



50 Years of Public Land Management

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1934 – 1984



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On June 28, 1934, President Franklin D. Roosevelt signed the Taylor Grazing Act (TGA). This law ended previously free and unregulated grazing use of the public lands and introduced Federal protection and management of the lands and their resources. The events leading to passage of the TGA characterized the development of the West. These events also laid the groundwork for the manner in which the TGA was implemented and the management philosophy that exists today. This document was compiled to review, very briefly, some of the major events prior to and following passage of the TGA. The first section describes the Act and other laws that shape the Bureau of Land Management's (BLM) current range management program. The second section describes changing rangeland condition during the 50 years that have passed since Federal management first began in 1934. The final section presents the policies under which the BLM today manages the public rangelands, with the objective of protecting and improving them for the future.

HISTORY OF THE TAYLOR GRAZING ACT

The Open Range

The era of the open range was, in large part, the result of the prevailing philosophy of public land disposal. There was no need to regulate or control use of the public lands because they eventually would be settled and transferred into State or private ownership. Congress tried to encourage land settlement through various grant programs. To promote the development of a transcontinental railroad, Congress granted over 94 million acres to the railroad corporations and another 37 million acres to the States for the benefit of the railroads.

Congress also granted tracts of lands to persons able to establish farms. When Congress enacted a series of homesteading acts, however, it based the amount of acreage that a settler could claim upon the amount of land that could support a family in the East. The Homestead Act of 1862, one of several early attempts to transfer Federal lands into private ownership,

allowed settlers to claim only 160 acres. The Enlarged Homestead Act of 1909 later raised the limit to 320 acres, and was followed by the 1916 Stockraising Act, which provided for 640 acres. Although about 285 million acres were claimed under the Acts, many homesteaders failed to establish successful operations of such limited size on arid range areas. The Federal Government eventually bought back over 2.2 million acres of this land from farmers driven into bankruptcy by the unsuitability of the land, drought, and the Depression.

The nature of the public lands was far better suited for livestock raising than for small-farm agriculture. The quality of forage, combined with the large open expanses where livestock could graze, encouraged the rapid growth of a Western livestock industry. In 1870, there were approximately 4.6 million cattle in the 17 Western States. Less than 20 years later, there were



Building the trans-continental railroad.

26.65 million. While some railroad and speculator reports, and even a few Federal reports, optimistically claimed that the ranges could support at least double the number of animals, many livestock operators and others were becoming alarmed by the onslaught of grazing animals on the range.

In several States, livestock operators banded together into grazing associations to impose some form of control. These early organizations attempted de facto allocation of the range and tried to discourage any new intruders onto the lands. As could be expected, the associations had limited success in restricting new settlers from taking advantage of the same free and open range that had lured them. Nor were they able to prevent itinerant sheepherders from grazing their animals on lands they had allocated among themselves.

The open range boom period only lasted a few short years before natural disasters, added to human ig-

norance, produced tragedy. Severe winters in 1886 and 1887 brought death to hundreds of thousands of animals spread out over the depleted range. A prolonged drought followed, further crippling the livestock industry.

The plight of the Western livestock industry captured national attention, but no legislation was passed in Congress for another three decades. Although legislation to regulate livestock use was introduced every year between 1899 and 1934, disagreements among Congressional delegates, the Federal agencies, the Western States, and the livestock industry prevented passage of a mutually supportable bill.

The public lands, and the livestock industry, continued to suffer from cyclical overstocking, natural disasters, and shifting market conditions. During World War I, the increased demand for meat, the continued free use of the range, and patriotic fervor promoted a new boom cycle. The bust came at the end



of the War. The livestock industry had expanded itself beyond the peacetime market, and placed too-heavy demands on the range. This chronic economic instability of the livestock industry forced operators to raise more stock on the lands, and kept them from supporting legislation aimed at limiting their use.

The livestock industry suffered with the rest of the Nation during the prolonged drought and Depression of the 1930's. The public lands, reportedly producing at less than half their original capacity, could no longer sustain the livestock numbers being grazed. Many livestock operators began to appeal to their Congressional representatives for some form of relief.

The livestock operators found a proponent in Congressman Ed Taylor of Colorado. Once an opponent of Federal regulation of the Western range, Congressman Taylor became an ardent supporter of this last-ditch effort to save both the lands and his constituency. Homesteaders did not want lands that were

unsuitable for farming under contemporary practices; the States had opposed an earlier effort by President Hoover to transfer the lands to them. Federal administration, aided by the operators, seemed the best policy, at least for the interim.

Taylor used a bill that had been unsuccessfully introduced the previous year by Representative Colton as his model. The bill was shaped by the desires of the livestock industry as well as by the struggle between the Secretaries of the Departments of the Interior and Agriculture for control of the lands. In his bid for retention of lands within the Department of the Interior, then-Secretary Harold Ickes promised the livestock industry that grazing fees would be tied to the cost of administration, which he claimed would not exceed \$150,000. Secretary Ickes also promised that the administration of the range would differ from that being used to regulate grazing on Forest Service lands, which the operators viewed as being too bureaucratic. Given these promises, the livestock industry rallied behind the bill, thus ensuring its eventual passage.

The Taylor Grazing Act

President Roosevelt signed the Taylor Grazing Act (TGA) "to stop injury to the public grazing lands by preventing overgrazing and soil deterioration; to provide for their orderly use, improvement, and development; [and] to stabilize the livestock industry dependent upon the public range" To accomplish these goals, the Secretary was authorized to establish grazing districts on not more than 80 million acres of vacant, unappropriated, and unreserved public lands which, in his judgment, were chiefly valuable for grazing and raising forage. In 1936, the TGA was amended to raise the amount of lands within grazing districts to 142 million acres. The TGA also authorized grazing administration on lands outside of the grazing districts, which added approximately 100 million acres to the lands to be managed.

The TGA was significant in several ways. First, because it ended free access to the public range, it was one of the first major conservation laws passed in the United States. Second, for the first time in American land legislation, authority was given for classification of land according to its best use. Third, it effectively marked the end of large-scale public land disposition by withdrawing from claim all remaining unreserved lands. At the same time, it made it possible for the Government to exchange lands with State and private landowners, and to sell isolated tracts. And finally, it recognized the Government's dual responsibility to care for the land as well as to consider the people dependent upon its use.

Implementation of the Taylor Grazing Act

The TGA was implemented through the combined effort of the livestock operators and the newly-created Division of Grazing, under the guidance of its first director, Farrington R. Carpenter. The first, enormous step in implementing the Act was to establish grazing districts. Maps of the lands were virtually nonexistent, and the only persons who knew where the lands were, who used them, and the amount of livestock grazed were the operators themselves. Carpenter spent much of his time persuading ranchers to organize themselves into grazing districts. With the help of informally established boards of stockmen, 32 grazing districts were established by the end of 1935. New districts were added at periodic intervals until the total of 60 was established by 1946.

