

September 2017
Freedom of the Press

CARING FOR THE LAND: AMERICA'S RIGHT TO KNOW

Western people & lands under duress.

An award for upholding the principles of the First Amendment and protecting the public's right to know. This is the fifth consecutive Freedom of the Press award for RANGE.

JUDGE'S COMMENT: "An extensive and laudable series of stories to give voice to under-represented ranchers and farmers in the West."

RANGE magazine is the recognized watchdog for the problems that threaten America's food sources, and is known for its editorial that illustrates the dire need to protect the land and promote the public's right to know the truth—all of it.

In the four quarterly publications covering the Nevada Press Association's Better Newspaper & Magazine journalism competition year (judged by Utah Press Association), RANGE devoted 36 reports, sidebars and features, totaling 85 pages of editorial about people and lands that are under duress. It is not a pretty picture. RANGE also profiled 21 ranching families as they shared their troubles, issues, humor and dedication to the land—despite interference from government agencies, special-interest groups and Mother Nature. Their locations include Oregon, Nevada, Washington, Montana, North Dakota, California, Wyoming, Arizona and South Dakota—people devoted to maintaining a healthy land for their families and the wildlife that shares their world and to producing food and fiber for millions of Americans.

Caring for the land is a complex, controversial subject in need of understanding the laundry list of dangerous circumstances. For 26 years, RANGE has exposed the issues faced by dedicated ranchers and farmers in a straightforward manner, and pursues commonsense solutions to problems by presenting reports written by renowned scientists and investigative researchers. This includes endangered species, special-interest groups with hidden agendas, the impact of wildfires and what should be done to protect our forests, excessive and burdensome government regulations, failure by agencies to follow the law and protect the land, government corruption, national monuments, suspicious legal relationships, government harassment, misunderstanding of western people and their issues, and innocent newcomers who have the money to buy huge ranches for the view but little understanding of how to keep them healthy.

RANGE follows the issues throughout in its pursuit of truth. The public needs to know what is at stake because the entire population can be impacted by the issues RANGE covers. Simply put, it is important to everyone who consumes food, any kind of food. Collectively, the stories in RANGE illustrate the dire need to protect the land, without which there would be no life. Despite the seriousness of the subject, misinformation, politics, self-serving special-interest groups and Mother Nature all present obstacles.

CONTRIBUTING REPORTS:

"Powerful Forces": Environmental scientist Michael S. Coffman, Ph.D., graphically explains the approximately 640 million acres of land, or about 28 percent of the 2.27 billion acres in the United States, claimed by the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) and U.S. Forest Service.

"Rapacious Feds": Judy Boyle, a fifth-term Idaho state legislator, writes that western states are sick of being treated as colonists and should demand sovereignty over their own lands and assets.

“Monumental Megabucks”: Dave Skinner writes: “Westerners have long suspected that claims of ‘local, grassroots support’ for new national monuments are false. Only million of dollars, anonymously and selectively spread to willing professionals, could generate such obvious and obviously expensive Astroturf. Well, now there is proof.” Skinner lays out the players and payers in a well-documented report.

“Ignoring Nature’s Law”: Rachel Dahl, an expert on the wild-horse issue, writes about BLM’s failure to follow the law. The agency ignores the provisions in the 1971 Wild Free-Roaming Horses & Burros Act that require immediate removal of excess horses from the range. Consequently, wild horses are dying of dehydration and starvation. Both are excruciating deaths. Unfortunately wild-horse advocates can’t shake reality and instead file lawsuits to protect their romanticized notion of wild horses galloping free across the land. Ranchers have had to restrict grazing livestock on the forage they own because too many horses have taken too much.

“Endangered Intellect”: Hank Vogler is a Nevada sheep rancher, who puts his college education to good use as a writer, humorist and radio commentator. But he gets serious when it comes to the Endangered Species Act and the damage it creates in the environment. “The world needs food and only 10 percent of the planet is arable,” he writes. “Every year more and more animals, plants, reptiles, fish, and insects get added to the endangered species list. None ever leaves. The list is longer than a polygamist clothesline.”

“National Theft”: Writer Barry Perryman, Ph.D., is a rangeland ecologist specializing in natural-resource management issues of the western states. For RANGE, he reports on the Equal Access to Justice Act, which enables special-interest groups to file lawsuits and be paid (by American taxpayers) even if they lose the case. As far as anyone can determine, 3,300 law suits were filed by 12 environmental groups between 2000 and 2011, and \$37 million in attorney fees were awarded.

“ECO-Profits”: Dan Dagget is a freelance writer, speaker, range consultant and a Pulitzer Prize nominee. At one time he was the darling of the Sierra Club, named one of its 100 Environmental Heroes. Today he refers to himself as a reformed eco-radical. For RANGE, he shows what can happen when the land is “protected,” and left dormant. Amazing before and after photos are proof of the benefits of livestock grazing.

“How It Should Be”: Writer Steven H. Rich is president of Rangeland Restoration Academy, specializing in good land management. For RANGE, he writes about the “hope” for the future of a healthy land by using team management. Rich cites: “We were healing nature and human relationships. We could see results on the land. In fact, we had hold of something better than we dared hope.”

JUSTICE DENIED

Also on RANGE’s watch list is a cast of characters with proven connections to nefarious anti-grazing occurrences, and others with agendas suspicious enough to be considered more than coincidental.

RANGE’s nominated package of eight reports focuses on the people who are faced with destructive issues forced on them by special-interest groups, and/or the federal government. It is clear that ranching interests have one thing in common: they have something that is coveted by someone, or some other organization, even the federal government.

These are all a few of the names to be remembered: Hage, Hammond, Gerber, Bundy and Finicum. RANGE wants the public to remember that people have died, been imprisoned, homes destroyed, livestock and wildlife burned to death, and yet Americans do not know the truth, or hear only segments and versions created by spin-doctors.

RANGE’s editorial contends that the West could be productive again if real producers were respected, if forests were managed sustainably (with timber cuts), if glorified mustangs

were kept to the numbers the resource can sustain, if private property rights were considered sacrosanct, if forage were eaten by cows, sheep and wildlife rather than by fire, if government policy did not take precedence over hardworking people, and if Washington's leaders were to give a damn about anyone west of the Potomac.

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