The Political, Economical and Social Considerations for Range Management in the 1980's

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The topic with its ramifications is a challenge. The future of the continuation of grazing livestock on federal lands in the 1980's is bleak!

Let's briefly analyze the past history of the people, agencies, and general public on our public lands. Ever since 1935 when the Taylor Grazing Act was passed, conflicts have resulted between the people administering the Act and the rancher. The land agency was not always at fault; after all it was only trying to follow the intent of Congress. Many times, though, the agency's interest was challenged and criticized by many. Resentment and lack of cooperation grew bigger into the 1960's; however, relationships were starting to ease off in the early 1970's when the E.I.S. (environmental impact statement) situation arrived - an issue many of us still feel was lost on purpose by the Bureau of Land Management.

We have had three significant pieces of public land legislation since 1935 - the Taylor Grazing Act, the "Organic Act" of 1976, and the Public Rangelands Improvement Act of 1978. Thousands and thousands of rules and regulations have been born and raised out of these three Acts. Many of these "offspring rules" have become notorious and very unreasonable and have done little to alleviate our problems on public lands.

We seem to have lost sight of our professed mutual objective of better range management on the public lands. A good way to get a perspective on what has happened is to visualize two tractors out in the field, one belonging to the land agencies and one to the livestock industry. These two tractors are lined up and pulling against each other. This has been going on much of the time since 1935. Hopefully, the settlement of the very explosive grazing fee issue will help rectify some of these hard feelings, but we suddenly have other problems.

Along comes the 1960's and another tractor pulls into this same field, driven this time by the environmentalists - a group that has over 5 million people in its twelve largest organizations, and is funded to the tune of over $48 million per year. They also line up with the federal land agencies, and they pull against the livestock industry in efforts seemingly designed for a drastic reduction of grazing on much of our public lands. They demand that we produce more food, cheaper, but do it on fewer acres with more restrictions, rules, and harassments.

A good example of these two tractors pulling together against the livestock is the recent policy established by the Bureau of Land Management on crested wheat. In May of 1977 President Carter issued an executive order which stated in part that an exotic species is defined as "all species of plants and animals not naturally occurring, either presently or historically, in any ecosystem of the United States."

The BLM, and I believe because of pressure from the environmentalists, has taken this to mean that no exotic species may be introduced which does not now occur within any of the ecosystems in the United States. Let's look very briefly at one state's history of success and failure of crested wheat plantings - Nevada. Our first seedings were in the late 1930's. Since that time, 1,200,000 acres of crested wheat have been planted in Nevada. BLM has now stopped seeding this valuable grass apparently because it is an exotic. At the same time, two other federal agencies continue to seed crested wheat - the Forest Service and Federal Highway Department. One wonders - who is running the BLM?

If these two forces were not enough to discourage the rancher, suddenly in 1979 a third tractor came rolling along, even bigger than the first two. Some might call it the proposition 13 vehicle. The conservative trend is suddenly on us. The driver of this third tractor has suddenly become the American public via Congress. So now you can see we have a giant conglomerate pulling against us during these recent months when this third powerful faction has pulled into the lineup. This new opponent is, and will unfortunately be, placing food production on its lowest list of priorities.

While this is going on, the federal government seems to be in agreement with the environmental philosophy that fewer acres will be available to produce the food that will be necessary. They, these three groups - environmentalists, federal government, and now the mood of Congress - are sending signals back to us: don't use those lands to grow meat. I question these signals. God created this world to be used, and if he didn't - why did He put man on it?

We have RARE II (roadless area review and evaluation), conducted by the Forest Service, which is putting a minimum of 15 million acres into wilderness areas; and in addition we have BLM's proposal, which will probably be larger - never to be used again. It is like sentencing these millions of acres to life imprisonment - with no chance of parole. Sure, grazing can continue in wilderness areas, but the restrictions and harassment in their use will cause most of us to stop using them. Once a permit goes vacant, as history has proven in a wilderness area, it will no doubt remain vacant. The amount of unreasonable rules, regulations, and harassments are almost insurmountable.

The problem, however, will be the order of priorities. Some of our most needed programs are going to get shorted severely. This will include dollars spent for range improvements on National Forests and lands administered by BLM. Many legislative mandates will be ignored and postponed because of no dollars. The policy of federal land agencies will be reductions of livestock until range improvement dollars are available. A long time is predicted for such a happening to occur. We have a sad situation. The environmentalists are demanding and accomplishing less production on fewer acres and little chance of range improvements due to the current mood of Congress and the administration. The federal land agencies are scared almost completely to death of environmentalists on every move they...
make. They are afraid they might end up in court again—an arena the environmentalists have been so successful in. Then add the fact that the Congress, who probably will be doing what we the people want, will quit spending so many dollars. With this problem, are chances for improved range conditions are slim; so we might have to live with our existing laws, more regulations, and less funds as is now available. It is unfortunate, however, that the production of food will be the one to suffer.