Once district boundaries were established, the next equally difficult task was to decide which livestock

operators would be able to continue grazing the range. The Act required that preference be given to historic range users; a second criterion was that livestock operators own or control a base property. These two criteria were too broad for the Division of Grazing to eliminate the excess operators. Ferry Carpenter turned once again to the grazing boards and asked them to help decide how many years would establish historic use and what would constitute base property. Eventually, the rule for prior use was that anyone who had used the range in connection with his base property for either 3 years, or 2 consecutive years, during the 5 years preceding the TGA would have priority. Base property requirements would be determined locally, since the type and use of property (land or water) depended on the grazing operations in the various areas.

The grazing boards also helped determine how much use each operator qualifying for a public land permit would be allowed. Again, prior use was the deciding criterion. If an operator believed that the granted use was less than he deserved, his first appeal was to the grazing board. The board members had shared the range with him and had a good grasp of the accuracy of the appellant's claim.

The value of the grazing boards' contribution to implementation of the TGA cannot be overestimated. While the boards were, in effect, being allowed to regulate themselves, the ranchers were the only persons with sufficient knowledge of the users and resources within the districts to accomplish this regulation.

CHANGING ROLES SINCE THE TAYLOR GRAZING ACT

Federal Personnel

Ferry Carpenter set out to implement the Taylor Grazing Act with 20 men transferred from other agencies. By the end of 1935, Carpenter had hired only 17 more staff members, of which 5 were clerks and 3 were stenographers. In short, during the early days of the Division of Grazing, there were 29 men to administer grazing on over 258 million acres of lands within and outside the grazing districts.

This rudimentary staff received help from the Civilian Conservation Corps. The "CCC's", as the Corps became known, put unemployed men to work on conservation projects during the time of the Depression until the early 1940's. A number of CCC camps were developed on the public lands with the objective of training young men to be productive workers. The CCC men built many range improvements, such as fences, water check dams, windbreaks, roads, and watering facilities. Many of these projects are still in use today, and bear such names as the CCC fence or CCC spring.

As the responsibilities of the Division of Grazing grew, so did the staff. By 1940, after the Division of Grazing had been renamed the Grazing Service, the number of personnel had reached 205—an average

of 1 person for every 1.2 million acres of grazing land, clerical and support staff included.

Although this number still seemed insufficient given the territory to be covered, it caused widespread consternation. In his bid for control of the public lands, Secretary Ickes had promised—unrealistically—that the Department of the Interior could manage the public lands for \$150,000 annually. Some congressional representatives viewed the growing numbers of Grazing Service personnel as a breach of this promise. The livestock industry disliked the growing agency for two reasons. First, Secretary Ickes also had promised that the grazing fee would be based on the costs of administering grazing use. Additional personnel meant greater administrative costs. Second, additional personnel meant more bureaucratic control over an industry long accustomed to self regulation.

Service personnel were cut drastically in 1945 as a result of a congressional dispute over the grazing fee. The TGA gave the Service the authority to charge a grazing fee. The first fee, charged in 1936, was \$0.05 per animal unit month; that is, one nickel for one cow or five sheep for one month. In 1945, the grazing fee for public land use was still \$0.05, although the fee charged on lands managed by the Forest Service averaged about \$0.31 an animal unit month.



CCC enrollees constructing the Hailey-Ketchum driveway fence along the Sun Valley Highway, Idaho. 1940

A House Subcommittee on Appropriations threatened to withhold appropriations from the Grazing Service if it did not raise the grazing fee. On the Senate side, the Public Lands Committee insisted that lower fees should be charged for the public range. The Grazing Service was caught between the two, and unable to respond to either. The Appropriations Subcommittee consequently carried out its threat by reducing the Service's budget by 85 percent. The Public Lands Committee, led by Senator McCarran of Nevada, did not oppose the cut because the alternative seemed to be an increase in fees.

Senator McCarran applauded the ensuing havoc within the agency. During the 4 years prior to the Service's downfall, McCarran had been conducting hearings throughout the West. These hearings, which were part of his investigation of the Service, were used by the Senator to search out the most discontented and vociferous of the public land operators. McCarran's apparent goal was to prevent any possible fee increase to cover the increasing costs

of administration by demonstrating that the Service was inept, bureaucratic, and completely misguided in its administration of the TGA. In explaining his Senate Committee's failure to oppose the budget cut made by the House Committee, McCarran said:

"... the only way, in my judgment, to get the Taylor Grazing Act back again to a solid foundation is not to increase this appropriation now, but to hold . . . [it] down where the House put it, until the Interior Department sees fit to set up a Taylor Grazing Administration that will be worthy of the name and the object of the law."

Denied funding, the Service reduced its staff from 250 to about 40 range examiners. This layoff became known as the "McCarran Holiday." Ironically, many of the employees laid off in the wake of the budgetary disaster were "rehired" by the District Grazing Advisory Boards. These Boards used grazing fees returned to the counties for range improvement work to pay the salaries of the laid-off workers and keep the grazing management program going.



Farrington R. Carpenter, first Director
of the Division of Grazing.

Robert F. Burford, present Director of
the Bureau of Land Management.



In 1946, the remnants of the Grazing Service were combined with the General Land Office to create the Bureau of Land Management. The Grazing Service became the Division of Grazing within the new agency. This Division has evolved over time and is now called the Division of Rangeland Resources. Over 280 range conservationists administer the grazing program in the field, supported by wildlife biologists, soil scientists, hydrologists, environmental specialists and other staff needed to ensure that grazing use is in harmony with the needs of the resources and with other uses. The first district offices established in 1935 to administer grazing use consisted of a district grazer and an office clerk. The current district office requires a large, interdisciplinary staff to fulfill the more complex, multiple-use oriented role of the contemporary BLM.

The Bureau of Land Management

1946-1970:

The basic objectives of the TGA were to prevent overgrazing through livestock control, improve the condition of the land, and help stabilize the livestock industry dependent on the range. Stabilization of the industry was largely achieved through the allocation of the range to persons with base properties, according to their historical use and dependency on the range. The first two objectives remain ongoing.

During the late 1950's and early 1960's, the BLM directed most of its attention toward bringing the number of animals allowed on the range down to the carrying capacity. This was a turbulent period, with numerous appeals brought before the District Grazing Advisory Boards and the BLM Director.

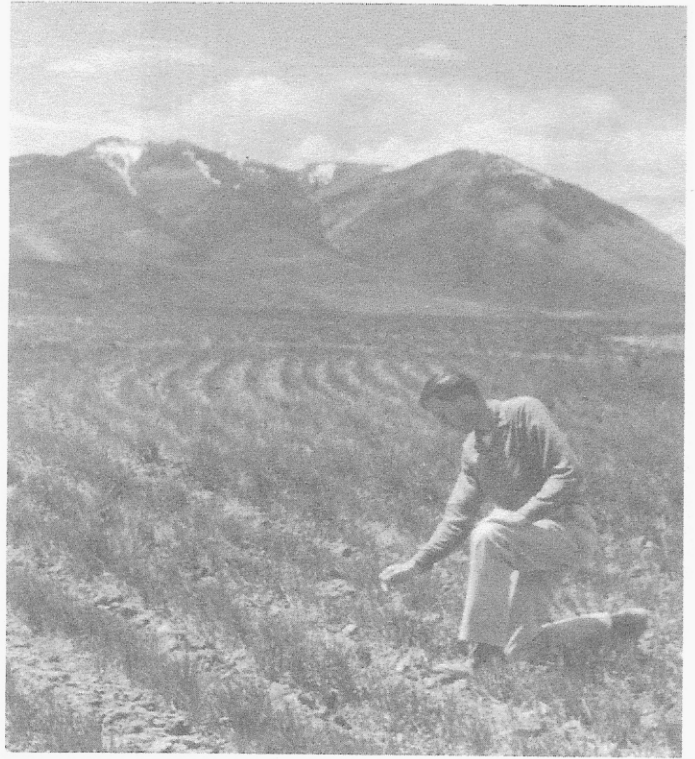
The BLM tried to offset required reductions through range improvement projects. Many water spreading systems were developed, with seedings of crested wheatgrass to improve the range. Senator Wayne Morse of Oregon was instrumental in getting money

for the 4.5 million-acre Vale Project, which was the largest range improvement effort ever accomplished worldwide.

