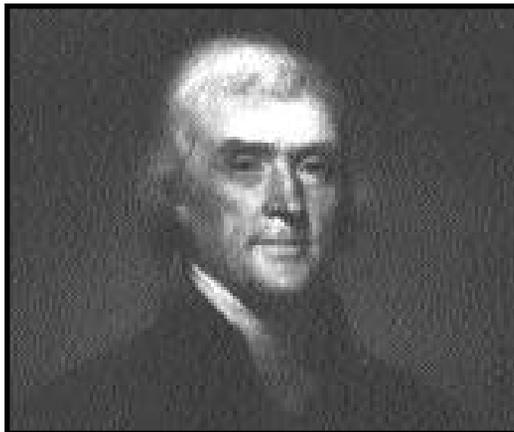


**Facts for the future  
of public and private lands**

# **THE WEST 2000**

**Ranching ■ Farming ■ Logging  
Mining ■ Recreation**

A RANGE publication



**"...a wise and frugal  
government, which shall  
restrain men from injuring  
one another, shall leave  
them otherwise free to regulate their own pursuits  
of industry and improvement, and shall not take  
from the mouth of labor the bread it has earned.  
This is the sum of good government..."**

President Thomas Jefferson, March 1, 1801  
First Inaugural Address

# **“IN THE UNITED STATES, THERE IS MORE SPACE WHERE NOBODY IS THAN WHERE ANYBODY IS. THIS IS WHAT MAKES AMERICA WHAT IT IS.”**

GERTRUDE STEIN, 1936

There has always been a west in America, always and still beyond the last reach of a highway or a house with no neighbors, there has been a west that warms and promises of wilderness and opportunity.

The “West” as our generation has come to know it is perhaps still defined as it was at the end of our nation’s first century in 1876, when the vast majority of the population, with six or more people per square mile, could be counted east of the 98th meridian. Beyond where that imaginary line slices down through the Dakotas west of the Mississippi and out the horn of Texas through the final reaches of the Rio Grande was said then to be The West.

Some say now it doesn’t begin until you cross the great divide of the Rockies. Some say it doesn’t exist at all, except as an expanse of lesser-settled space between the coastal regions. The West is less a locale or a region in America today than it is an idea, an image coming to mind of somewhere still presiding over the natural heritage belonging to us all.

**“What do we want of this vast, worthless area? This region of savages and wild beasts, of deserts, shifting sands and whirlwinds of dust, of cactus and prairie dogs?”**

DANIEL WEBSTER, 1838

## **UNITED STATES PUBLIC LANDS**

It is a surprisingly difficult figure on which to find general agreement, but the United States is vastly more “publicly” owned than most Americans realize. Even the noted liberal economist, John Kenneth Galbraith, was stunned to discover in the 1970s the extent of government ownership in the United States that he recognized as exceeding, “the combined areas of Germany, France, Italy, Belgium, Holland, Switzerland, Denmark and Albania. Where socialized ownership of land is concerned,” he wrote, “only the USSR and China can claim company with the United States.” He wrote that prior to the collapse of the Soviet Union.

The extent of federal ownership seems to vary by accounting methods used in different administrations, but it is generally agreed to extend over about one million square miles, nearly a third of the total U.S. land mass, with by far the largest federal holdings in the West. **Together with state, county, and Indian trust lands it is estimated that 42 percent of all the land in the United States is owned and controlled by government.**

Nowhere is that more evident than in the West where federal authority over lands is divided among four agencies (in rounded figures):

- The U.S. Bureau of Land Management (Department of Interior) with 268 million acres (an area larger than the original 13 colonies);
- The U.S. Forest Service (Department of Agriculture) with 191 million acres;
- The U.S. Park Service (Department of Interior) with 77 million acres;
- The U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service (Department of Interior) with 87 million acres.

More than 700 million acres in all, two-thirds of it covering the western states. In several western states, federal ownership amounts to the majority of the state land mass. Nevada is 87 percent federal land, for example. Alaska is more than 65 percent federally owned,

and combined with state lands, 95 percent government-owned.

By contrast, the states of New York, Massachusetts, Illinois, Kansas, and Texas all have less than 2 percent federal land.

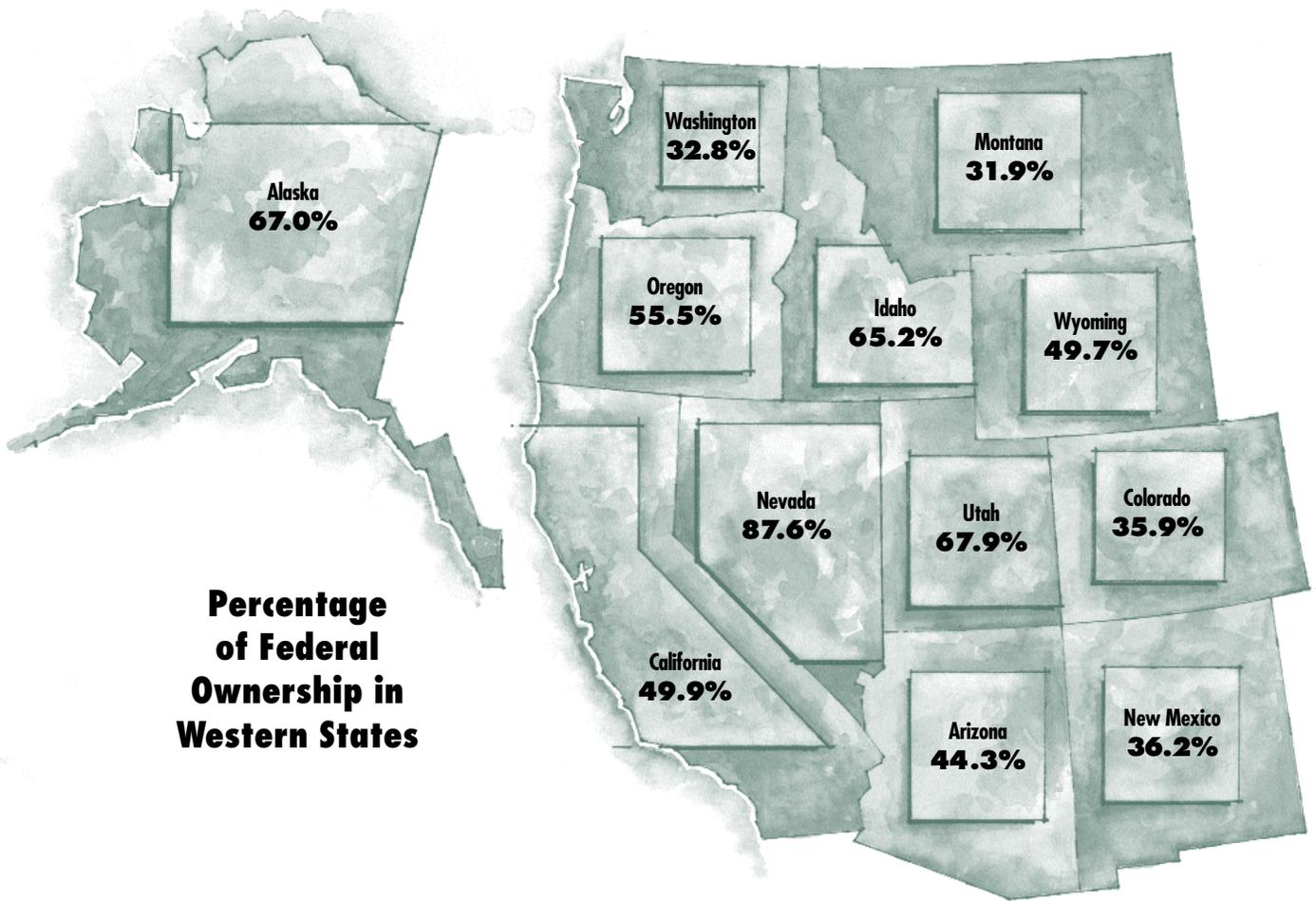
Allowed uses of these lands held by the federal government vary among the agencies directed to oversee them, but unlike the development of private property in the East from sale and homesteading of the public domain, western lands following the Civil War proved to be too arid and infertile to provide sustenance for a family on a 640-acre homestead.

Offering more land favored more trouble. In a compromise meant to bring more order to westward expansion there were established much larger communal pasture lands on which permits for use would be granted and managed by the federal government. The birth of federal authority over the West was intended as a democratic means of distributing its wealth.

Until 1976, with the passage of the Federal Lands Policy Management Act (FLPMA), it was understood that fees for use of these communal pasture lands would be only intended to cover costs of federal oversight. FLPMA demanded the fees be tied to “fair market value” of the land itself, and at the same time directed that the government not “devolve,” or sell to private ownership any of these lands. In effect, private ownership of lands in the West has been restricted since the 1870s as a means of encouraging cooperative production, and now is all but prohibited on remaining public lands as a means of retaining federal control.

