



March, 2003

SUSTAINING WORKING LANDSCAPES ON WESTERN PUBLIC LANDS

Concepts for Promoting Sustainable Ranching and Sustainable Landscapes

Sustainable rangelands, sustainable ranching -- these mutually attainable goals are actually dependant on each other. Certain BLM grazing policies can hinder the efforts of ranchers and conservation-minded citizens who wish to work actively with BLM to reach these goals. BLM plans to change these policies to facilitate improved partnerships with those who value maintaining and restoring western resources and landscapes while preserving the vitality of ranching and all that it contributes to western lifestyles. Our objective is to increase the flexibility of grazing permittees and lessees in working with the BLM, conservationists and others to maintain or restore working landscapes, while at the same time maintaining the economic and operational viability of their ranching operations.

The concepts presented below provide a framework for citizen-based stewardship that supports *conservation* through *consultation*, *communication* and *cooperation*. Changes in the grazing rules, an effort that began earlier this month, will be needed before we can implement the "Reserve Common Allotment" concept presented below. We believe that the other concepts can be implemented as soon as we develop the appropriate management tools.

We invite you to examine these concepts. BLM will be hosting between one and three grazing policy development workshops per State across the West from March 31 to April 25. The purpose of these workshops is to allow you to provide your thoughts concerning these concepts and others that would achieve the same ends - increasing the flexibility for working collaboratively to maintain or restore the public land resources. Those interested in participating in the workshops should check with their State or local BLM office for details.

Concept 1: Conservation Partnerships

Authorized under the Federal Land Policy and Management Act, Conservation Partnerships provide an opportunity for permittees and lessees, on a voluntary basis, to enter into contracts or agreements with BLM to achieve upland recovery, riparian/wetland restoration, enhanced or improved water quality and quantity, improved wildlife or fisheries habitat, and listed species recovery. In return, conservation partnerships would allow permittees and lessees to seek grants to pay for labor and materials invested in conservation practices or provide increased management flexibility within agreed upon parameters.

Concept 2: Reserve Common Allotments (RCAs)

Reserve Common Allotments would be managed as reserve forage areas for the purposes of rangeland restoration and recovery. BLM would allow RCAs to be used by permittees and lessees who are engaged in rangeland restoration and recovery activities that require them to rest their customary allotments. By temporarily shifting their livestock to RCAs, permittees and lessees would be able to address rangeland health issues while simultaneously meeting their economic needs.

Concept 3: Voluntary Allotment Restructuring

Voluntary allotment restructuring involves merging two or more allotments in which one (or more) of the permittees or lessees agrees to temporarily not graze their livestock. The other permittee(s) or lessee(s) would then be allowed to graze their original herd over the entire area resulting in lighter grazing use over the larger area. The goal is to improve range conditions while supporting permittee economic viability.

Concept 4: Conservation Easements

Conservation easements are land-use restrictions or constraints voluntarily placed on property by the landowners for the purpose of advancing conservation goals. In many areas of the west, land ownership patterns are intermingled between state, private, federal and other ownerships. In some areas, small parcels of public land managed by the BLM are completely surrounded by larger parcels of private land, which leads to an unmanageable situation. Often these small parcels of public land are identified in agency land use plans for disposal. Under this concept, prior to disposal, BLM would place a conservation easement on the small isolated parcel of public land. In exchange for the value of the small parcel of public land with the conservation easement, the owner of the adjacent private land would place a similar conservation easement on their surrounding private land. The results would be larger blocks of land that would preserve the conservation values in accordance with the covenants of the conservation easement.

Concept 5: Endangered Species Act Mitigation

Conservation Partnerships, RCAs, restructured allotments and conservation easements all provide options to mitigate affects to listed species resulting from livestock grazing. For example, Conservation Partnerships could be used to restore rangelands, which benefit listed species. RCAs are intended to be grazed intermittently, and then only to the extent consistent with sustaining their long-term conservation objective. Restructured allotments incorporate forage reserves for grazing. Conservation easements automatically include mitigating factors for some listed species. Mitigation banks could also be an option under these concepts. They work by permanently preserving and/or creating habitat for listed species and then using that habitat as a source of mitigation credits to be sold to other land users to mitigate land development impacts on listed species as required by the Endangered Species Act.