The Vale Project settled an historic range dispute known as the battle of Soldier Creek. Soldier Creek was an area in Eastern Oregon-Western Idaho where the BLM had proposed substantial reductions in livestock use to bring grazing use into line with carrying capacity. Opposition to the cuts was so strong that the BLM, the operators, and their representatives in Congress battled for years to find other alternatives. Eventually, the operators agreed to voluntary cuts, and the BLM was given the funding for an intensive management program.

The BLM sprayed or reseeded over 400,000 acres, or about 10 percent, of the Vale Project area. Fencing, water development, and the increased forage on the treated acres improved livestock distribution and reduced grazing pressure on the remaining area during critical growth periods. As a result, forage and habitat production on the untreated 90 percent of the area more than doubled.

The 1950's and 1960's also marked an intensive effort to control weeds and pests, such as halogeton, the beet leafhopper, and the aroga moth. Halogeton is a poisonous plant introduced to the United States from Asia. It invades disturbed areas and was responsible for the death of thousands of sheep during the 1950's. The beet leafhopper, or whitefly, carries a virus that causes curlytop in sugar beets, which severely reduces sugar beet production. This insect spends part of its lifecycle on Russian thistle before moving into, and infesting, sugar beet fields. Sugar beet producers were concerned that Russian thistles growing on public lands adjacent to beet fields were contributing to current crop damage by the insect. The aroga moth was defoliating large areas of big sagebrush, opening the areas to erosion and the invasion of undesirable plant species.



Revegetated range, Vale Project, Oregon.

Congress responded to these situations by providing the BLM with large sums of money in the late 1950's and early 1960's to control damage by halogeton and the two pests. The preferred method of controlling damage by all three is to reseed the infested areas with resistant plant species. In most areas, the BLM replanted infested areas with crested wheatgrass, which provides for better distribution of livestock during the spring and fall grazing seasons. The better distribution of livestock also relieved grazing pressure on the adjacent native ranges and allowed them to improve over time.

Allotment management plans were introduced in the 1960's as another way to improve the range through better grazing management. Many individual allotments were established; rangelands were fenced,

and intensive range management was used to increase forage production.

1970-Today

A primary criticism of the early BLM was that its actions were single-use oriented. The 1970's saw the resurgence of an environmental movement that encompassed management of the public lands. The first wave of this movement had been felt in 1964, with passage of the Classification and Multiple Use Act (C&MU Act).

While the TGA provided for management of the public lands "pending their final disposal," the C&MU Act was the first official recognition by the Congress that some of the public lands had multiple-use values and should be retained in Federal ownership. The Secretary of the Interior was to determine which of the lands administered by him through the BLM should be retained "at least during this period . . . and managed for (1) domestic livestock grazing, (2) fish and wildlife development and utilization, (3) industrial development, (4) mineral production, (5) occupancy, (6) outdoor recreation, (7) timber production, (8) watershed protection, (9) wilderness preservation, or (10) preservation of public values that would be lost if the land passed from Federal ownership." To accomplish this new mission, the C&MU Act granted the BLM its first authorization ever to gather information about the public lands and its resources.

At the same time Congress passed the C&MU Act, it created the Public Land Law Review Commission. This Commission was to review the overwhelming mass of policies, laws, and regulations affecting public land management and to recommend appropriate changes. At that time, there were over 3,500 laws pertaining to the lands.

The Commission submitted its report, called *One Third of the Nation's Land*, in 1970. Among the Commission's 137 recommendations concerning public land management were those recommending clearer disposal policies, greater use of environmental impact

studies as a precondition of various land uses, blocking of Federal lands through land exchanges, and comprehensive land use planning that would include public participation.

The importance of the Public Land Law Review Commission was that its recommendations reaffirmed many of the principles established in the TGA while also recognizing the growing interests of other users of the lands. The Commission's recommendations also laid the groundwork for several land management laws that followed, particularly the Federal Land Policy and Management Act of 1976.

The Commission's ideas were being incorporated into law even before its report was submitted. Its recommendations concerning recognition and protection of environmental quality are reflected in the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 (NEPA). In the NEPA, Congress established a national policy to consider the impact of proposed and alternative Federal actions on the quality of the human environment prior to their implementation.

The BLM is now in the process of completing 144 site-specific grazing environmental impact statements, covering 174 million acres of public lands, by the end of Fiscal Year 1988 (September 30, 1988). As of July 1984, the BLM has completed 93 EIS's addressing the impacts of livestock grazing on 118 million acres of public lands. By September 30, 1984, the BLM will have completed 105 EIS's, covering 133 million acres.

Several laws passed during the 1970's affect the BLM's range management program. The most important of these are the Federal Land Policy and Management Act (FLPMA) of 1976 and the Public Rangelands Improvement Act (PRIA) of 1978.

The FLPMA has been called the BLM's Organic Act because it is the most comprehensive legislation concerning BLM's programs ever enacted by the Congress. It gave statutory recognition to an agency

established only through executive order, and gave it the formal authority to enter into long-range planning and intensive resource management. The FLPMA also settled the lingering question of public land disposition by stating that most of the lands would remain in Federal ownership. It calls for periodic inventory of the lands and their resources, land-use plans to guide present and future uses, and management on the basis of multiple use and sustained yield.

The FLPMA also addresses the grazing management program specifically. It amended the TGA by increasing the percentage of grazing fees to be returned to the BLM for on-the-ground range improvements to 50 percent. It provides that grazing leases and permits normally be issued for 10 years and that existing permittees/lessees have first priority for renewals. The Act also assures permittees and lessees that, if the land is devoted to another public purpose, including disposal, they will be reimbursed for the value of range improvements they constructed on public lands. The FLPMA also guarantees permittees and lessees 2 years prior notice if their permits/leases are to be cancelled.

The PRIA is the most recent Act dealing with the public rangelands. This Act reemphasized the concepts expressed in the FLPMA, including a continuing inventory of public land resources; multiple-use management, and consultation, cooperation, and coordination with persons affected by resource management decisions. The PRIA established the Experimental Stewardship Program, which is designed to foster improved rangeland management by providing incentives or rewards to ranchers whose stewardship of the public lands improves resource conditions. The PRIA also established on a trial basis (1979-1985) a grazing fee formula that reflects annual changes in the costs of livestock production. The Secretaries of the Departments of the Interior and Agriculture are to report to Congress on the Experimental Stewardship Program and on the trial fee formula by the end of 1985.