Federal ownership or expansion of authority over additional lands in the West has continued over the last decade at a rate of about one million acres a year. The Clinton administration proposed measures in the last year that would provide \$900 million annually for government acquisition of more land from “willing sellers.” Short of congressional approval for that, administrative and executive authority continues to be used in the West to acquire more public land, sometimes in a guise of purchase by a group such as The Nature Conservancy, which then turns the land over to the government, usually at a profit to the “non-profit” sponsor.

From such circumstances, then, it may be easier to perceive the differences of opinion toward federal management between those who live in the East and those who live in the West. And yet, even more dramatic distinctions have been established in the last 30 years since the passage in 1964 of the National Wilderness Act.



**“THESE WILD THINGS, I ADMIT, HAD LITTLE HUMAN VALUE UNTIL MECHANIZATION ASSURED US OF A GOOD BREAKFAST, AND UNTIL SCIENCE DISCLOSED THE DRAMA OF WHERE THEY CAME FROM AND HOW THEY LIVE.”**

ALDO LEOPOLD, *A SAND COUNTY ALMANAC*, 1948

In our times, Aldo Leopold and his “Almanac” is more frequently quoted by environmentalists than Henry David Thoreau or even John Muir. Leopold had been both a farmer and a forest ranger. It was in large part through his efforts that portions of the Gila National Forest in New Mexico were designated as the nation’s first wilderness area by administrative action of the U.S. Forest Service in 1924. There were similar administrative acts that would expand wilderness and primitive areas to about 15 million acres by the time the United States was entering its post World War II economic expansion. It was just about then, in 1948, and shortly after his death fighting a grass fire in Wisconsin, that Leopold’s only published work, the “Almanac,” was produced. It became an epistle for preservation that would inspire creation of the Wilderness Society and adherents to a belief in preserving the wild all over the world. Yet as much as he in his work blamed economic expansion and “Henry Ford” for destruction of the wild, Leopold and others of his time held no illusions about theirs being a spiritually inspiring, but little practiced, desire for a return to the primitive. Least of all did he expect the government to take on a task, “too large, too complex, or too widely dispersed” in dividing the land between its natural presence and its ultimate use.

**“An ethical obligation on the part of the private owner is the only viable remedy to these situations.”**

ALDO LEOPOLD, *“THE LAND ETHIC,” A SAND COUNTY ALMANAC*

### **AN EXPANDING WILDERNESS**

Propelled in part by a nascent environmental movement that did not trust federal agencies to protect wildlands through administrative action, the U.S. Congress in 1964 passed the National

Wilderness Act, establishing a National Wilderness Preservation System and reserving to Congress the authority to designate areas suggested for their wilderness potential. Fifty-four areas covering nine million acres of U.S. Forest Service land were immediately set aside.

By 1968, with the impetus of “legacy” lands deriving from political sponsorship, Congress began expanding the Wilderness System, bringing it to 631 areas covering nearly 144 million acres by 1994, more than 10 times the amount of designated wilderness known to Leopold in his time.

## The Wildlands Project

- The goal of the Wildlands Project is to set aside approximately 50 percent of the North American continent (Turtle Island) as “wild land” for the preservation of biological diversity.
- The project seeks to do this by creating “reserve networks” across the continent. Reserves are made up of the following:
  - Cores, created from public lands such as National Forests and Parks.
  - Buffers, often created from private land adjoining the cores to provide additional protection.
  - Corridors, a mix of public and private lands usually following along rivers and wildlife migration routes.
- The primary characteristics of core areas are that they are large (100,000 to 25 million acres), and allow for little, if any, human use.
- The primary characteristics of buffers are that they allow for limited human use so long as they are “managed with native biodiversity as a preeminent concern.”
- Moral and ethical guidelines for the Wildlands Project are based on the philosophy of Deep Ecology.
- The eight point platform of Deep Ecology can be summarized as follows:
  - All life (human and non-human) has equal value.
  - Resource consumption above what is needed to supply “vital” human needs is immoral.
  - Human population must be reduced.
  - Western civilization must radically change present economic, technological and ideological structures.
  - Believers have an obligation to try to implement the necessary changes.
- The Wildlands Project itself is supported by hundreds of groups working towards its long-term implementation. Implementation may take 100 years or more.
- The Wildlands Project has received millions of dollars in support from wealthy private and corporate foundations such as the Turner Foundation, Patagonia, W. Alton Jones Foundation, Lyndhurst Foundation, etc.

### Note from RANGE

*This summary, taken from the web site of the Wildlands Project, is actually meant to alarm and even frighten. A “big lie” such as setting aside 50 percent of the continent and reducing human population has served the purpose of tyrants before in gaining a fraction of what they threatened to take. None of us should be so deceived again, even if there are those in Washington who believe it will work.*

Current suggestions and proposals by federal agencies and special interest groups propose expansion of the Wilderness System by at least another 90 million acres, thus incorporating more than 25 percent of all federal lands and nearly 10 percent of all land in the United States as wilderness.

Alaska would contain most of these proposed wilderness lands (up to 55 percent) and the greatest areas of wilderness would be in the western states. Only the states of Connecticut, Iowa, Kansas and Rhode Island have no lands designated or recommended as wilderness.

From the beginning of discussions, the most difficult aspect has been in defining what constitutes “wilderness.” Especially from 1970 when the Forest Service began its Roadless Area Review and Evaluation (RARE I), challenges were presented by the states and other interests. It was not until a compromise was reached in 1984,

when Congress enacted new laws establishing wilderness covering nearly nine million acres in 21 states, that the Act really took hold.

Numerous exemptions for uses such as logging, grazing and mining were provided and implemented in the 88 separate wilderness laws enacted by Congress up to 1994, leaving the conclusion that wilderness is defined as whatever Congress says it is.

Nevertheless, the standard definition held by environmentalist groups is that of “areas where the earth is untrammelled by man, where man himself is a visitor who does not remain.”

The most radical proposal of The Wildlands Project put forward in 1992 by David Foreman of Earth First! and others suggests that up to 50 percent of the continental United States (most of it in the West) should be restored to a condition dominated by predators and replicating the Pleistocene era, more than 12,000 years ago. Although seeming incredible in its suggestions to limit human habitation to permitted zones within and around the wilderness, the Wildlands Project is reported to have found favorable support within the Clinton administration.

Since reaching a peak soon after the establishment of Wilderness Areas with limited access, recorded visitor use has remained stable or shown a decline in every year, even taking into account additional designated areas. The reintroduction of predators, including wolves, grizzly bears and other carnivores has increased.

**“Burn down your cities and leave our farms, and your cities will spring up again as if by magic, but destroy our farms and the grass will grow in every city in the country.”**

WILLIAM JENNINGS BRYAN, 1896

As a demographic region of the United States, the West continues to grow at a rate faster than the East, and has certainly established a population base deserving at least of equal consideration to the traditionally held political authority of the original colonies. But population alone is a deceiving figure. Even though the concentration of people on the coasts shows signs today of shifting into less populated areas inland, the limitation of available private land in the West creates zones of urbanized development in concentrated pockets such as Las Vegas, Nev. It is not population growth but population shift that is challenging the West. There is, in short, a bigger difference than ever today in the new westerner who is “all hat, and no cows.”

Those who still gain their livelihood from rural areas, whether they be farmer, rancher, hardware salesman or barber, recognize the change being brought upon them by technology and spendable wealth. The cultural significance of agrarian America, especially in the West, and not for the first time, is at a crossroad.

**“As the urban areas continue to grow and the rural areas continue to shrink, I think small communities are going to sell less barbed wire and more espresso.”**

ANDY KERR, OREGON NATURAL RESOURCES COUNCIL, 1996

Of the more than 268 million Americans alive today, it is no surprise that fewer than four million, or 1.6 percent, live on rural farms. Not all of them are farmers. Nevertheless, federal census figures indicate that nearly 25 percent of the population lives in rural areas with fewer than 2,500 residents.

Compare that to 1940, when the U.S. had less than half its present population, but 43 percent of Americans were considered to live in rural areas and nearly 23 percent of them on rural farms.

That fewer actual farmers must be producing more to feed a growing nation is one conclusion to be drawn. Another is that steadily more non-farmers dominate rural social and economic foundations. "Rural," in fact, is not officially rural at all any more, but referred in government terms as "nonmetro," meaning that the region is unattached to a city of 50,000 or more.

It is in that vague idea of our rural regions that population is reported to have grown between 1990 and 1996 at a pace double that of the entire 1980s. In part, this is due to increasing life expectancy among the "baby boom" generation born during and after World War II and leading now to more older citizens "retiring" to the countryside. This has resulted in an increase in the number of elderly in "nonmetro" or rural areas.

A conclusion from such statistics is that the American agricul-

turalist, or family reliant on farming, ranching, logging or mining, is part of an aging and dwindling class of society that retains land in amounts disproportionate to their population. They are being overtaken, in some views, by the "sprawl" of expanding urban wealth.

