove livestock grazing from sites that fit the U.S. Bureau of Land Management definitions of "good" with "stable or declining trends," or worse, rangeland conditions. Riparian areas are of special concern due to their great biological significance.

3. Allow livestock grazing only where, and in such a manner, that it serves positive ecological roles.

With a view to the longer term, the public land management agencies should initiate steps to phase out livestock grazing from those ecosystem types where the practice does not pass the "litmus test" for ecological justification (see #1 above), for example, in desert scrub and desert grassland ecosystems. For those ecosystem types where livestock grazing does have potentially beneficial ecological roles (for example, achieving and sustaining diversity of vegetation types or successional stages at the landscape scale), the

agencies should bring grazing under management that ensures its positive contribution to the health, biological diversity, and long-term productivity of those systems.

4. Help society make informed choices.

Honestly articulate the ecological costs and consequences of livestock grazing, as well as the beneficial roles grazing can serve if carefully managed in certain ecological settings. Make scientific information understandable and accessible, so that society can make informed choices about public lands and resources.

5. Establish a network of significant areas where livestock are excluded, to serve as benchmarks for scientific evaluation of the ecological effects of grazing.

These benchmark areas should be established in all major ecosystem types of the American West, and should be large enough to evaluate landscape-level processes.

6. Eliminate grazing on public lands where it is accompanied by widespread control of native predators.

Society for Conservation Biology,
Public Lands Grazing Committee:

Thomas L. Fleischner, Chair, David E. Brown, Allen Y. Cooperrider, Winifred B. Kessler, Elizabeth L. Painter

Approved by the Board of Governors of the Society for Conservation Biology, 11 June 1994.

This position statement was developed in conjunction with a lengthier review article which includes extensive supporting literature citations. See Fleischner, T.L. 1994. Ecological costs of livestock grazing in western North America. Conservation Biology 8(3):629-644.



ARTWORK BY
EDSON FICHTER

Livestock,
especially cattle,
spend a
disproportionate
amount of time
in riparian
habitats.

► **OWYHEE CANYON UPDATE,**
CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

diminishes revenue to the common school fund by preventing competitive bidding on the leases for the next 30 years, ONDA and others will be appealing the decision to the court of appeals.

So what does this mean for bidding on state land leases in 1995? When the ranchers filed their lawsuit, the judge issued an injunction preventing the state from implementing its new range management rule, thus the public bidding process, originally scheduled for late 1994, was indefinitely postponed pending a final decision on the case. With the case now moving to the court of appeals, it is unlikely there will be any decision until later in 1995. In the meantime, the old rules remain in effect and the ranchers will once again be grazing their livestock on state lands. To add insult, the old grazing fee remains in place depriving the school fund of thousands of dollars in revenue.

ONDA met with the Division of State Lands to discuss ONDA's intention to bid on the Owyhee Canyonlands lease and manage the area as cow-free "wilderness." ONDA expressed concern to DSL over their lack of ability to manage lands in this remote area and suggested the state trade the land back to the BLM. (The Owyhee state lands were part of a consolidation of land between the BLM and the state in the 1980s. Most of the land in the Owyhee Canyonlands was federal land. Obviously, if ONDA can become an affected lease holder, we will be in a key position to advocate for this trade.) Once in federal ownership, the land can be formally designated as cow-free wilderness. To make our vision perfectly clear, the Owyhee Canyonlands have been added to the proposed Oregon High Desert Protection Act (which would designate 6 million acres of Oregon's High Desert as wilderness) in anticipation of a trade with the BLM and subsequent designation as wilderness.

ONDA also met with BLM State Director, Elaine Zielinski, to encourage the Owyhee land trade, along with a long-term solution to protect the greater Owyhee ecosystem. The wild and scenic river designation on the Owyhee River does nothing to protect the entire watershed. Upland habitat and small streams flowing into the Owyhee River have no protection from livestock grazing. As a result, water quality in the river, especially during low river flows, is poor. Designating the Owyhee Canyonlands ecosystem as a cow-free National River Conservation Area is one option on the table. Critics of this idea claim that BLM would be unwilling to take the cows off the land. Others suggest BLM should be given a chance to do the right thing. ONDA will support what's best for the land.