Advisory Groups

The first public group created to advise the BLM on range management issues was the District Grazing Advisory Board. Although the original TGA had provided only that the Secretary "could" cooperate with local stockmen in implementing the Act, the informal boards of stockmen pulled together by Ferry Carpenter had proved so valuable that they were given statutory recognition. In 1939, the TGA was amended to provide for the creation of a Grazing Advisory Board in every district "in order that the Secretary . . . may have the benefit of the fullest information and advice concerning physical, economic, and other local conditions in the several grazing districts . . ." Except for emergency situations, the Secretary was to request the board's advice prior to issuing any rules or regulations affecting the district. These boards could contain from 6 to 13 members, with 1 member representing wildlife interests and the remainder being stockmen.

In 1940, State advisory boards were established, although they were not given statutory recognition until 1949. At first, only livestock representatives from the district boards were elected to serve on the State boards. In 1961, the boards were expanded to include a wildlife representative, and from one to seven representatives of other interests such as forestry, recreation, mineral development, and State and local government. Representatives from the State boards, in turn, were selected to serve on a national advisory board.

In 1972, Congress passed the Federal Advisory Committee Act. That Act abolished all existing Federal advisory groups and established strict controls over new ones. Congress responded to pressure from the public and the BLM to recharter the advisory boards in 1976 with passage of the FLPMA. The FLPMA authorizes the creation of District Grazing Advisory Boards if requested by a majority of the grazing permittees.

The FLPMA states that the function of these boards shall be "to offer advice and make recommendations . . . concerning the development of allotment management plans and the utilization of range betterment funds." Recent policies issued by the BLM have reemphasized the advisory functions of the boards so that it can still have the full benefit of the operator's knowledge of the grazing areas.

The FLPMA also authorized the formation of District Multiple-Use Advisory Councils to advise the BLM's

district managers on all aspects of multiple use planning and management. A National Public Lands Advisory Council exists today at the discretion of the Secretary of the Interior to advise him, through the Director of the BLM, on all public land management policy. This national council is made up of representatives of the various interests, including grazing, wildlife, forestry, energy and minerals, and other uses of the public lands.





CHANGING LIVESTOCK GRAZING USE

The TGA provided the Division of Grazing with the authority to reduce livestock grazing to levels that the depleted public lands could sustain. Initially, this meant dividing the lands into grazing districts and determining which of the current range users would be allowed to remain on the lands. The Division of Grazing spent the first several years organizing the livestock operators into districts, developing regulations, and working with the grazing advisory boards to allocate use. During most of these early organizational years, grazing use continued at the same level as had occurred in preceding years.

In 1941, the Division of Grazing—now renamed the Grazing Service—authorized approximately 22 million AUM's of grazing. That was the highest amount of use ever authorized, and was in response to the demand for meat, wool, and leather during World War II. The amount of livestock grazing on the public lands has declined steadily since 1941, except for a brief increase during the Korean War years. Grazing use reached a low of about 10.2 million AUM's in 1980 (see figure 1). Slight increases have occurred for 1981 through 1983.

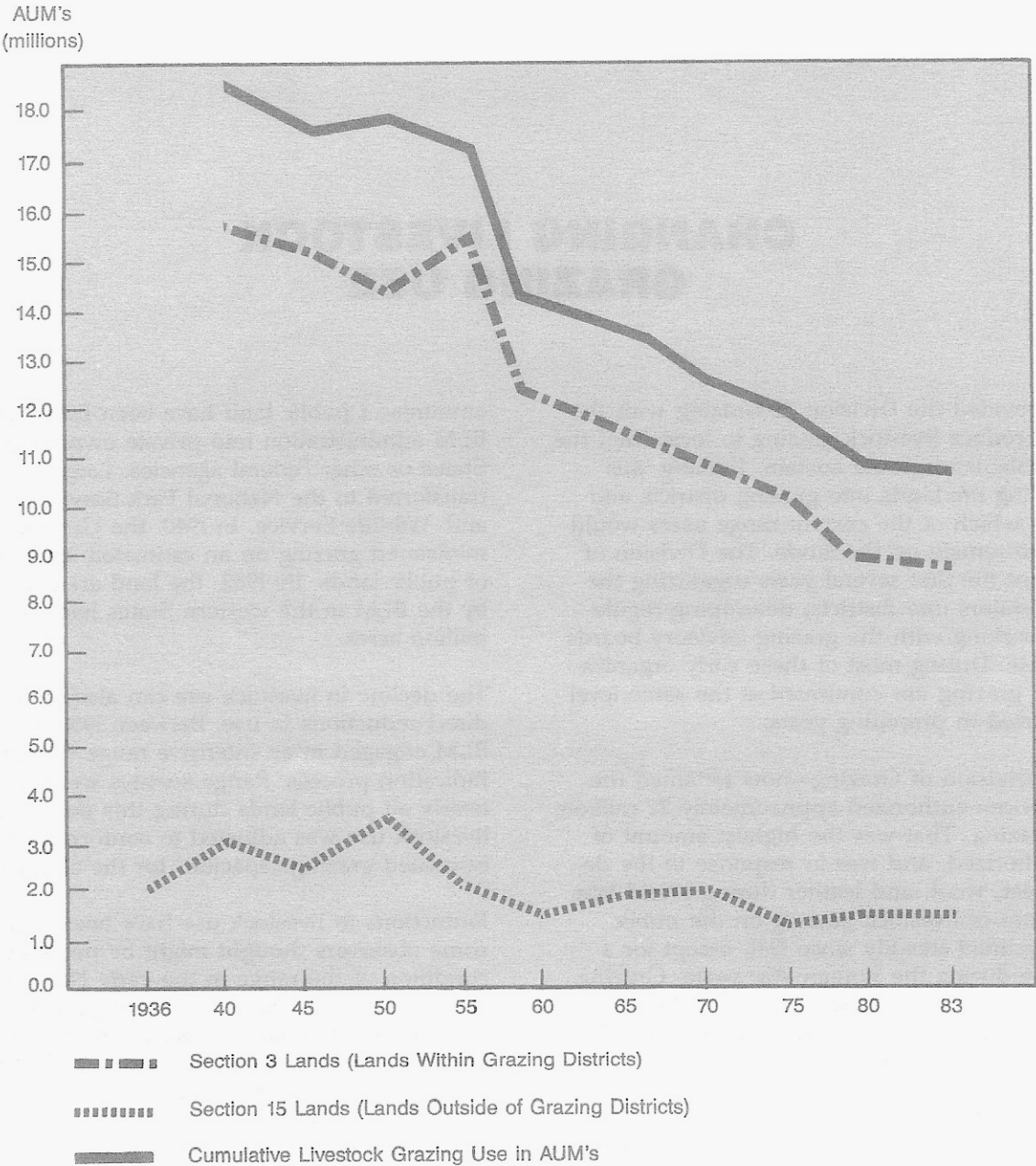
A large part of this decline is attributable to a reduction in public land acreage. Since 1936, substantial

amounts of public land have been transferred from BLM administration into private ownership or to the States or other Federal agencies. Large blocks were transferred to the National Park Service and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. In 1940, the Grazing Service administered grazing on an estimated 258 million acres of public lands. By 1982, the land area administered by the BLM in the western States had decreased to 174 million acres.