Even more evident, however, is the steadily rising cost of real estate in favored coastal areas especially, causing expansion into more affordable regions that were once rural. Two-acre "farms" and "view" ranches are replacing marginally productive agricultural operations.

Astonishingly, one researcher at the University of California at Davis, Steven C. Blank, produced a paper in 1999 suggesting that, "The U.S. economy no longer needs agriculture and is rapidly outgrowing it." (Blank, *The Futurist*, "The End of the American Farm?" April, 1999.)

In general, more Americans with more options provided by technology and transportation are choosing to make their homes in rural regions, and in most cases without intending to do so, are altering the economic and social description of rural America. Not that they aren't welcome, but because so many misunderstand, vital elements of our future are being put at risk by casting aside what has been learned from the past.

**"THE BEST BUSINESS YOU CAN GO INTO YOU WILL FIND ON YOUR FATHER'S FARM OR IN HIS WORKSHOP. IF YOU HAVE NO FAMILY OR FRIENDS TO AID YOU, AND NO PROSPECT OPENED TO YOU THERE, TURN YOUR FACE TO THE GREAT WEST, AND THERE BUILD YOUR HOME AND FORTUNE."**

HORACE GREELEY, 1855

Not as pithy and memorable as "Go West, young man," but more accurate of Greeley's "Advice to Aspiring Young Men," it was a suggestion followed by many who sought their fortunes in the West, as well as by others who remained "on the farm." But a century-and-a-half makes a big difference, both in farms and fortunes. On the web site of the American Farmland Trust in 1999, there was a constantly changing figure on the amount of farmland in America being lost. It rolled on steadily at a rate of nearly an acre a minute, but it turned out it was going too slow. A report in December 1999 by the Department of Agriculture concluded that farmland was being lost to development at an ever faster rate in the 1990s—more than 16 million acres between 1992 and 1997, 3.2 million acres a year. Most of those losses were of the most productive prime farmland near urban centers. The losses continue at a rate of over 50 acres an hour.

### **"No Farms. No Food"**

BUMPER SLOGAN OF AMERICAN FARMLAND TRUST

As an occupation in America, farming has been declining since the beginning of the 20th century. But if the American farmer is ever more rare, he or she is still ever more studied.

The federal government defines a farm as any establishment from which \$1,000 or more in agricultural products would normally be sold in a year. Latest government reports indicate there are slightly fewer than two million farms in the U.S., covering about 968 million acres, a decline of about 7 percent in numbers of farms since 1987 and about 3.1 percent in land use. The average size of a farm increased over that period from 451 acres in 1987 to 471 acres in 1997.

Even so, the vast majority of farms in the United States, 86 percent, remain "family" farms. Three-quarters of those farms are

regarded by government statistics as "non-commercial" or "hobby" farms with gross sales under \$50,000 a year, requiring some form of non-farm income to support the family.

Production of farms, however, has increased at a rate of 2 percent a year since 1948, according to federal statistics, due to the use of fertilizers and improved technologies.

Such production statistics may be misleading. U.S. agricultural output did show remarkable gains after World War II, reaching a growth in essential grain production alone in the 1970s of 2.3 percent, but the rate of growth since then has been declining to only 0.5 percent in the 1990s, leading some analysts to conclude that U.S. agricultural production is near its limit from existing farm lands.

Given anticipated global population and income growth, food demand is expected to increase by at least 64 percent over the next 25 years. In its most dire prediction, the American Farmland Trust forecasts that if the rate of farmland being lost continues, the

United States would be forced to go from a food exporting nation to a food importing nation by the middle of this century.

## THE FARMERS

Fewer than 10 percent of American farm operators are under the age of 35. About half the farm operators are under 55. But the number of operators 65 or older exceeds that of the 35 or younger population by three to one. (Although those oldest farm operators control about the same share of farmland, they average less than half the sales and income per farm than younger operators. They also reported less than one-third of lender debt than the youngest operators.)

On farms where the operators reported farming as their major job, occupying more than half their working hours, average gross income was \$132,550 a year. However, less than half the farmers surveyed by USDA reported farming to be their major occupation. Others reported a gross income averaging less than \$16,000 a year.

Farms with full-time operators control more than 70 percent of farmland acreage and 79 percent of farm income, but the disparities are sometimes enormous: out of two million farms, only about 123,000, or less than 7 percent, receive the majority of farm receipts. This sometimes leads to the *false* conclusions that the larger farms produce most of the nation's food supply (they do not) or that large-scale operations are more efficient, when in fact studies have shown that mega-farms produce a "diseconomy of scale," both in production and general values of farm economies.

Nearly 80 percent of all farmers have at least a high school education, and half of those at least some college education. Those with the highest education reported on average the highest gross income.

So it appears that if it's not quite "grandpa's" farm any more, family farming remains the most vital element of American agriculture, despite the fact that grandsons and granddaughters seem less and less interested. Those farming the most land, and apparently making the most money, are full-time farmers between the ages of 44 and 54.

"Corporate" farms, or those with gross receipts over \$250,000 a year, amount to about 6 percent of total farms but account for nearly 60 percent of total farm income.

"Family" farms are difficult to define, since many families have incorporated their interests, and since the averaging in of all family farms distorts the statistics. However, family-owned farm operations in the United States earning less than a gross of \$250,000 a year still account for about 94 percent of total farms.

Their value cannot be defined in farm receipts alone, since the value of family farms in rural areas is reflected in goods and services produced and farm contributions to community wealth, including schools and infrastructure, as well as stewardship of the land.

One index of what has occurred in the United States, however, is the steady shift in profit from food production to processors and packagers. Between 1910 and 1990, the share of agricultural profit to the farmer has been reduced from 21 percent to 5 percent.

**"TO WASTE, TO DESTROY, OUR NATURAL RESOURCES, TO SKIN AND EXHAUST THE LAND INSTEAD OF USING IT TO INCREASE ITS USEFULNESS, WILL RESULT IN UNDERMINING IN THE DAYS OF OUR CHILDREN THE VERY PROSPERITY WHICH WE OUGHT BY RIGHT TO HAND DOWN TO THEM AMPLIFIED AND DEVELOPED."**

PRESIDENT THEODORE ROOSEVELT ADDRESSING CONGRESS IN 1907

They were the words of a conservationist who in his administration withdrew more than 200 million acres of public domain from sale to private interests. Yet they were also the words of a rancher, "old four eyes" as he was once called, who credited his own spirit to his time on the range. The heart of the controversy over rangeland today is contained in that seeming contradiction, for while a large portion of the public is being led to believe that grazing is incompatible with the preservation of western public lands, it is the rancher who has conserved those lands for generations foreseen by Roosevelt.

**"The greatest thing that agriculture furnished this country is not food or fiber, but a set of children with a work ethic and a good set of values."**

RON MACHER, EDITOR OF "SMALL FARM TODAY,"  
IN TESTIMONY TO THE USDA, 1997

The beef cattle herd in the United States today stands at about 98.5 million head, a relatively stable figure over the century's last decade, but representative of some increases in the East along with similar declines in herds west of the Rockies. Of that total, fewer than 25 percent of ranchers in the 11 western states utilize grazing permits on federal land to provide about a quarter of their total forage. Yet

because federal ownership so dominates western land, an estimated 60 percent of cattle brought to market from the West can be traced to some grazing on "public" lands.

In many western states, there has been an alarming decline in the use of private lands for agricultural and livestock raising purposes. The state of Montana, for example, experienced the loss of 1,000 cattle-producing operations a year between 1995 and 1998. Most of those losses were to non-agricultural purposes.

Grazing fees for use of public land were first imposed with the suggestions and help of ranchers themselves on Forest Service lands in 1906 to aid in administrative costs for maintaining those lands and protecting the rights of permit holders. In 1936, two years after passage of the Taylor Grazing Act, which also had the support of ranchers, fees were imposed on lands generally in the public



**Popular environmentalism is threatening not only parts of our culture, but our ability to feed, clothe and house ourselves.**

*Percent of income spent on at-home food consumption (including alcohol). Source: Economic Research Service. Computed by Brigit Mead, ERS, from data provided by the UN System of National Accounts.*

domain and now administered by the Bureau of Land Management. Those earliest fees amounted to five cents per Animal Unit Month—for the amount of forage sufficient to sustain a cow and a calf or five sheep for a month. Payments to the government for AUMs amounted to over \$10 million in 1998.

Aside from environmental issues discussed elsewhere in this report, at the heart of arguments about grazing on public lands is the question of a “subsidy” provided to federal permit holders who, in theory, would have to pay more to graze on private lands.

The federal government has attempted to address that question in numerous actions, beginning with the Independent Offices Appropriation Act of 1952, which required fair market value for federal lands leased or sold, and culminating most recently in the Department of Interior’s Rangeland Reform of 1994, which attempted to tie grazing costs to supposed environmental damage.

However, two laws are the key to federal grazing fees: the Federal Land Policy Management Act (FLPMA) of 1976, and the Public Rangelands Improvement Act (PRIA) of 1978, both of which attempted to tie fees to the value of the land and the value of what it annually produces.

