

PUBLIC RANGELANDS IMPROVEMENT ACT (1978)

43 U.S.C. § 1901

(a) The Congress finds and declares that -

- (1) vast segments of the public rangelands are producing less than their potential for livestock, wildlife habitat, recreation, forage, and water and soil conservation benefits, and for that reason are in an unsatisfactory condition;
- (2) such rangelands will remain in an unsatisfactory condition and some areas may decline further under present levels of, and funding for, management;
- (3) unsatisfactory conditions on public rangelands present a high risk of soil loss, desertification,⁽¹⁾ and a resultant underproductivity for large acreages of the public lands; contribute significantly to unacceptable levels of siltation and salinity in major western watersheds including the Colorado River; negatively impact the quality and availability of scarce western water supplies; threaten important and frequently critical fish and wildlife habitat; prevent expansion of the forage resource and resulting benefits to livestock and wildlife production; increase surface runoff and flood danger; reduce the value of such lands for recreational and esthetic purposes; and may ultimately lead to unpredictable and undesirable long-term local and regional climatic and economic changes;
- (4) the above-mentioned conditions can be addressed and corrected by an intensive public rangelands maintenance, management, and improvement program involving significant increases in levels of rangeland management and improvement funding for multiple-use values;
- (5) to prevent economic disruption and harm to the western livestock industry, it is in the public interest to charge a fee for livestock grazing permits and leases on the public lands which is based on a formula reflecting annual changes in the costs of production;
- (6) the Act of December 15, 1971 (85 Stat. 649, 16 U.S.C. 1331 et seq.), continues to be successful in its goal of protecting wild free-roaming horses and burros from capture, branding, harassment, and death, but that certain amendments are necessary thereto to avoid excessive costs in the administration of the Act, and to facilitate the humane adoption or disposal of excess wild free-roaming horses and burros which because they exceed the

carrying capacity of the range, pose a threat to their own habitat, fish, wildlife, recreation, water and soil conservation, domestic livestock grazing, and other rangeland values;

(b) The Congress therefore hereby establishes and reaffirms a national policy and commitment to:

(1) inventory and identify current public rangelands conditions and trends as a part of the inventory process required by section 1711(a) of this title;

(2) manage, maintain and improve the condition of the public rangelands so that they become as productive as feasible for all rangeland values in accordance with management objectives and the land use planning process established pursuant to section 1712 of this title;

(3) charge a fee for public grazing use which is equitable and reflects the concerns addressed in paragraph (a)(5) above;

(4) continue the policy of protecting wild free-roaming horses and burros from capture, branding, harassment, or death, while at the same time facilitating the removal and disposal of excess wild free-roaming horses and burros which pose a threat to themselves and their habitat and to other rangeland values;

(c) The policies of this chapter shall become effective only as specific statutory authority for their implementation is enacted by this chapter or by subsequent legislation, and shall be construed as supplemental to and not in derogation of the purposes for which public rangelands are administered under other provisions of law.

43 U.S.C. § 1902

As used in this chapter -

(a) The terms "rangelands" or "public rangelands" means lands administered by the Secretary of the Interior through the Bureau of Land Management or the Secretary of Agriculture through the Forest Service in the sixteen contiguous Western States on which there is domestic livestock grazing or which the Secretary concerned determines may be suitable for domestic livestock grazing.

(b) The term "allotment management plan" is the same as defined in section 1702(k) of this title, except that as used in this chapter such term applies to the sixteen contiguous Western States.

(c) The term "grazing permit and lease" means any document authorizing use of public lands or lands in national forests in the sixteen contiguous Western States for the purpose of grazing domestic livestock.

(d) The term "range condition" means the quality of the land reflected in its ability in specific vegetative areas to support various levels of productivity in accordance with range management objectives and the land use planning process, and relates to soil quality, forage values (whether seasonal or year round), wildlife habitat, watershed and plant communities, the present state of vegetation of a range site in relation to the potential plant community for that site, and the relative degree to which the kinds, proportions, and amounts of vegetation in a plant community resemble that of the desired community for that site.

(e) The term "native vegetation" means those plant species, communities, or vegetative associations which are endemic to a given area and which would normally be identified with a healthy and productive range condition occurring as a result of the natural vegetative process of the area.

(f) The term "range improvement" means any activity or program on or relating to rangelands which is designed to improve production of forage; change vegetative composition; control patterns of use; provide water; stabilize soil and water conditions; and provide habitat for livestock and wildlife. The term includes, but is not limited to, structures, treatment projects, and use of mechanical means to accomplish the desired results.

(g) The term "court ordered environmental impact statement" means any environmental statements which are required to be prepared by the Secretary of the Interior pursuant to the final judgment or subsequent modification thereof as set forth on June 18, 1975, in the matter of Natural Resources Defense Council against Andrus.

(h) The term "Secretary" unless specifically designated otherwise, means the Secretary of the Interior.

(i) The term "sixteen contiguous Western States" means the States of Arizona, California, Colorado, Idaho, Kansas, Montana, Nebraska, Nevada, New Mexico, North Dakota, Oklahoma, Oregon, South Dakota, Utah, Washington, and Wyoming.