The decline in livestock use can also be attributed to direct reductions in use. Between 1958 and 1965, the BLM engaged in an intensive range survey and an adjudication process. Range surveys were conducted on nearly all public lands during this period, and livestock use was adjusted to conform to the estimated grazing capacities for the allotments.

Reductions in livestock use have been less severe than some observers thought might be necessary, given the condition of the range in the early 1930's. In many instances, operators have voluntarily decreased their grazing use to facilitate more rapid improvement of the range or to respond to short-term fluctuations in forage production. Some operators have been able to decrease the number of animals grazed with no loss in profit. When fewer animals graze on available

Figure 1. Animal Unit Months (AUM's) of Public Land Use, 1936-1983, for Section 3 and Section 15 Lands

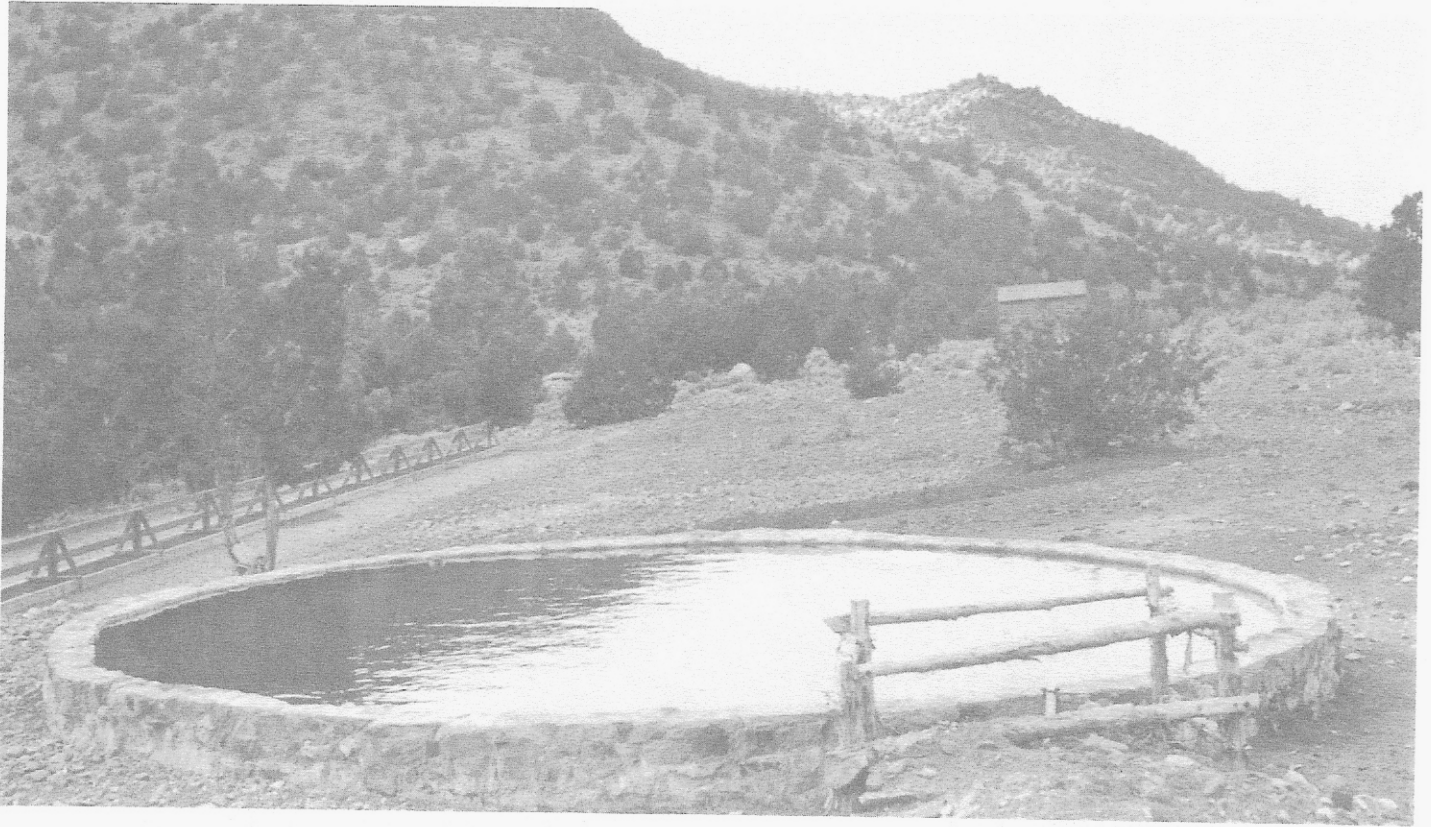


forage, they can consume a more nutritious diet, with a resultant increase in weight gain and offspring produced. In other instances, changes in market conditions or availability of labor have caused operators to reduce their herds.

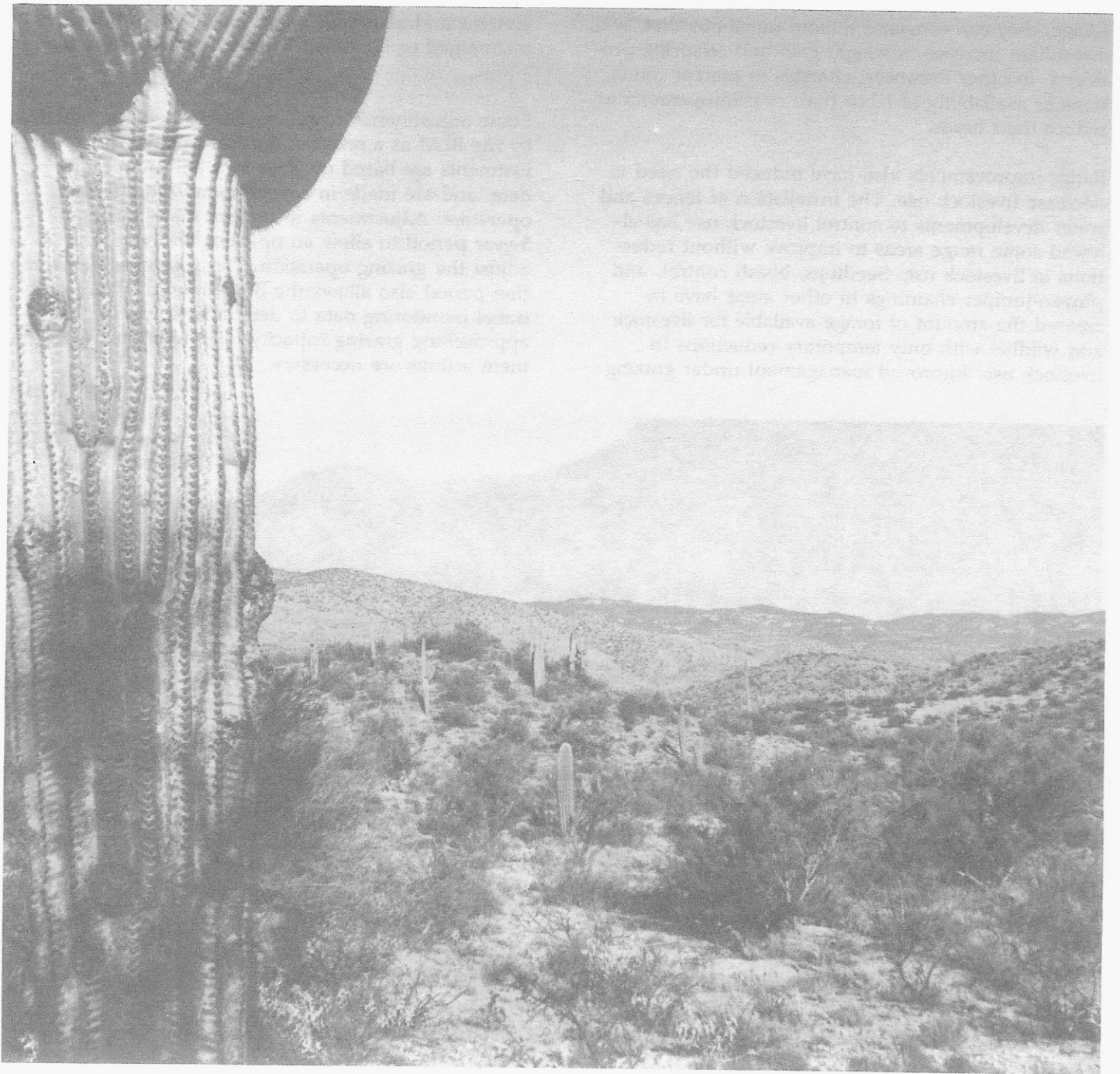
Range improvements also have reduced the need to decrease livestock use. The installation of fences and water developments to control livestock use has allowed some range areas to improve without reductions in livestock use. Seedings, brush control, and pinyon-juniper chainings in other areas have increased the amount of forage available for livestock and wildlife with only temporary reductions in livestock use. Improved management under grazing