Under PRIA in 1980, grazing fees reached their highest point in history of \$2.36 per AUM on BLM land and \$2.41 on Forest Service land. The fees proved to be unrealistically high in relation to production and gradually fell back to \$1.35 per AUM on all public land, where they stood in 1999, while legal challenges continue over Rangeland Reform.

## IS IT A SUBSIDY?

In a variety of ways, from irrigation to price supports, the federal government is said to subsidize much of American agriculture. Government subsidies in one form or another, in fact, are common in most agriculturally producing nations, and encouraged by international trade agreements.

Farm “subsidies” are undeniably essential in the fundamental economic value of the cost of food, which in the United States is the lowest of all industrialized nations.

One argument over public grazing is that artificially low grazing fees amount to a net loss for the government and benefit only a small number of permit holders, some of whom represent wealthy corporations in their own right.

Combined losses of the BLM and Forest Service on revenues versus costs of public grazing were reported from 1994 to 1996 to have been \$66 million. In the same period, the government reported losses of \$355 million on recreation and \$290 million on timber.

One reason may be found in the fact that the federal agencies are overweight in administration, requiring 78 employees per million AUMs, compared to 20 employees per million AUMs on state grazing land.

Interior Secretary Bruce Babbitt has led environmental arguments that grazing permits benefit fewer than 27,000 ranchers and less than 5 percent of national beef production. This may be more true as a result of continued federal pressure on small operators, but even so, 80 percent of ranchers using federal lands make a net income of less than \$30,000 a year, and the BLM itself estimates that 20 percent of calves shipped to feeder lots come off the public range.

The relatively small number of ranchers benefiting from grazing permits is indicative of the historic nature of the cattle industry in the West especially, in which relatively few major producers (including Babbitt’s own family) control large herds. One of the nation’s largest federal grazing permits in Rock Springs, Wyo., is held by the Rock Springs Grazing Association, which actually represents nearly 50 individual ranchers.

As a result not only of stagnant cattle prices, but increasing regulations, the number of active permits on public land has declined since 1988 by about 20 percent. Reduction in allowed AUMs on some permits have declined in this decade by as much as 50 percent. That the total number of cattle remains roughly the same reflects the pressure on smaller operators, not the larger ones.

- Historically, the purpose of permits on public land was to aid in organized development of the West and its settlements, something that was accomplished. Permit holders were expected to operate from their own deeded land near to the permitted range. This is still true.
- Improvements on grazing permits, including fences, water and spring improvements and protection of riparian areas are the responsibility of the livestock operator and done at substantial cost to the permittee.
- Fair market value for grazing fees on private lands has been estimated to be from nearly \$6 per AUM to more than \$17, with an average estimate of \$9.80 per AUM in 17 western states. However, unlike federal leases, a private owner, not the lease holder, is responsible for all improvements and care of the cattle as well as the range.

	PUBLIC LAND COSTS PER AUM*	PRIVATE LAND COSTS PER AUM
Grazing fee or rental	\$ 1.35	7.77
Turn out	.99	.69
Gather	3.26	.97
Routine management	4.08	3.73
Maintenance	2.23	1.55
Salting & vet services	.16	.22
Meetings	.80	.01
Death loss	3.13	.37
Misc.	.17	0
Total cost per AUM	\$16.17	15.31

\* An Animal Unit Month (AUM) is the amount of forage sufficient to sustain a cow and a calf or five sheep for a month

- Almost by definition, public grazing lands in the West are not as productive of forage as are private pastures and thus require more restrictive care by the permit holder.

Taking into account the total costs to the permit holder, independent academic research has concluded that the total cost to ranchers grazing on public lands is about \$16.17 per AUM (including the federal grazing fee), compared to an average total cost of \$15.31 on private land.

The fact is that it would be cheaper for the rancher to graze his cattle on private land in the West—if that land were available.

According to industry reports, since 1989, about 50 percent of federal jobs in direct land management staff, including range conservation officers, have been eliminated. This has compressed federal management of public lands into an increasingly administrative capacity without direct involvement on the range except to impose new regulations.

At the same time, the value to rural communities in employment, services and goods from permittee ranchers commonly accounts for the most stable and significant share of the local economy in ranching areas.

In a 1996 survey that asked ranchers what they would do if grazing were prohibited on public land, 21 percent said they would retire, 16 percent said they would find a new occupation, 21 percent said they would sell their private land for development. The majority, 57 percent, said they would reduce the size of their operation.

## THE RANCHERS

Much as is the case in all American agriculture, cattle-raisers tend to be middle-aged or older, with ranchers under the age of 35 representing the least percentage with the heaviest debt.

Of ranchers surveyed, most said that between 25 and 50 percent of family income is produced from an off-ranch source.

Like farmers, independent ranchers in America today find it difficult, but not impossible, to make a living from the ranch alone. The tendency to larger corporate operations in ranching is nothing new in the West, but the cost of doing business has risen significantly in legal fees and the requirements to meet new regulations.

As with farmers, sharp disparities are evident in production and profit: A medium-sized feedlot generally east of the Rockies, for example, averages about 10,000 head of cattle, while the average cow-calf operation is 49 head. In the West, where there are fewer feedlots, a viable cow-calf operation is considered to be around 300 head.

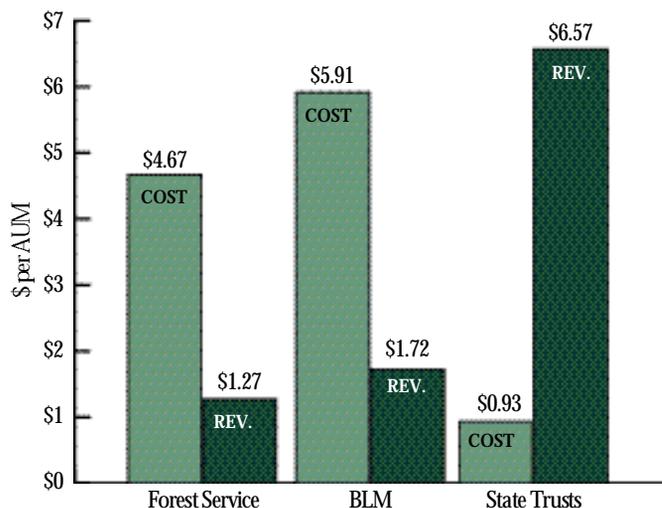
Although herds are clearly larger in the West, smaller operations are more jeopardized by flat prices and additional regulations. Calf production in the 1990s reached its lowest point since 1952. The result has been that while ranching remains an alluring occupation for many, economic and regulatory pressures have forced others to sell their deeded land, thus contributing to urbanized development and the concentration of production into fewer large operations.

While the federal agencies acknowledge they have an "inadequate data base" in public lands grazing, several western states have begun analyzing effects of recent federal policy on local economies.

In Nevada, the most heavily federalized state, a study of six counties documented a loss of public grazing by over 340,000 AUMs since 1980. The annual monetary loss to local economies in this region was estimated by the University of Nevada, Reno to be \$12.3 million a year, and a one-time loss to the affected ranching operations of \$12.8 million. At least 167 full-time jobs were also eliminated.

The true value and cost of public grazing is thus left to be defined by government management in context with the effect on local cultural and economic values.

Grazing: Federal Costs High, Revenue Low



Note: 1994-96 average, in 1996 dollars. State Trust figures are based on the average figures for state-managed lands, including Arizona, Idaho, Montana, North Dakota and Oregon. Idaho data was provided for 1995 and 1996 only. Costs include all surface management.

## **"THIS IS THE FOREST PRIMEVAL. THE MURMURING PINES AND THE HEMLOCKS...STAND LIKE DRUIDS OF OLD."**

HENRY WADSWORTH LONGFELLOW, "EVANGELINE," 1847

Fewer Americans experience them today, except from the passing window of an airplane or a car, yet even after the century-and-a-half since Longfellow's poem, American forests still stand as vast as they did then. In fact, even with all the harvesting and their conversion in parts to millions of acres of farm land, and even with losses to natural causes, the nation's forest land is still about two-thirds the size it was before Pilgrims landed in 1620.

The heart of the bitter arguments today is in that romantic notion of a "primeval" old growth forest untouched by man—something that probably didn't exist even in Longfellow's time. It is in the last century, and especially in the last decade, that federal policy has prohibited uses of the forest that were prevalent even among Native Americans five centuries ago, thus "preserving" a renewable resource that federal policy may end up destroying.

**"Too much light often blinds gentlemen of this sort. They cannot see the forest for the trees."**

CHRISTOPH MARTIN WIELAND, 1768

The problem, in fact, is not too few trees, but too many, something most Americans cannot grasp amid a pressure-laden campaign against the U.S. timber industry.

In 1900, forest growth and regeneration was a fraction of annual harvest. Today, however, growth exceeds harvest by more than 33 percent. This is not merely a factor of new policy. Net annual growth of the forest has increased 55 percent since 1952, and growth per acre has increased 62 percent, largely due to new technologies and management by the industry itself.