I believe it is time for Congress to seriously consider old ideas with a new approach. It has been suggested in the past to Congress, to the land agencies, and to the environmentalists that we ranchers would spend our own money to improve the public lands if given an opportunity. I am sure that the private ranching operations could make most of these range improvements at a third of the cost that the government is now undertaking. We could begin immediately to improve these lands by financing many of the developments ourselves, thus saving the government millions of dollars. The plan would work on a credit down through the years on grazing fees. As I see it in the near future and in the long range, this is the only way that range improvement dollars will be available in the next 10 years. So far, efforts by the livestock industry and some members of Congress for this venture have been unsuccessful due to the opposition of the land agencies.

It is rather ridiculous for the federal agencies to spend millions of dollars for nonproductive efforts. A good example of

this are the 152 EIS’s currently under preparation. So far, a lot of the EIS’s are costing nearly a million dollars apiece. I’m sure when the American public finds this out it will not tolerate this wasteful spending. Especially when the end results will mean less food production and result in higher food costs to the consumer.

I have requested the BLM director, Frank Gregg, to make available a complete detailed report on the amount of dollars spent on these EIS’s. We are spending millions of dollars for paper work only, while the ranges receive no measurable dollars for improvement. Perhaps our Western Congressional delegation should hold an oversight hearing on this problem. A hearing concerning the actions taken by not only the land agencies, but also the activities of the national Environmental Protection Agency as to how it has affected and is affecting range conditions in the West, is definitely in order.

I hope that you members of the Society for Range Management will help. The next 10 years will probably decide the density of whether we as family operators can continue in the livestock industry of tomorrow.

In conclusion I plead with you. Let’s all work together, the Society for Range Management, the BLM, Forest Service, the many environmental groups, and the livestock industry for the benefit of a more productive public lands for tomorrow. Let’s turn all those tractors around the other way and pull together. The results could be tremendous.

Change and Challenge of the 1980’s

Guy R. Martin

Proper management of rangelands is one of the highest priorities in the Department of Interior. This article will tell of the changing role of rangeland management in the 1980’s and social, economic, and political aspects associated with it.

The decade of the 1980’s is to be a decade of challenge and change. The change is not the effort of a few for the discomfort of many—especially those who live in the West. Result of change is molded by events that reflect new public attitudes in the outlook of the courts, in the laws that regulate the public lands, and in changing economic conditions. This Administration is committed to achieving those changes in range management that will produce a healthy vegetative resource that can support an economically viable livestock industry, a thriving base for wildlife, wild horses and burros, and proper watershed management.

John Wesley Powell, in 1878, described the public range as lands whose value consists only in the scant grasses which they spontaneously produce and that the value could only be made available by the use of water for the sustenance of livestock. Gifford Pinchot said, “The planned and orderly development and conservation of our natural resources is the first duty of the United States. It is the only form of insurance that will certainly protect us against the disaster that lack of foresight has in the past repeatedly brought down upon nations since passed away.”

During most of the 19th century, public land policy was basically one of nonfederal ownership to encourage settlement and development. Just before 1900, emphasis in public land policy began to shift towards retention of some lands in federal ownership for conservation of watersheds, preservation of natural beauty, and protection of timber lands. The shift began to increase in the early part of the 20th century with concern for wildlife and arid grazing land (Taylor Grazing Act, 1934) and recreation.

The United States Congress reinforced these changing concepts with passage of major, innovative legislation:

★ The Classification and Multiple Use Act of 1964 was a new approach to provide authority to manage the lands for recreation and other purposes.

★ The National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 requires that effects of each federal undertaking upon cultural resources be evaluated and that adverse effects be mitigated. This Act sets forth basic concern of the nation for preservation of its heritage.

★ The National Environmental Policy Act of 1969, expressing a major concern for quality of the environment, requires a detailed statement on major federal actions significantly affecting quality of human environment.

★ The Endangered Species Act of 1973 declared that all federal departments and agencies seek to conserve endangered

The author is Assistant Secretary of Interior for Land and Water Resources. This article was condensed from an address the Secretary made at the plenary session, 32nd Annual Meeting of the Society for Range Management, February 12, 1979, at Casper, Wyoming.