systems and allotment management plans have also maintained or increased livestock grazing capacities.

Some adjustments in use are currently being initiated by the BLM as a result of land-use plans. Current adjustments are based on inventory and monitoring data, and are made in consultation with affected operators. Adjustments in use are made during a 5-year period to allow an operator adequate time to adjust the grazing operation. This 5-year implementation period also allows the BLM time to collect additional monitoring data to determine if grazing use is approaching grazing capacity or if additional management actions are necessary.



Stockwatering facility.



RANGE CONDITION PROGRESS REPORT

In April 1936, just 2 years after passage of the TGA, the Secretary of Agriculture transmitted to the President of the United States Senate a report on the conditions of rangelands in the Western United States. This report, called *The Western Range*, presented a dismal picture of the public domain lands that had just been assigned to the Department of the Interior for management. Range depletion on the public domain and grazing district lands was estimated as averaging 67 percent. Only 2 percent of the lands showed improvement since the early 1900's, while a stunning 95 percent of the rangelands had declined during the same period.

Related problems were erosion, reduced productivity, impaired watershed service, and siltation of waterways. The conclusion of the report was that it would probably take more than 50 years of management to restore the depleted range sufficiently to support the current livestock grazing use, and another 50 years to restore it to its original productivity.

The first 50 years have now passed since Federal management of the public domain lands began. How much have the lands improved?

Rangeland Condition—1936-1976

The Western Range was the first attempt at a national assessment of range condition. Based on many years of research on range and watershed problems, it provides a reasonably accurate portrayal of the lands at the time Congress enacted the TGA.

In *The Western Range*, the condition of the range was expressed in degrees of depletion from the virgin, or climax, plant community. Four classes of depletion were used. The classes were moderate (0-25 percent), material (26-50 percent), severe (51-75 percent) and extreme (76-100 percent). The public domain lands were in the worst state of any lands under Federal administration, with 1.5 percent moderately depleted, 14.3 percent materially depleted, 47.9 percent severely depleted, and 36.3 percent extremely depleted.

The next major report on range condition was published in 1969, based on a national inventory conducted in 1966 by Pacific Consultants, a private contractor, for the Public Land Law Review Commission. The inventory of range condition in *The Forage Resource* focused primarily on Federal rangelands.

Pacific Consultants identified 19 percent of lands administered by the BLM as being in excellent and good condition, 52 percent in fair condition, and 29 percent in poor condition.

In 1975, the Department of the Interior prepared the *Range Condition Report* for the Senate Appropriations Committee. This report was based upon available data and estimates from field observations, and was to identify current range condition, expected trend, and current management efforts. The report concluded that range condition had improved substantially since 1936, with 17 percent in good or excellent condition, 50 percent in fair condition, and 33 percent remaining in poor condition.

An independent assessment by T. W. Box, D. D. Dwyer, and F. H. Wagner in 1976 supports the conclusion that the condition of the public lands had improved since passage of the TGA. In *The Public Range and Its Management*, which was prepared for the President's Council on Environmental Quality, the authors made their own comparison between the data from

The Western Range and the data presented by Pacific Consultants. Although they believed the differing techniques used to obtain the data prevented a direct comparison, they concurred that:

"We think an assumption that three-fourths of the western ranges were producing at less than half their potential is a fair assessment of range productivity in 1966. This marks some range improvement since the 1936 study, which estimated that 83.9 percent of all Federal land was in poor condition at that time. Most of this improvement apparently occurred on the public domain. In 1936, the estimated percentage of land in good condition was only 1.5 percent of the public domain according to "The Western Range" (U.S. Senate Document 199). In 1966, 18.9 percent of

Photo below shows low productivity range in Rio Puerco area of New Mexico. Photo on right shows same range 5 years later, after intensive management. Implementation of a grazing system and adjustments in livestock use patterns allowed the native range to improve naturally.



the BLM grazing lands were in good or excellent condition, according to Pacific Consultants' report of 1968."¹

The authors further observed that:

"... We believe that the reported overall response of Public Domain ranges was small because they were extremely depleted by excessive "free range" use at the beginning of the period, and the arid nature of most of the Public Domain ranges does not allow them to respond quickly to management. A move of one condition class in 30 years can be considered a successful response to management."

Rangeland Condition—1984

No comprehensive inventory of rangeland condition has been conducted since the Department of the In-

¹ In *The Western Range*, range condition was expressed as degrees of depletion from the virgin, or climax, plant community. Box, et al. interpreted moderate depletion (0-25 percent) to be good condition. Today, this degree of depletion from virgin, or climax, is termed excellent condition.

terior's *Range Condition Report* of 1975. However, the BLM is in the process of preparing grazing environmental impact statements, covering 174 million acres of the public lands. Range inventories used for the EIS analysis provide data that can be used to determine range condition and are available for 98,501,358 acres of the public lands. The condition of the remaining acres for which recent inventory or monitoring data are not available can be estimated using professional knowledge and judgment.

Based on this information, 5 percent of the rangeland is in excellent condition, 31 percent is in good condition, 42 percent is in fair condition, and 18 percent is in poor condition. Table 1 compares these figures with those presented in the earlier reports. Table 2 summarizes information on current rangeland condition, by State.



