

The Challenges of Public Lands Ranching



Ron Cerri



President, Nevada Cattlemen's Association

- 4th generation Humboldt County Rancher
- 88% of the public land ranches are medium sized family operations

Our son is the 5th generation Humboldt County rancher...

hopefully they will be the 6th!



- 1864—First settlers came into northern Nevada
- 1934—Congress enacted the Taylor Grazing Act at urging of ranchers across the west
 - Purpose was to regulate grazing by issuing grazing permits and granting grazing privileges
- 1946—Bureau of Land Management created by combining the General Land Office and the U. S. Grazing Service
 - Purpose was to manage and protect public lands, manage for multiple uses such as livestock, mining, recreation, etc.

BLM and USFS Regulations

- Agencies have strict standards on utilization levels
- Riparian areas particularly important
- Stiff penalties
for
non-compliance



Fire

- Decrease in utilization levels leads to more wildland fires
- Fires not only affect livestock grazing, but also wildlife habitat
- Minimum of two years non-use required after fires
- Common for fires today to be 500,000-1,000,000 acres
- 2007—3.3 million acres burned in the west



- 1800's—Introduction of Cheatgrass, an invasive species from Eurasia
 - Cheatgrass out-competes native species
 - After a fire cheatgrass is the first thing to grow back, perpetuating fire cycles



Anti-Grazing and Environmental Groups

- In the 1970's and 80's cattle outnumbered people in Nevada
- In 1982 there was 700,000 head of cattle—today there are a little over 400,000
- Sheep numbers once totaled 1,330,000—today there are only 65,000



- 1990-2000 the West grew faster than any other region in the United States
- During this same period, Nevada grew faster than any other state, a whopping 66%
- One quarter of western ranches have been converted to other uses in the last 30 years
- 24,000,000 acres of western ranchland expected to disappear in the next 20 years

- Increase in population has created additional demands upon the land
- Newcomers not accustomed to livestock
- There are groups whose intentions are to end public land grazing
- These groups are able to finance their litigation by using Equal Access to Justice Act (EAJA) and the Justice Fund
- EAJA was created in 1985 by Congress as a means for ordinary citizens to sue the government and recoup attorney fees

- Since 1995 fourteen environmental groups have received **\$42,000,000** by suing the federal government
- Most cases won not on real substance, but on procedural mistakes by the federal agencies

[Activist 'Green' Lawyers Billing U.S. Millions in Fraudulent Attorney Fees](#)

Excerpted from: [Pajamas Media](#)
March 4, 2010
by Richard Pollock

Radical environmental groups have ripped off taxpayers to the tune of \$37 million.

Headline seen
on Western
Watersheds
Project Web
Site:

WWP Wins
Remand of BLM
Grazing
Decisions On
Over 1.3 Million
Acres of Public
Land in Nevada

Wild Horses and Burros

- 1971—Congress gives BLM responsibility for managing wild horses and burros through the Wild Free Roaming Horse and Burro Act
- A very emotional issue with the wild horse advocacy groups trying to portray ranchers as selfish mustang haters
- Prior to this Act ranchers managed wild horses and burros
- Wild horse advocates contend wild horses are native to the Americas

- Ancient ancestor to today's wild horses disappeared 12 million years ago during the last ice age
- Some wild horses today are descendants of Spanish horses, but most are feral descendants of horses that ranchers turned out in the early 1900's
- Ranchers are not opposed to wild horses; just want them managed
- Wild horses have few natural predators and reproduce at a rate of 20% per year



- In 1971 when the Act was passed there were 17,000 horses and 8,000 burros in ten western states
- BLM has determined Appropriate Management Level is 26,600 horses
- 20,000 horses in Nevada alone
- 40,000 horses in the west
- Wild horse advocates are urging BLM and lawmakers to increase horse numbers and expand the areas where horses are allowed to run
- Ranchers have been forced to reduce livestock numbers to accommodate excess horses

Water

- Nevada is the driest state in the U. S.
- Water is the single most limiting factor for everything we do in Nevada
- Nevada has one of the strictest water laws in the U. S.
- Federal government owns 87% of the land in Nevada
- Government cannot own water because it cannot put it to beneficial use
- In retaliation, the Forest Service is not allowing its permit holders to put in new water developments or even maintain existing water developments

Threatened and Endangered Species

- BLM and Forest Service are mandated under the Endangered Species Act to take measures to ensure survival of threatened and endangered species
- Sage Grouse could become the new Spotted Owl of the West
- Ranchers are working together with the federal agencies to protect and enhance habitat for Sage Grouse

- Other species like pygmy rabbit, desert tortoise, cutthroat trout, bats and pica, for example, could all have an effect on livestock grazing



What the Future Holds.....

- Even with the financial crisis ranch real estate is still in demand and considered a safe long term investment
- Inflated ranch values make it difficult to pass on the ranch to the next generation
- Nevada ranches are being purchased by investors, big mining corporations, city entities



- Madeleine Pickens purchases two Northern Nevada ranches to create wild horse sanctuary
 - 600,000 acres
 - Wants government to pay her \$500 per horse to run the federally protected horses on federal land



'No' to Pickens: Commissioners oppose horse sanctuary

ARTICLE: ELKO — After two-and-a-half hours of public comment and a presentation by Madeleine Pickens, Elko County Commissioners voted 3-1 Wednesday to oppose her wild horse sanctuary project.

Madeleine testifying before the Elko County Commission



Questions?