- Nearly 60 percent of U.S. forest is still on private land.
- Harvesting on public land today is practically nil, but even at the beginning of the decade, when harvest from public land accounted for less than 10 percent of production, growth in National Forests exceeded harvest by more than 60 percent.
- For every tree harvested, seven are planted.
- Of the 6.2 million acres of identified old growth timber in National Forests in Oregon and Washington, virtually all of it is now set aside in areas forbidden to harvest. Another one million acres is in National Parks where harvesting has always been prohibited.

Currently proposed roadless policies on public land would cut off access to between 40 and 60 million acres of forested land. The result is a staggering growth of fuel-loaded forests exceeding 30 million acres that even the U.S. Forest Service admits is at extreme danger from wildfires of previously unheard of proportions. At the same time, the Forest Service acknowledges that even domestic demand for wood fiber will increase by at least 50 percent in the next 20 years.

Wood consumption in the U.S., measured in tons, currently accounts for 47 percent of all primary industrial raw materials consumed, roughly equivalent in weight to all metals, plastics and cement combined.

Although the United States is the world's leader in importing other raw materials, most of the wood consumed in this nation is produced and manufactured here—so far.

## **USE IT OR LOSE IT?**

Spanish explorers in the 16th century reported they were unable to approach the Pacific Coast of this continent at times because of the heavy smoke and ash blowing out to sea from huge forest fires probably set by native inhabitants as a regularly used method for clearing the forest.

It is only in the last quarter century that researchers have begun to appreciate the extent to which Indians all over the North American continent used fire in combination with other methods to harvest the forest resource. A "primeval" forest probably no longer existed after thousands of years of development of native civilizations prior to the arrival of Europeans. In fact, early settlers frequently commented on the "park-like" forests with open savannahs and easily traveled trails. Research indicates that overgrowth of these forests may have been due to the extraordinary loss of population among natives susceptible to diseases brought by early European explorers and settlers, and in even greater measure to federal reservation policies that removed tribes from their native lands.

In 1910, the condition of the largely untended forest of northern Idaho and western Montana that foresters called, "the high lonesome," was that of an old growth forest unmanaged in any way. There was a drought, shattered in two terrible August nights when wind and lightning set off perhaps the largest fire ever known. It raged like an open blast furnace across three million acres, killing 86 people, and leading to the establishment of Forest Service policies on fire suppression. Recovery of the forest in "the high lonesome" was said to have required at least 40 years.

Under the Clinton administration, however, the Forest Service has presented an unclear policy largely favoring "natural" causes, including wildfires, to occur. Many former Forest Service employees say it is an invitation to disaster. Not surprisingly, the timber industry has recommended that harvesting of the forest for beneficial use would serve best for managing against such wildfires. Yet permits for salvaging even dead trees on Forest Service land have been steadily reduced during the Clinton administration and in some places in the Southwest eliminated altogether.

## **THE TIMBER PEOPLE**

As with other forms of agriculture, the numbers of people directly involved in logging or harvesting of the forests are only representative of a larger industry that involves trucking, mills, finished pro-

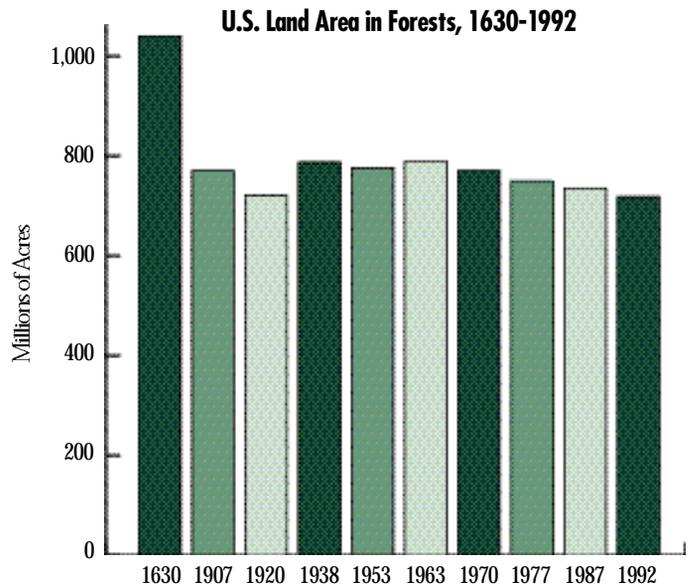
duction and a myriad of services and goods provided by nearby communities.

No other industry has been more dramatically affected by federal policy changes.

An estimated 132,000 jobs were lost or eliminated within five years of action, or inaction, taken by the Clinton administration after listing of the spotted owl as an endangered species in 1990. Standing economies in several northwestern towns collapsed and were not replaced by promises of tourism or technology training. In California, Oregon, Washington, Idaho, and Montana alone, 318 wood mills were closed between 1989 and 1999. Nearly all of them were in small towns dependent on the mills for their economy. The direct loss in jobs was over 35,000. The indirect losses to the local economies has not been calculated.

Perhaps most importantly, however, more than four billion board feet of a completely renewable resource was withheld from production, resulting in continued overgrowth, fuel loading and insect infestation in the forests, and indirectly leading to increased harvests in Third World nations where methods of reforestation are either not utilized or unknown. Unrenewable rainforests on far less stable ground are still being destroyed in response to global demand for wood. As such land is cleared, it is used for grazing to meet other global demands, suggesting environmental losses that are unnecessary and unintended by American producers.

Because the loss of jobs in the timber industry had its greatest impact on skilled middle-aged workers, even a return to harvesting levels of 1990 would require a substantial period of



Forests still cover about two-thirds of the area that was forested when the Pilgrims landed at Plymouth Rock in 1620. About 307 million acres of forest land have been converted to other uses since 1630 – mainly to agricultural use. More than 75 percent of this conversion took place in the 19th century. After 1920, agricultural production increased per acre, cropland area stabilized, and so did forest land area.

retraining the work force.

An ecological disaster of worldwide proportions awaits in the meantime.

**“I HAVE FALLEN IN LOVE WITH AMERICAN NAMES, THE SHARP NAMES THAT NEVER GET FAT. THE SNAKESKIN TITLES OF MINING CLAIMS, THE PLUMED WAR BONNET OF MEDICINE HAT, TUCSON AND DEADWOOD AND LOST MILE FLAT...”**

STEPHEN VINCENT BENET, 1927

What was raised from the land in the West frequently went to feed those who were extracting what was regarded as its greatest wealth. America found a vault of treasure waiting there as the industrial age began. Much more than most Americans realize is still there, and still being produced by an industry as essential to the next century as it was to the last.

**“It’s not a custom with me to keep money to look at.”**

GEORGE WASHINGTON, 1780

Although the West today still lures prospectors, mining operations exist in all 50 states, producing materials from sand to exotic isotopes, so much in such variety that it is difficult to calculate.

The value of non-fuel mining in the United States in 1997 was estimated at \$39.5 billion, with the highest value in products used for construction, agriculture and manufacturing totaling \$27.1 billion. Total production of metallic minerals such as gold, zinc, iron ore, and copper was valued at \$12.4 billion in that year. Coal production was nearly \$20 billion.

As with all production from natural resources, the actual values of mining are spread throughout the economy, producing about \$525 billion a year according to the industry, or about 7 percent of

the nation’s Gross Domestic Product (GDP).

So obvious that it is frequently ignored, mined products are essential to virtually every other part of the economy, from agriculture to cyber-space. Yet miners are today saddled with environmental and government suspicions of being looters of the public wealth.

There are nearly 40 separate laws and regulations governing federal control of mining.

## THE MINERS

As of 1997, there were 355,000 Americans reported to be directly employed in mining. They were among the highest wage-earners in U.S. industry, averaging \$44,000 a year. Industry estimates are that an additional five million Americans, including government employees, earn their income from mining production. The rate of occupational injury among miners is lower than that of employees in hospitals, hotels, or retail outlets.

Although large corporations control most production, the lure to individuals of finding a strike is as evident in mining as in other resource development. In the mining state of Nevada, for example, nearly 80 percent of all claimants hold between one and 20 claims, as opposed to the 36,000 claims held by nine large companies.

It can sound, as it so often has in American history, like a get rich quick idea, but mining in America today is certainly no less beset with obstacles to individual enterprise than other industries, and in some ways is the most threatened of them all. That is particularly true on public land, where the Mining Act of 1872 still offers the last remaining opportunity of converting federal property into private use.

Deep mounds of regulations and requirements piled up over years stand in the way of opening a new hole in the public earth today, but mining operators have found their way through most of them in the past 25 years to produce a record of regeneration and renewal of mining lands. Tens of millions more in dollars have been invested by the industry in voluntary restoration of abandoned mines.