Table 1. Comparative Percentages of the Public Rangelands in Excellent, Good, Fair, and Poor Condition, 1936-1984

Year	Percent by Condition Class			
	Excellent	Good	Fair	Poor or Bad
1936 ^a	1.5	14.3	47.9	36.3
1966 ^b	2.2	16.7	51.6	29.5
1975 ^c	2.0	15.0	50.0	33.0
1984 ^d	5.0	31.0	42.0	18.0

Sources:

- ^a Data adapted from *The Western Range*, Senate Document 199, 75th Congress, 2nd Session.
- ^b *The Forage Resource*, Pacific Consultants (1969).
- ^c *Range Condition Report*, Department of the Interior (1975).
- ^d Aggregation of all baseline resource records maintained at each of the Resource Areas within the BLM. Total acreage = 96%; the remaining 4 percent has not been rated for range condition.

The information contained in the various reports is not directly comparable because the methods used to estimate the condition classes differ. However, a general pattern of gradual improvement in range condition can be observed by examining the figures in Table 1. For example, the percentage of land in the poor condition class has steadily declined, while the percentages of land in the excellent and good condition classes have increased. The apparent reversal of this trend between 1966 and 1975 probably did not occur, but is more likely the result of a change in reporting methods.

The intent of each report was to reflect the health of the rangelands. In the 1936 Senate document, *The*

Western Range, range condition was not reported as excellent, good, fair, or poor, so the classes given in the table were inferred from the figures on percent depletion from virgin, or climax, condition. Moderate depletion was interpreted as excellent condition; material depletion as good; severe depletion as fair; and extreme depletion as poor. Range condition ratings used by Pacific Consultants for the 1966 figures refer to the present state of range sites relative to their potential, or climax, vegetation.

Table 2. Percent of acreage in range condition classes, by State.

State	Percent by Range Condition ¹			
	Excellent	Good	Fair	Poor
Arizona	3	24	52	21
California	1	46	42	11
Colorado	1	16	45	30
Idaho	6	31	46	17
Montana	5	67	26	2
Nevada	8	25	42	23
New Mexico	2	26	48	24
Oregon	4	25	52	19
Utah	4	33	39	16
Wyoming	6	46	39	8
Bureauwide	5	31	42	18

¹ Less than 100 percent in some States where some lands have not been rated as to range condition.

Range condition classes described by the Department of the Interior in its 1975 report were based on the range's ability to produce forage for livestock. The 1984 condition class figures are based on ecological site inventories and on professional judgment of the ecological condition of lands not yet covered by such inventories.

In the future, the BLM will estimate range condition based on ecological status and on resource value ratings. Ecological status is a measure of the present state of vegetation and soils in relation to the potential natural plant community for the site. It will be expressed as climax, late seral, mid-seral, and early seral, with climax being the potential natural community. Unlike the terms excellent, good, fair, and poor, the use of seral stages will clearly reflect that the goal is to manage for a plant community that will most nearly satisfy multiple-use objectives for the site, regardless of the ecological condition class.

Resource value ratings will express the value of vegetation on a site for a particular use or benefit. That is, these ratings will describe the present vegetation of a site in relation to its optimum productivity for livestock, wildlife, or another specific use. This information can be used to determine to what degree the present vegetation is meeting management objectives.

In summary, most range management professionals concur that rangeland condition has substantially improved. This improvement is, in part, the result of a decrease in livestock numbers from the excessive grazing use that occurred prior to passage of the TGA. Additionally, however, the improvement in rangeland condition can be attributed to the implementation of rangeland improvements, better livestock management practices, and cooperative efforts between the BLM and the livestock operators and other rangeland users and interest groups.



MANAGING FOR THE FUTURE

The range management policies of today still reflect the basic values expressed by the TGA. These values center on livestock grazing management, rangeland productivity, and soil and watershed protection. They guide the range management program and are given equal weight in managing for a sustained, balanced rangeland ecosystem.

Legislation passed since the TGA has broadened the focus of the range management program to include other, equally valuable, uses of the public lands. Livestock grazing on the public lands must be considered in the context of multiple use, and with the objective of maintaining and improving the lands for the present as well as for the future.

The BLM has adopted the following range management principles to ensure that it can fulfill its responsibilities.

Selective Management

The BLM's policy is to concentrate available funding and personnel on areas where management action is most needed to improve resource condition, resolve serious resource-use conflicts, or where investments in

range improvement will yield the greatest positive return. This approach is called selective management.

Selective management is essentially a land categorization process designed to help BLM personnel assign management priorities among allotments or groups of allotments in a planning area. To facilitate this approach, the BLM has developed three categories into which allotments are grouped according to their potential to respond to management. This potential is determined by analyzing the allotment's range condition, resource potential, presence of resource-use conflicts or controversy, opportunity for positive economic return, the present management situation, and other criteria as appropriate.

The three categories are expected to take into account nearly all resource situations; however, special categories may be developed for allotments or areas requiring unique management objectives. Objectives for the three primary categories are to: (1) *maintain* current satisfactory condition; (2) *improve* current unsatisfactory condition; and (3) *manage custodially*, while protecting existing resource values. Proposed actions for managing allotments within each category are designed to meet these objectives.

Generally, categorization occurs as part of the land-use planning process. Land-use planning is also the point at which the public helps to establish resource management objectives for individual allotments or areas.

Establishing Resource Management Objectives

Resource management objectives describe the condition or productivity of the resources that are needed to sustain the desired mix of uses. The BLM uses these objectives to develop appropriate management actions, such as the installation of rangeland improvements or the development of allotment management plans. The BLM also uses these objectives to determine what inventory and monitoring data are needed to determine if progress toward their achievement is being made.

The BLM relies on the public to help integrate the various rangeland uses and their management through the land-use planning process. Where one use of a resource may adversely affect another value or resource use, the land-use plan—called a Resource Management Plan—provides the opportunity for the BLM and the public to work together to avoid or resolve the conflict.

Inventory and Monitoring

Range inventory is the process for gathering data needed to describe, characterize, or quantify resources over the short term. These data are the basis for land-use plans and for apportioning public land resources among various uses or user groups through land-use planning. These data also identify and support needed management actions, establish a baseline for measuring changes in resource condition, and establish a common basis of comparison among various land types and ownerships.

The BLM's goal for a baseline inventory is a soil survey and ecological site data. Ecological site data identify the land according to its potential natural community and specific physical site characteristics, which make each area different from others in its ability to produce vegetation and to respond to management.

Rangeland monitoring is a process for periodically collecting resource data over the long term. These data are used to determine the effects of management actions on the rangeland resources and to provide quantifiable data needed to support management decisions when alternative management actions are needed.

Generally, monitoring studies fall into four broad categories. Actual-use data are collected to provide information concerning the actual amount of grazing use that has occurred on an area of rangeland during a specific period of time. Data on wildlife, wild horse, and wild burro use also are collected. These data are essential in determining the need for, or amount of, adjustments in grazing use or in revising existing management plans.

Utilization data provide information concerning the percentage of forage that has been consumed or destroyed on an area of rangeland during a specific period of time and the grazing pattern on the allotment. Utilization data are important in evaluating the effects of grazing use on specific areas of rangeland and identifying areas of concentrated use that may be dispersed by some form of range improvement.

