

Ranchers Invest in Federal Land



Today, more than 22,000 ranchers graze cattle and sheep on Federal lands. These ranchers, who provide food and fiber to our nation, own their own property, but pay an annual fee to the government that permits them to graze their animals on some of the 250 million acres of public lands designated for grazing throughout 14 western states. According to the Department of the Interior, grazing on public lands contributes a minimum of \$1.5 billion annually to the economy. In addition to paying Federal-grazing fees, ranchers invest a great deal personally to maintain the land, sustain healthy wildlife populations and make the space safe for public recreational use.



Skyrocketing Grazing Fees

- Grazing fees were first implemented in 1978 through passage of the Public Rangeland Improvement Act and continued in 1986 through an Executive Order issued by President Reagan. The fees are calculated according to three market-based factors: current grazing lease rates, beef cattle prices and the cost of livestock production. The cost fluctuates frequently based on current market conditions.
- President Reagan's Executive Order set a minimum grazing fee of \$1.35 per animal unit, per month. At the minimum rate, a public land rancher who grazes 1000 cattle would pay the government \$1,350.00 per month in grazing fees. In 2014, ranchers paid the federal government more than \$12 million in grazing fees. Ranchers are some of the only people to pay for accessing federal lands.
- Of most concern recently, the President's new budget proposal included a \$2 per animal unit (AUM) administrative fee. This fee, on top of the preexisting grazing fees, is particularly concerning and may drive many ranchers out of the business.

PLC Recommendation:

PLC does not support the addition of an administration fee levied on top of regular grazing fees. Members of Congress need to understand the devastating economic, cultural and environmental impact that a grazing fee hike would place on the ranching industry.



Personal Investment in the Land

- Public land ranchers invest time and personal funds to maintain the land they lease – preserving water sources, creating firebreaks and acting as first responders during forest fires. Research shows that public land ranching saves taxpayer dollars by reducing the land management workload of the Federal government. The work ranchers do to maintain the land saves the Bureau of Land Management approximately \$750 million in taxpayer dollars each year.
- The work of public land ranchers preserves our nation's remaining open spaces, which are consistently threatened by overdevelopment. Ranchers also work to control invasive plant species and non-native grasses. Programs like The Sage Grouse Initiative are led by local ranchers – in partnership with state and federal agencies, universities and nonprofit organizations -- and leverage the best ranching practices to protect the habitats of wildlife, including endangered species.
- Today, ranchers are also investing more financially due to heightened state and local government regulations for permitting land improvements and an overwhelming level of punitive litigation initiated by environmental groups. Unlike outside special interests, ranchers actually invest in the resources of western lands and support common-sense regulation that implements the public's support for multiple-use of public lands.

PLC Recommendation:

PLC would like Congressional decision makers to better understand the ranching industry's deep commitment to ensuring the best stewardship of our nation's open spaces. In addition to paying ongoing grazing fees, ranchers invest year-round staff labor; the industry's best practices and land management expertise and personal finances to maintain the land they work. The work of ranchers significantly reduces the land management burden of the Federal government.



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