



THE WILDLIFE SOCIETY

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In accordance with TWS policy, The Wildlife Society Council seeks member review and comment on the following revised position statement prior to renewing it. Comments must be received by **15 July 2009** to be considered in a final position statement. Please send comments to: **Laura Bies, Director of Government Affairs, The Wildlife Society, 5410 Grosvenor Lane, Suite 200, Bethesda, MD 20814-2144, or via email to laura@wildlife.org.**

Revised Position Statement

Livestock Grazing on Federal Rangelands in the Western U.S.

Properly functioning rangeland ecosystems, supporting a wide diversity of native plant species, are critically important to sustaining wildlife diversity and productivity in the American West. Scientifically sound management plans and practices are key to restoring lands degraded by many years of range management that damaged soils, water, and plant diversity.

An ecosystem approach to rangeland management is an appropriate starting point for effective restoration and conservation of federal rangelands in the West. This approach accommodates multiple uses and provides opportunity for improved wildlife-livestock interactions while restoring important resource functions and values that will help sustain viable biological and human communities. This approach also includes provisions for declaring certain lands unsuitable for livestock grazing, which is a critical component of rangeland grazing plans.

Livestock grazing is only one of the influences on the rangeland resource—these lands support a wide variety of uses and values. Livestock grazing is recognized as both a land use and a management tool that can be used to alter rangeland vegetation to achieve specific objectives. Land management agencies must recognize the importance of sustaining renewable western rangeland resources for the future use and enjoyment of the American public.

This statement addresses only terrestrial ecosystems. The American Fisheries Society has developed a livestock grazing position statement for aquatic systems.

Considering this background and the importance to wildlife of federal rangelands in the West, it shall be the policy of The Wildlife Society to support:

1. Implementation of livestock grazing systems that will improve, restore, and maintain western rangeland ecosystems.
2. Livestock grazing management on federal rangelands in the West that:
 - a. is based on scientific studies and considers all rangeland resources, trends, and interactions as well as the broad spectrum of human values and needs;

- b. provides for adaptive management and continued improvement of programs and practices as new knowledge and understanding of rangeland ecosystems becomes available;
 - c. includes provisions, support, and criteria for monitoring;
 - d. involves effective coordination and cooperation among agencies and affected publics in developing policy alternatives, implementing policy provisions, and evaluating policy outcomes;
 - e. promotes heterogeneous landscapes comprised of diverse mosaics of plant and animal communities, including native, late successional habitats
 - f. is based on plans consistent with ecosystem characteristics and with local habitat objectives for wildlife species;
 - g. will meet conservation objectives for habitats and populations of threatened and endangered wildlife and plant species, and
 - h. recognize and guard against the potential for disease transmission between domestic livestock and wildlife.
3. Enforcement of grazing regulations and strong penalties when grazing agreements are violated.
 4. Restoration management using native plant species. In the past, exotic plant species were used to conserve soils in some areas and preserve future restoration options. In the future, exotic plant species should be used only when native species clearly are not an option.
 5. Consideration of vegetation manipulation alternatives to grazing such as burning or mowing to facilitate rangeland restoration.
 6. Agencies in developing and implementing objective and quantifiable criteria for designating lands unsuitable for livestock grazing when appropriate, based on soil productivity, forage distribution and abundance, and other factors.
 7. Research and development of cost-effective, long-term habitat monitoring and evaluation procedures for western rangelands.
 8. Research evaluating the effects of wild herbivore foraging on western rangeland ecosystems, and in rangeland restoration practices designed to improve degraded plant communities in the West, especially riparian habitats.
 9. Programs for predator control that are, when necessary, directed toward specific individuals causing damage rather than broad-spectrum removal aimed at lowering local or overall predator populations.
 10. Further scientific training and career development of professional managers involved in rangeland management decisions.

11. Development of strong professional and public education programs that clearly articulate goals and outcomes of rangeland management.