On a parallel front, State Senator Peter Sorenson has agreed to consider legislation to designate the Owyhee Canyonlands as a state wilderness area within the state park system. Although the politics in Oregon would not support such a proposal, ONDA believes it might help elevate the profile of this remote and little-known area.

The greater Owyhee Canyonlands ecosystem is one of the most remote, primitive desert landscapes in the U.S. Like most of the West, the land has suffered its share of abuse over the years. For example, the Owyhee River salmon runs were once part of the great salmon runs of the Columbia River but were blocked from migrating back to their ancestral home by dams. If the salmon returned today, they could not tolerate the degraded condition of the river. We anticipate the salmon's return and will make every effort to restore and protect this unique and wild desert wilderness.



PHOTO COURTESY OF GARY TEPFER

► **SACRED COWS,**
CONTINUED FROM PAGE 7



that you, your insurance company, or your heirs must pay for the cow, which has the right-of-way.

The tradition survives, as Edward Abbey pointed out in 1986 in *Harpers*: "the rancher (with a few honorable exceptions) is a man who strings barbed wire all over the range; drills wells and bulldoze stock ponds; drives off elk and antelope and bighorn sheep; poisons coyotes and prairie dogs; shoots eagles, bears and cougars on sight; supplants the native grasses with tumbleweed, snakeweed, povertyweed, cowshit, anthills, mud, dust, and flies. And then leans back and grins at the TV cameras and talks about how much he loves the American West."

Of the economic benefits of minerals, timber, water, wildlife, recreation, and grazing on public lands, grazing is lowest, accounting for only 1% of the economic return. And a recent nationwide poll showed that 34% of the respondents favored taking all cows off public land.

Removing all livestock from public lands would not even register in the national economy. In the West, it would reduce employment by 0.1% and reduce the economy by 0.5%. Growth in other industries and sectors would rapidly offset these losses. Today, 4% of American beef is exported (even the Japanese are now getting bypass operations), the industry is pushing 3-ounce servings (with the fat surgically trimmed) and broccoli consumption is up 600%.

Things are changing. Little boys with normal IQ's no longer want to become cowboys. It's about time!

Denzel Ferguson is the Executive Director of the Society Advocating Natural Ecosystems (SANE)

► FROM THE OUTBACK,
CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

subtle relationships in Nature not previously known, much less appreciated, and rarely put into practice. As Ed Abbey once said, "It is not enough to understand Nature, the point is to save it." Ironically, Wilderness holds in reality the notions we attribute to the cowboy way of life: freedom, independence, self-will and justice. But the myth of the cowboy is unsustainable. It is a house of cards with no ecological foundation. The image was concocted by Buffalo Bill and Hollywood movie moguls serving up the "Wild West" to Americans hungering for the freedom of a home on the range.

So what keeps us from redefining the myth? Alaska Governor Wally Hickel recently said it best when he quipped "we just can't let Nature run wild." We are afraid. The reality is we have no choice. Wilderness in particular

It is not
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to save it.

— Ed Abbey

embodies our notion of "Nature run wild." It teaches humility and commands respect, but our baggage of human arrogance blinds us from this truth. In Wally's World, we deny that universal truism "Nature bats last." Someone needs to gently tell Wally he struck out.

We are the abolitionists of the "Old West." Our job is to break the chains of industrial servitude to restore and save what remains of the "Wild West." We'll start with the public lands: no more all-you-can-eat smorgasbord of free water, free land, free gold, free grass, and free trees, but venerated as our bridge to the past and our hope for the future. For spiritual and ecological needs, we will follow through with our commitment to Wilderness. These are the sacred lands that exist not just for our sake, but for Nature's sake. In Wilderness, we find solace knowing that there is always a place to go home, where the Laws of Nature are the laws of the land.