Trend is the directional change in kind, proportion and/or amount of plant species over time. Trend data provide information needed over the long term to determine the effectiveness of on-the-ground management actions and to evaluate progress in meeting management objectives. Trend data are useful in indicating whether the rangeland is moving toward or away from its potential or from meeting specific management objectives.

Climatic information is the fourth category of monitoring data. Although soil, topography, and animals influence the kinds and amounts of vegetation, climate is regarded as the most important influence. Aspects of climate that might be studied include precipitation (amount, time of occurrence, and distribution), soil and air temperature, wind, and evapotranspiration rate. These data are combined with actual use, utilization and trend information to evaluate the effects of management on vegetation.

Range Improvements

Range improvements have been an important part of the BLM's range management program since passage of the TGA. Congress recognized the importance of range improvements by providing that a portion of the fees collected for grazing would be used for the construction or maintenance of improvements.

The BLM's policy is to initiate cost-effective range improvements that will improve rangeland condition for a variety of uses, including livestock grazing, wildlife, wild horses and burros, and watershed protection. The BLM is increasing funding available for new improvements by assigning maintenance responsibilities for most structural improvements to the primary beneficiaries of the improvement. Thus, if an improvement primarily benefits grazing management, the livestock operator is responsible for its maintenance. In addition, private investment in range improvements constructed on public lands is encouraged.

The BLM ensures that funds available for improvement work are used in the most cost-effective manner by conducting an investment analysis of all improvements proposed for each allotment. Funds are allocated first to allotments where they are most needed to resolve serious resource-use conflicts or where the public can obtain the greatest return on the investment.

Cooperative Management

Working together with rangeland users has been part of the range management philosophy since informal boards of stockmen helped to implement the TGA. Legislation passed since the TGA continues to contain language supporting cooperative range management. The most recent example, the PRIA, expanded the philosophy of consultation, cooperation, and coordination. The PRIA also established the Experimental Stewardship Program to explore innovative grazing management policies including, "Cooperative range management projects designed to foster a greater degree of cooperation and coordination between Federal and State Agencies charged with management of the rangelands and with local private range users." The BLM currently administers several experimental stewardship areas throughout the Western States. Some areas are administered jointly with the Forest Service.

Other current program efforts designed to encourage rangeland users and other interested parties to participate in cooperative management include Coordinated Resource Management and Planning (CRMP) and Cooperative Management Agreements (CMA's).

The CRMP is a process whereby various interests work together as a group to identify mutually acceptable alternatives for reaching the resource management objectives for an area. Membership on a CRMP board generally includes representatives from user groups, the BLM, the Forest Service, the Soil Conservation Service, State wildlife agencies, and other owners or administrators of land adjacent to the public lands.

Grazing-related CMA's are agreements between the BLM and a livestock grazing permittee or lessee. These agreements establish livestock grazing goals and objectives for an allotment, guidelines for livestock grazing practices, and monitoring practices to determine if the goals and objectives are being achieved. They are developed for livestock operators

who have been recognized as good stewards of the land through their exemplary grazing management skills. The CMA recognizes their proven ability to help achieve and maintain range management objectives by providing them with additional flexibility and tenure. A CMA, however, does not give the livestock operator the authority to regulate or exclude other uses of the public lands nor does it exempt the operator from laws and regulations governing public land use.

The BLM encourages user and public involvement through channels other than these formal programs. District Grazing Advisory Boards are still called upon to help the BLM implement an effective range management program by addressing issues specifically related to livestock grazing. Involvement of the Boards begins during the earliest stages of issue identification and allotment categorization and continues through to implementation of land-use planning decisions. The District Boards are consulted prior to the assignment of maintenance responsibilities for rangeland improvements and their advice is sought in specific situations involving the cancellation of grazing or range improvement permits. The Boards also make recommendations to field officials concerning the nomination and selection of permittees/lessees for CMAs as well as acceptance of the CMAs developed.

District Multiple-Use Advisory Councils also are encouraged to participate actively in the land-use planning process. The Councils have a much broader

perspective than that of the District Grazing Advisory Boards, and are asked by the District Managers to offer advice on issues that are multiple use in nature. The Councils also nominate permittees/lessees or other deserving users for CMAs, and may participate in the selection process.

The BLM makes a special effort to work with the States through the National Governors' Association and its special task forces, such as its Subcommittee on Range Resource Management. The Association, or its Subcommittees, receive periodic briefings on policy and program issues that could affect the Western States. Recommendations received from the Association are fully considered and frequently adopted to improve range management policies and programs.

Universities throughout the Western States occupy a unique position in facilitating the BLM's efforts toward consultation, cooperation, and coordination. Through their Extension Services, universities assist the exchange of ideas and concerns between the BLM and the range users.

The BLM also strives to consult, cooperate, and coordinate with several other formal and informal range user and interest groups at the national and local level. These groups are encouraged to participate in the BLM's land-use planning process as the basic avenue for public input, and are also invited to review proposed program, policy, and regulatory changes.



SUMMARY

The history of grazing management on the public lands has been turbulent. Originally, the lands were unmanaged simply because they had no definite owner. The national opinion was that the lands would eventually be transferred from their Federal landlord into private or State administration. Long-term management was still not possible even after passage of the TGA. Since the Act stated that the lands would be retained in Federal ownership "pending their final disposal," the BLM and its predecessors were regarded as temporary custodians. Only with passage of the FLPMA in 1976 did Congress officially declare that the lands would remain in Federal ownership.

The relationship between the BLM and the livestock industry has been equally turbulent. Having used the lands freely and without regulation for several decades, the livestock users did not agree readily to Federal administration. However, when it became apparent that the lands and the operators dependent upon them would suffer without Federal control, the operators worked to pass and implement the TGA. The operators also helped to ensure the continuation of the Act when budget disputes between the House and the Senate in 1945 nearly eliminated the personnel necessary to carry it out. The relationship between the land management agency and the livestock operators has continued to seesaw between resistance and support for the past 50 years.

The relationship between the BLM and the nonlivestock interests has been no less rocky. Although the

agency's primary authority for managing the public lands until the FLPMA was the Taylor Grazing Act, these interests have criticized the BLM for being a "captive" of the livestock industry. Some interests believe the BLM has not acted rapidly enough since FLPMA to accommodate other users or uses of the public rangelands.

The concern of the BLM is that changes to promote multiple use be as equitable as they are quick. On the one hand, nonlivestock users deserve a greater share in public land use. These interests also deserve an equal voice in decisions affecting public land management, as mandated by the FLPMA. On the other hand, many livestock operators have built their operations around public range use. These operators also deserve a voice in management decisions. The BLM must consider their welfare under the provisions of the TGA.

The BLM intends that its emphasis on cooperation, consultation, and coordination with user and interest groups will steady the relationship among all parties involved into one of mutual effort toward the common goal of proper rangeland management. With proper management, the lands can be developed to their full potential. Wisely managed and equitably shared, the lands will have sufficient resources to provide for all uses—now and in the future.

UNITED STATES

DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

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U.S. Department of the Interior Bureau of Land Management