Unlike other resources on federal lands, mining actually produces a positive return to the government of \$6 for every dollar budgeted for management. (Nine state governments, however, reported returns of \$35 per dollar spent on state-managed mineral lands.) Even so, newer environmental regulations, and even international accords, have been employed in the last decade to delay or halt new mining operations or explorations in the United States. One such administrative action recommended by the Department of the Interior would halt lead mining in southeast Missouri, effectively terminating 85 percent of lead production in the U.S.

Other Department of Interior actions, however, have concentrated on imposing restrictions to mining claims in the West and demanding higher royalties from existing mines. Both actions would override aspects of the 1872 Mining Law with executive authority not subject to congressional approval. This is in contrast to actions taken by other nations, including emerging Third World countries, to eliminate barriers to exploration and production of their mineral resources.

When the Grand Staircase Escalante region of Utah was declared a National Heritage Site in 1996 by President Clinton, access was prohibited to an estimated \$2 billion in exceptionally high grade coal. The need for such coal required U.S. industry to begin importing it from Indonesia.

In just the last year, the federal government issued 52 notices of land withdrawal covering 2.3 million acres of the West that were closed to mining exploration.

Even with the strictest environmental regulations and controls in the world, the United States is estimated to contain a large percent of the world's resources for mineral products, metallic minerals and fuel reserves. Coal reserves alone are estimated to contain 400 years of fuel energy.

The United States is still the world's second largest producer of gold, next only to South Africa. Both gold and silver production in the U.S. reached record levels in 1997. Yet by all accounts, mining has touched less than one-quarter percent of all U.S. land.

**By figures of the government itself, each American relies on 46,000 pounds of new mined materials, including 7,500 pounds of coal energy, each year.**

**“THE RESULT WOULD BE THE IMPROVEMENT OF THE VALLEY AND NATIONAL PARK BY THE CONSTRUCTION OF ROADS, BRIDGES, AND TRAILS.... THE TOLL ROAD SYSTEM WOULD BE ABOLISHED AND IN ALL PROBABILITY A SPLENDID BOULEVARD CONSTRUCTED UP THE MERCED CANYON, WHICH WOULD REDUCE THE TIME AND EXPENSE OF TRAVEL ONE HALF AND GREATLY INCREASE THE COMFORT...”**

SIERRA CLUB STATEMENT FAVORING FEDERAL CONTROL  
OF YOSEMITE VALLEY, 1905

As a nature-loving club, long before it became a pressure group, John Muir's Sierra Club believed that the more Americans who could participate in the enjoyment of nature, the better the chances for preserving it from other uses. A Stanley Steamer made it into Yosemite Valley in 1900, the first of what has since become an overwhelming flood of motorized visitors to the park. In recent years, others have sought more solitary experiences with nature on roads and trails suitable to off-road vehicles (ORVs) and motorized bikes. They too have a club in the half-a-million-member Blue Ribbon Coalition, but theirs is so far a losing battle to federal actions that have literally dug tank-trap trenches through previously traveled forest roads, cutting off all wheeled access.

**“President Clinton is acting more like King William, and it should send chills up the spines of everyone who uses public lands.”**

SENATOR LARRY CRAIG (R-ID) IN A 1999 STATEMENT  
ON U.S. FOREST SERVICE ROAD CLOSURES

John Muir would surely be appalled at how “loved” is his Yosemite Valley today. He might be alarmed as well by the disturbance of motorized vehicles finding their way deeper and deeper into the forests. But it's an open question about whether even Muir would favor “locking up” more than 40 million acres of public land in the West from use by any except those who come on foot, and then, only by permission.

For the most part, the Forest Service built the roads—some 380,000 miles of them—not for visitor use, but to make possible the management and harvesting of forest lands. Since timber harvesting has been greatly reduced or eliminated, the Forest Service has lost millions in revenue and has less and less in its budget for maintaining roads and trails.

## THE RECREATIONISTS

In a way, shutting off roads to vehicular use is, like the spotted owl, another surrogate method of preventing logging and, as is frequently argued, creating *de facto* wilderness without going to the trouble of congressional approval.

Yet recreation groups like the Blue Ribbon Coalition have been willing to aid in road maintenance and improving trails, and their numbers alone would indicate some possibility for the Forest Service to address its budget problems in another way.

Unclear figures indicate that before major road closures, off-road vehicles accounted for more than 90 million visitor days a year in the National Forests, with the figure steadily growing. The numbers could present some possibility for opportunity or, as has actually happened, for confrontation.

With roads closed, the Forest Service now contends, ORV operators cut fences and make their own roads, thus leading to more damage in the forest and to inevitable confrontations with authority. Yet associations and industry groups have repeatedly offered help and “adopt a trail” assistance to federal authorities and have stressed environmental concerns to their memberships.

The National Off Highway Vehicle Conservation Council organized in 1990 now has members in 40 states and conducted a survey of off-road users in 1998 that determined: the average age of OHV users is 39; nearly 60 percent are married with family; and one-third are employed as professionals and more than half have attended college. Average income was placed at \$44,000 a year.

Not only are they not likely to destroy existing roads and trails, polls among OHV users have indicated support for paying fees for use, so long as those fees were directed to actual maintenance.

As with other aspects in the issue of public lands, the argument over roads has simply been inflamed by what seem to be arbitrary

actions of the federal administration on behalf of a single environmental agenda that favors non-management of the forest and puts aside the investments of the past.

- The network of Forest Service roads represents a distance eight times longer than the interstate highway system.

- Many of the roads were built to accommodate heavy truck traffic, and thus easily handle automobiles and recreational vehicles on weekend visits. Recreational use is estimated to account for 98 percent of traffic.

- The Forest Service reported average cost for one mile of such a road in 1997 as \$64,000. (This is an extreme figure when compared, for example, to Montana’s estimated cost of a state-built timber road of \$5,000 a mile.)

- The maintenance backlog for road repair by the Forest Service is currently over \$10 billion.

Digging tank traps and closing access to up to 60 million acres of forest doesn’t seem a likely solution, but it is so far the policy of the Forest Service.

### “We must identify our enemies and drive them into oblivion.”

BRUCE BABBITT IN HIS FIRST MESSAGE AS PRESIDENT OF THE LEAGUE OF CONSERVATION VOTERS, 1991

Bruce Babbitt brought his attitude with him when he moved from the League of Conservation Voters into the top job at the Department of Interior. The former Arizona governor had aspired to be President of the United States, and short of that to become a Justice of the U.S. Supreme Court, but when Bill Clinton named him as Secretary of the Interior, it was with the urging of politically powerful environmental interests. They considered Babbitt to be their heavy hitter, “our Babe Ruth” as one of them put it. From the beginning, Babbitt did not disappoint them, naming no less than 20 executives from their own non-profit ranks to key posts in the nation’s land-managing authority, including George Frampton of the Wilderness Society to become Assistant Secretary for Fish & Wildlife.

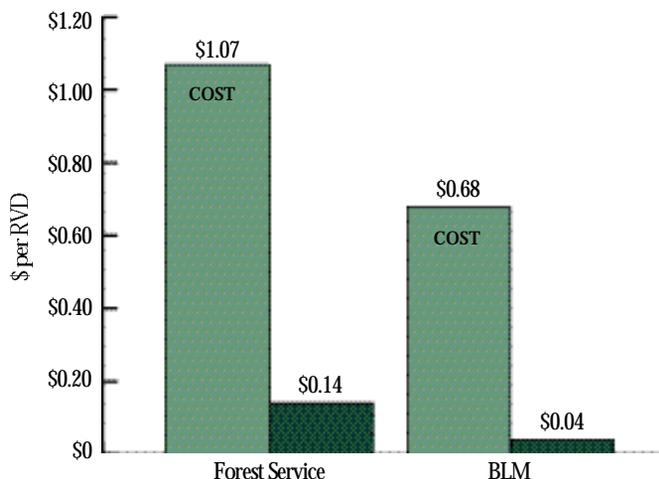
Interior had long been regarded as the most thankless Cabinet post, and the least likely to promote a future career. It carried the baggage of inevitable controversies over management of the nation’s enormous public lands, and of wrenching decisions to be made between competing interests. Despite his well-known arrogance, Bruce Babbitt regarded himself as a peacemaker. He has presided over the last eight years in perhaps the most contentious period in the history of the department.