Let's not be discouraged by political drift. We are, I believe, witness to the end of the age of arrogance. The transition to a free society in harmony with Nature will take many forms and happen in many places and different times. Wilderness is one harbinger of that transition. Being an incrementalist, I will hold on to a vision of Nature unfettered by the whimsical demands of our self-consuming culture and, in the mean time, work for the places we call LaRosa Canyon, Poker Jim Ridge, the Donner und Blitzen River, Sutton Mountain, Leslie Gulch and Dead Dog Canyon. We must remain diligent. Perseverance is progress.

WISE USE (?)

The wise-use (sic) crowd loves to talk about the economy, jobs, and taking. If you want to know who supports the natural resource economy, who provides the jobs, and who is doing the taking, order a copy of the following document:

Taking from the taxpayer: Public subsidies for natural resource development. Majority Staff Report, Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations, Committee on Natural Resources, George Miller, Chairman, U.S. House of Representatives, Washington, D.C. 20515-6201, (202) 225-2761. 125 pages.

Some examples of the gross subsidies at the expense of the public and Nature:

1. Dan Russell of California has 40 public-land grazing allotments comprising five million acres in California, Nevada and Wyoming.

2. In the New Magma District of the Central Arizona Project, the Bureau of Reclamation sells irrigation water for \$2/acre foot, when it costs the agency \$248.52/acre foot to deliver it.

3. The Jerritt Canyon Mine in Nevada has gold deposits worth \$1 billion. The ore is

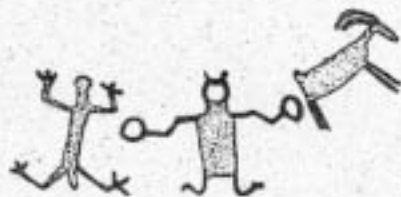
extracted by heap-leaching by the Independence Mining Company, which has applied to patent own the land (at the cost of only \$5 per acre.)

The Independence Mining Company is 70% owned by Minorca USA, a wholly owned subsidiary of Minorco, Luxembourg, which is in turn a subsidiary of Anglo-American, a South African-based company!

4. In 1991 the Tongass National Forest in Alaska counted 80% of all benefits from timber cutting as benefits to fisheries. The Arizona and New Mexico forests counted more than three-quarters of all benefits from timber cutting to recreation!

5. The nuclear industry collected \$3.05 billion in federal subsidies in 1991.

And much, much more! This document clearly identifies the bad guys — and they are not environmentalists.



BOOKS

The Sagebrush Ocean: A Natural History of the Great Basin by Stephen Trimble



This is the best general introduction to the ecology and spirit of the Great Basin, a place where the desert almost seems to mirror the sky in size; where mountains hold ravens, bristlecone pines, winter stillness and unseen, but thrilling, the possibility of bighorn sheep.

\$21.95

Waste of the West Public Lands Ranching by Lynn Jacobs



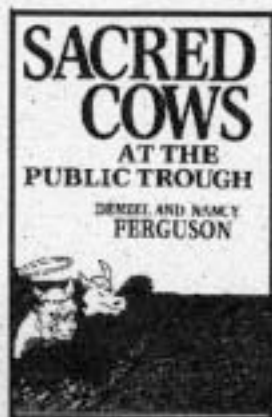
Waste of the West is the most complete, rational, and thorough portrayal of the West's greatest environmental issue—livestock production. The result of many years of research and personal experience, this volume is a remarkable and insightful compilation that addresses every aspect of the livestock industry's political, social, and ecological stranglehold on the West.

—George Wuerthner, ecologist and author

\$28.00

MARKETPLACE

Sacred Cows at the Public Trough by Denzel & Nancy Ferguson



An informative appeal to the nation to rescue the public lands from the grip of an abusive and demanding minority: the open-range livestock industry. At times you will be angry, at times you will want to cry, but one thing for sure, after reading this, you will never feel the same.

\$9.00

Hole in the Sky by William Kittredge



Hole in the Sky is a courageous and engrossing book, full of the very rare winces and shudders of a man truly owning up to his life. Kittredge writes a bountiful, wise and lucid prose that befits a story out of the lineage of Stegner, Guthrie and that great unknown, John Graves.

—Jim Harrison

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