43 U.S.C. § 1903

(a) Following enactment of this chapter, the Secretary of the Interior and the Secretary of Agriculture shall update, develop (where necessary) and maintain on a continuing basis thereafter, an inventory of range conditions and record of trends of range conditions on the public rangelands, and shall categorize or identify such lands on the basis of the range conditions and trends

thereof as they deem appropriate. Such inventories shall be conducted and maintained by the Secretary as a part of the inventory process required by section 201(a) of the Federal Land Policy and Management Act (43 U.S.C. 1711), and by the Secretary of Agriculture in accordance with section 1603 of title 16; shall be kept current on a regular basis so as to reflect changes in range conditions; and shall be available to the public.

(b) The Secretary shall manage the public rangelands in accordance with the Taylor Grazing Act (43 U.S.C. 315-315(o)), the Federal Land Policy and Management Act of 1976 (43 U.S.C. 1701-1782), and other applicable law consistent with the public rangelands improvement program pursuant to this chapter. Except where the land use planning process required pursuant to section 202 of the Federal Land Policy and Management Act (43 U.S.C. 1712) determines otherwise or the Secretary determines, and sets forth his reasons for this determination, that grazing uses should be discontinued (either temporarily or permanently) on certain lands, the goal of such management shall be to improve the range conditions of the public rangelands so that they become as productive as feasible in accordance with the rangeland management objectives established through the land use planning process, and consistent with the values and objectives listed in sections 1901(a) and (b)(2) of this title.

43 U.S.C. § 1904

(a) Authorization of additional appropriations

In order to accomplish the purposes of this chapter, there are hereby authorized to be appropriated the sum of an additional \$15,000,000 annually in fiscal years 1980 through 1982; for fiscal years 1983 through 1986 an amount no less than the amount authorized for 1982; and for fiscal years 1987 through 1999 an amount not less than \$5,000,000 annually more than the amount authorized for fiscal year 1986. Such funds shall be in addition to any range, wildlife, and soil and water management moneys which have been requested by the Secretary under the provisions of section 1748 of this title, and in addition to the moneys which are available for range improvements under section 1751 of this title.

(b) Availability of unappropriated funds for subsequent fiscal years

Any amounts authorized by this section not appropriated in one or more fiscal years shall be available for appropriation in any

subsequent years.

(c) Fund limitations for prescribed uses; distribution, consultation and coordination; public hearings and meetings; interested parties; priority of cooperative agreements with range users

No less than 80 per centum of such funds provided herein shall be used for on-the-ground range rehabilitation, maintenance and the construction of range improvements (including project layout, project design, and project supervision). No more than 15 per centum of such funds provided herein shall be used to hire and train such experienced and qualified personnel as are necessary to implement on-the-ground supervision and enforcement of the land use plans required pursuant to section 1712 of this title and such allotment management plans as may be developed. Such funds shall be distributed as the Secretary deems advisable after careful and considered consultation and coordination, including public hearings and meetings where appropriate, with the district grazing advisory boards established pursuant to section 1753 of this title, and the advisory councils established pursuant to section 1739 of this title, range user representatives, and other interested parties. To the maximum extent practicable, and where economically sound, the Secretary shall give priority to entering into cooperative agreements with range users (or user groups) for the installation and maintenance of on-the-ground range improvements.

(d) Environmental assessment record and environmental impact statement requirements

Prior to the use of any funds authorized by this section the Secretary shall cause to have prepared an environmental assessment record on each range improvement project. Thereafter, improvement projects may be constructed unless the Secretary determines that the project will have a significant impact on the quality of human environment, necessitating an environmental impact statement pursuant to the National Environmental Policy Act [42 U.S.C. 4321 et seq.] prior to the expenditure of funds.

43 U.S.C. § 1905

For the grazing years 1979 through 1985, the Secretaries of Agriculture and Interior shall charge the fee for domestic livestock grazing on the public rangelands which Congress finds represents the economic value of the use of the land to the user, and under which Congress finds fair market value for public grazing

equals the \$1.23 base established by the 1966 Western Livestock Grazing Survey multiplied by the result of the Forage Value Index (computed annually from data supplied by the Economic Research Service) added to the Combined Index (Beef Cattle Price Index minus the Price Paid Index) and divided by 100: Provided, That the annual increase or decrease in such fee for any given year shall be limited to not more than plus or minus 25 per centum of the previous year's fee.

43 U.S.C. § 1906

Notwithstanding any other provision of this chapter, authority to enter into cooperative agreements and to make payments under this chapter shall be effective only to the extent or in such amounts as are provided in advance in appropriation Acts.

43 U.S.C. § 1907

All National Grasslands are exempted from the provisions of this chapter.

43 U.S.C. § 1908

(a) Scope of program

The Secretaries of Interior and Agriculture are hereby authorized and directed to develop and implement, on an experimental basis on selected areas of the public rangelands which are representative of the broad spectrum of range conditions, trends, and forage values, a program which provides incentives to, or rewards for, the holders of grazing permits and leases whose stewardship results in an improvement of the range condition of lands under permit or lease. Such program shall explore innovative grazing management policies and systems which might provide incentives to improve range conditions. These may include, but need not be limited to -

- (1) cooperative range management projects designed to foster a greater degree of cooperation and coordination between the Federal and State agencies charged with the management of the rangelands and with local private range users,
- (2) the payment of up to 50 per centum of the amount due the Federal Government from grazing permittees in the form of range improvement work,
- (3) such other incentives as he may deem appropriate.

(b) Report to Congress

No later than December 31, 1985, the Secretaries shall report to the Congress the results of such experimental program, their

evaluation of the fee established in section 1905 of this title and other grazing fee options, and their recommendations to implement a grazing fee schedule for the 1986 and subsequent grazing years.