## WHAT ARE WE FIGHTING OVER?

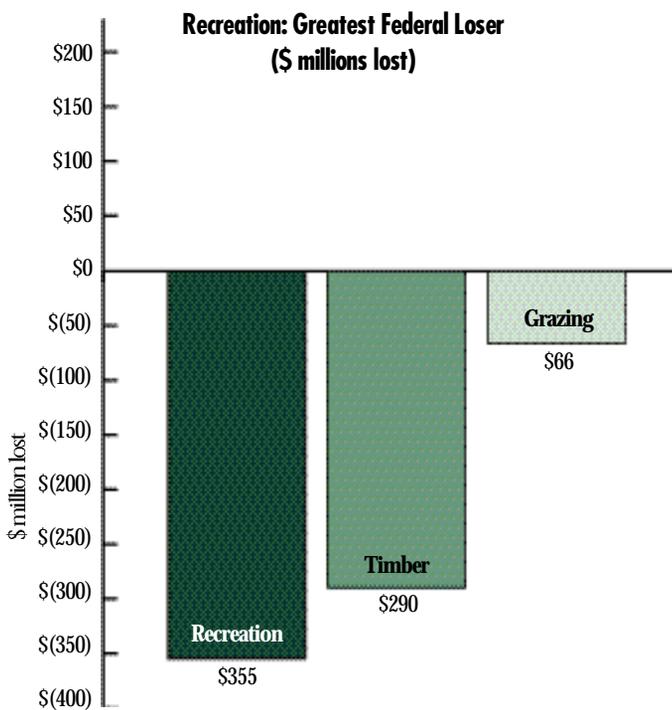
Americans are not at war with each other. More than ever today, we are more alike than we are apart in our beliefs, ambitions, and ideology. Clearly the most powerful and richest nation on the planet, we are at once its greatest consumers and its most ardent protector, a seeming contradiction of ourselves.

Most Americans today say they regard themselves as “environmentalist,” because to say otherwise would deny some of the most evident truths about abuses caused by human behavior in the past. Still, saving the whales or protecting the rain forest or finding simple truth in the behavior of predators misleads many of us in an attempt to identify our adversaries. In order to secure the planet for

**Federal Recreation: High Costs, Low Revenue**



Note: 1994-96 average, in 1996 dollars. RVD = Recreational Visitor Days.



future generations, we are told, we must overcome a vaguely-defined villain among ourselves, a force that, if left unchecked, will destroy the future.

“We have found the enemy,” said Pogo, “and he is us.”

The battleground may seem to be the environment, but the objective is really power.

## CONDITIONS IN GENERAL

Much of what urban America imagines about the West in particular today is simply not true.

- **The forests have not been destroyed by loggers.** If anything, forest lands as vast as any known by our ancestors are in far greater danger today from the absence of harvest and management.

- **The rangeland is not being grazed into desert.** To the contrary, the public range in particular is today regarded to be in better condition than at any time in the last century, thanks mostly to agreements sought by ranchers themselves, but also to increasing knowledge on conservation provided by environmentally aware scientists. If the future of the range may be limited from what it once was, it is because ranchers themselves have more respect and understanding of its natural cycles than ever before.

- **We have not “mined out” our natural resources in fuel and minerals, and face no risk of doing so in the foreseeable future.** What is at stake is our understanding of how to use the knowledge we have in making the best and most beneficial use of the resources that exist.

- **Mankind alone is not responsible for all natural catastrophes.** Humans have always had an effect on the environment, no less than buffalo or wolves or prairie dogs, but in many cases no more than other species. The obvious difference is in our understanding of how we affect the environment. The grasp we have of that comes from education and knowledge far more than from restrictive enforcement and threatened punishment.

We are, however, squandering our own natural wealth and the well-being of the planet itself in allowing the destruction of farms, managed forests, rangelands, and other means of natural, regenerative production in favor of what we are misguided to believe is an answer in global technology no longer reliant on natural resources.

Our need for food and for raw materials will not be served by the Internet alone, and cannot be met by a political policy that is short-sighted and guided by special interests. **“Preservation” of productive and generally renewable resources in the United States in favor of importation of food and raw materials from emerging nations poses threats not only to national security, but to global survival. Such policy seems not only reckless, but totally unnecessary.**

## THE “SIDES”

The expansion of federal control and authority in the past 10 years especially is simply too obvious to be regarded as merely the evolving process of our government. Many in the West see what they suspect is a sinister move to socialism behind it all. Indeed, several of the key founders of what has become the environmentalist movement were in fact self-proclaimed socialists or acknowledged their interest in the theory. That includes Aldo Leopold and Bob Marshall, a democratic socialist who instigated the formation of the Wilderness Society in 1935.

Yet for the most part, even though some point to the “Green Cross” role of former Soviet Premier Mikhail Gorbachev in the movement, environmentalists are not “Communists” or even dogmatists. On their side, there is equally deep suspicion that those who use the land and its resources are directed by rich and greedy capitalists who would carelessly exploit all public wealth for themselves if left unchecked.

On the battleground for public opinion, those separate assumptions seem to underlie the contending messages between regulation and free enterprise. **Attitudes and prejudice have been formed among the public in a way similar to political campaigns, and as is common to such campaigns, opinions have been formed based less on truth than emotion.**

It is a commonly held assumption, for example, that agriculture in general is represented by powerful political lobbyist groups and organizations which sometimes act against the public good in order to preserve their traditional advantages.

Such long-standing associations representing farmers, ranchers, loggers, miners and recreationists do exist in a complex, and sometimes conflicting, assortment of politically attentive offices. Yet there is also a body of equally complex environmental organizations with political bases in Washington, D.C., that certainly exert no less power and influence.

The difference for more than a quarter century has been that agricultural groups have found themselves disarrayed in actions commonly directed at a specific issue or region, while large environmental interest groups have employed huge sums of their non-profit holdings in attempting to shape general public policy.

No president or politician would ever say they are against farms, for example, yet it involves a more politically popular, and often more profitable, stance to declare themselves “pro-environment,” even though that position may carry hidden baggage.

Some idea of what that’s worth may be seen from the financial

holdings of major non-profit environmental organizations: The Nature Conservancy is the most outstanding example and reported non-profit revenues of \$1.6 billion last year. No other single environmental group can come close to TNC's holdings, which also include over a million acres of land. Recent practice has been for activist groups to form coalitions with shared funding targeted at a particular cause, such as halting logging in the Southwest, with financial coffers commonly totaling half a million dollars a year on each issue. It is spent on influence, both on politicians and in the public media.

By contrast, the total budget for lobbying activities of the National Cattlemen's and Beef Association is about \$2 million a year, including salaries and costs. Yet these funds, derived from a much smaller base of the population, must be devoted to a number of issues and even individual cases. Even if agricultural groups could combine their assets in the way that environmentalist groups do under shelter of foundations, the strain on a limited pool of rural contributors would itself threaten the continued existence of many of them. The bitter choice among those in agriculture is in whether they can afford to just stay even with a "movement" that enjoys enough funding to expend more and more in soliciting financial support from the cities and suburbs.



The public popularity of "saving" the environment is by itself so potent that sometimes little special interest pressure at all is necessary to trigger administrative action that is not even offered for public debate. The outstanding example, though not the only one, was the 1996 campaign designation of the Grand Staircase Escalante in Utah as a National Heritage Site, surprising even the entire Utah congressional delegation.

**Indeed, what has characterized the Clinton administration is evasion of public debate, even in Congress, by using administrative orders and regulations to carry out major policy changes on public lands.**

Secretary Babbitt has frequently expressed his frustration with congressional reluctance to approve his proposals. Not for the first time, Babbitt infuriated some in Congress recently by telling the *National Journal*—"We've switched the rules of the game. We're not going to do anything legislatively."

It's that kind of bluster, along with previous actions, that has helped stir opposition to the administration. Yet even mild political dissent to such authority has been branded as "anti-government" in the heated issue of public lands.

Opponents to environmental initiatives by the administration are frequently labeled as dupes or tools of powerful corporations such as oil companies. Ironically, however, a huge amount of wealth employed by the leading environmental organizations can be traced to grants from fortunes made in the 20th century from corporate exploitation of natural resources. This includes The Rockefeller Family Foundation (Standard Oil), The Pew Charitable Trusts (Sun Oil), The Ford Foundation, and a long list of other well-known corporate titles with charitable foundations that donate hundreds of millions of dollars a year to environmental groups. When it comes to funding, there is no doubt that the "big" money is in green hands.



The idea persists among many westerners that it is some kind of international conspiracy involving a plan to turn over large parts of

the United States to the United Nations. There are 47 "Biosphere Reserves" and 27 "World Heritage" sites in the United States covering as much as 70 percent of national parks and monuments which are in theory protected under international agreement with the United Nations.

That does not mean those lands are controlled by the U.N., but what is less understood is the power awarded in settling disputes over these lands to the influence of nationally and internationally recognized "Non Government Organizations" (NGOs) such as The Nature Conservancy.

Such politically-weighted "international authority" has also been used by the Clinton administration to avoid a national debate (notably in blocking the New World Mine near the border of Yellowstone National Park).

Secretary Babbitt is certainly aware of the appearance of demagoguery in his administration and has initiated other measures such as Resource Advisory Councils (RACs) to provide what some argue is only an appearance of democratic participation among ranchers, recreationists, academicians, environmentalists and local government in deciding use of public lands.

In what they say is an attempt to reach consensus on such issues as multiple land use, federal authorities have established training programs for land management staff in "facilitated" meetings now commonly experienced by many westerners. They are recognizable in their signature direction by a "facilitator" writing the views of participants on easel-sized tablets of white butcher paper.

That the methodology is so common is no accident. Breaking participants into small groups generally unfamiliar with each other is intended not only to produce a variety of thought, but to discourage disagreement in a politely uncertain social setting. Translating their views into simple statements listed on the paper makes their differences seem even less significant. What comes of it, according to critics of this "Delphi" method, is the *appearance* of agreement on a pre-planned solution. The critics say participants are simply manipulated into thinking they have found consensus. Whether or not the critics are right about that, such "facilitated" methods appear to be taking the place of social and scientific debate. Those with particular expertise and knowledge in the field, in fact, are characteristically excluded from the consensus process.

To say there is a conspiracy or some sort of grand plan for a socialist takeover of the West distorts the reality of a vastly more complex (not to mention more capitalist funded) environmental "movement" that has captured the enthusiasm of young people in particular through a public media campaign that presents an opportunity for redemption of some mutually held social guilt. If it distorts reality and ignores its own responsibility for the creation of social and even environmental crises, it has evolved less as a conspiracy than as a political agenda which yet requires an educated response.

## **SPECIES ENDANGERED—IS IT THE OWLS? OR IS IT US?**

From the very beginning of their campaign in 1989, the Sierra Club made no secret of the fact that the spotted owl was virtually invented from questionable research as a "surrogate" useful to halting all old growth forest harvesting in the Northwest.

Andy Stahl of the Sierra Club was delighted in comparing the

owl to “Bambi” as a symbol of the Club’s intentions. It worked even beyond Sierra Club expectations and hopes, in a rapid few years shutting down virtually all logging on public land. This even though the owl’s supposed reliance on old growth timber was put into serious question by hundreds of nests found in second growth forests and one even discovered in a K-Mart sign.

There are 1,197 species of plants and animals in the United States listed as threatened or endangered. Since final passage of the Endangered Species Act in 1973, 11 species have been delisted as a result of their recovery; seven species have been declared extinct; and nine other species have been delisted after finding the original data was incorrect.

Of the 10 to 30 million species estimated to exist on the planet today, scientists estimate that 17,000 become extinct every year. That is not an alarming figure. Most of the species that ever existed are today extinct from natural processes.

Though science debates how much government actually had to do with it, the Endangered Species Act (ESA) can certainly flaunt its poster successes in the bald eagle or the peregrine falcon, even while ignoring that it was the elimination of pesticides such as DDT, and the work of the private Peregrine Fund, that deserve the credit.

But the key to understanding the ESA today is in that “surrogate” issue. Most of the species listed are considered in danger because of habitat loss, and the most frequently “lost” habitat involves fresh water.

Which brings us to what has always been the bottom line in the West. If the West had been blessed with nearly the same general distribution of rivers and waterways found east of the Mississippi, this would surely be a different nation, and no such disputes over “public land” could possibly have endured over more than a century. In the West, as Mark Twain observed, “Whiskey is for drinking. Water is for fighting.”

Administration of the Endangered Species Act today is largely the responsibility of the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, headed by George Frampton. If water is what will unlock the door to species survival, Frampton holds the key. And, as in other parts of Interior Department policy, it is seldom a matter of representative debate about the outcome.

Water transformed the desert in some areas of the West, making it “bloom” as Theodore Roosevelt promised in new farms that were meant to feed industrial expansion to the coast. Such promises of water for irrigation brought people West at the beginning of the 20th century. Probably the most common issue at the heart of most disputes in the West today are over rights still held to that water. In an ever-growing West it is ever more the most valuable commodity. Water is power.

More than the land, the government wants the water.  
That is the bottom line.

## **THERE WILL NEVER BE MORE, AND THERE IS NEVER ENOUGH**

Never like the East, of course, water in the West has always been more scarce and more at issue over who should control its use. Rainfall in the 17 western states is typically 30 to 50 percent of what it is in the East.

In the East, general water doctrine is based on “riparian rights”

of each landholder adjacent to a stream sharing equally in its “reasonable” use.

In the West, water law follows a doctrine of “prior appropriation,” allowing the first water user to take what is needed for “beneficial” use. In a drought, senior rights are met first, the basic rule being, “use it or lose it.”

Agricultural users in the West have generally been losing it in the last 20 years due to new claims by federal authorities over what is “beneficial” use and “prior” rights. In large part, this is because federal doctrine that once left the matter of “prior appropriation” to the states and to notion of allowing the West to “bloom” from irrigation, has been “reinvented” in the last decade with more and more claims of federal rights.

Those priorities have changed since federal reclamation policy at the beginning of the 20th century encouraged families to settle in an arid West made to “bloom” from the creation of dams, reservoirs and irrigation systems.

Today, some 31 million people in the West rely in one way or another on the more than 300 dams and reservoirs built by the Bureau of Reclamation to provide water to more than nine million acres of farmland since 1902.

Despite promises made to those original settlers, however, increasing demand for water from growing urban areas and newly established wildlife habitats has resulted in major alterations in the policy and mission of federal agencies such as the Bureau of Reclamation. And although federal authority stems from the Reclamation Act of 1902, since then assumed and actual federal authority over water resources has been fragmented into multiple agencies.

No less than 12 standing committees in Congress have jurisdiction over “federal” water, yet no comprehensive plan on federal water resources has been introduced since the 1965 Water Resources Planning Act generally providing for an assessment of the resource.

Since then, although states are acknowledged to generally have control over their own water resources, multiple federal agencies including the BLM, the Forest Service, U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, the Bureau of Reclamation and the Environmental Protection Agency have claimed prior rights for the allocation of western water.

The complex issue of water rights is expected to be argued in one or more cases before the U.S. Supreme Court in this decade. In the meantime, however, losses of farmland due to elimination of irrigation or grazing rights by federal authorities amount to millions of acres and continue to be central to the issue in the West.

**“Nature teaches more than she preaches. There are no sermons in stone. It is easier to get a spark out of a stone than a moral.”**

JOHN BURROUGHS, CA. 1900

More so than we would like, RANGE is accused of “preaching to the choir” by reminding those in the rural West of what they already know. But neither we nor those readers closest to us want to be regarded as missionaries or adversaries in causes that need not divide the nation or the people of the West as much as they have in

recent years. John Muir is a hero to us, too. Aldo Leopold could have written for *RANGE* magazine. Contemporary environmentalists, even if their views are as radical as those of David Foreman and Reed Noss, are part of our interest. But every trend deserves to be examined for its truth.

These things we think are true.

- The honest production of food, fiber, and raw materials in the West is no less necessary today than ever.

- If the numbers of farms and the viability of farming continues to decline in the United States, the *least* result will be a serious increase in the cost of food for all of us.

- If the decline in legitimate livestock grazing continues at a rate of 20 percent each decade, the result will be not only higher costs for protein, but lower quality and even questionable supplies.

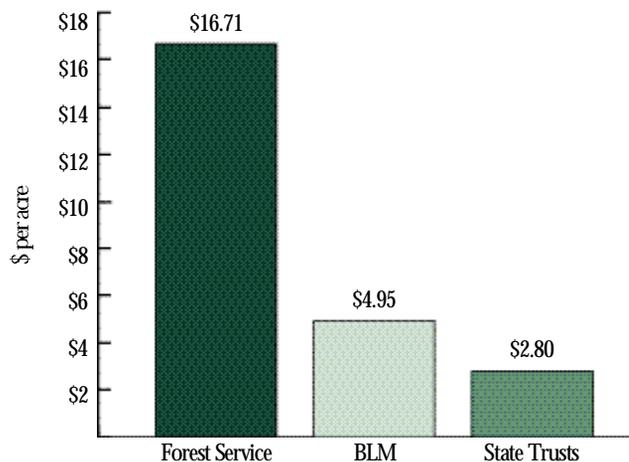
- If timber production, reduced by 70 percent in the last decade, remains at such levels, consumer costs for an incredible variety of products will rise, while the forests will be in ever greater danger of catastrophic wildfires.

- If the production of fuel and minerals in the United States is even more limited than it is today, this consuming nation will still acquire the necessary raw materials from imports, thus not only compromising national security, but contributing to environmental destruction in other countries.

- If the national heritage contained in our public lands is set aside as a preservation of a mythical past, our future as a nation and as free people will be in dire doubt, and the balance of nature throughout the planet will be threatened.

- If the trend of federal regulation and control continues, production of food, fiber and raw materials in the United States will be directed into the holdings of larger and more powerful corporate

### Federal Management Costs Are High



Note: 1994-96 average, in 1996 dollars. State Trust figures are based on the average figures for state-managed lands, including Arizona, Colorado, Idaho, Montana, Nebraska, New Mexico, Oregon, South Dakota, Utah and Washington.

enterprises that will have influence over supply, demand and prices.

In calculating all of it in the last two decades, it is not the management of natural resources, but the attempt to manage and control human behavior and aspiration that is at the heart of the issue in the West.

We believe, as people in the West have always believed, that we have a right to participate in shaping our own destiny. That is nothing more than what is promised to us all as free people. ■

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