



Watersheds Messenger

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Summer 2004

Western Watersheds Project



Working to protect and restore western watersheds and wildlife through education, public policy initiatives and litigation.

Shadows of the Past

By Louise Wagenknecht

In the mid-1950s, a new ranger on the Leadore District penned a scathing memo to the files after he discovered a permittee dumping salt blocks in the middle of the road: just testing out the new guy. In the late 1980s, I discovered, most permittees still placed salt blocks next to streams or watering troughs, on the theory that the cows wouldn't have to walk as far that way.

From Lewis and Clark Ate Lunch Here, a memoir in progress by Louise Wagenknecht

After an excerpt from my book, *White Poplar, Black Locust*, appeared in this newsletter, several people wrote to ask me what I was working on next.

In true Gemini fashion, I find myself working on three manuscripts at once. The third memoir (working title: *Lewis and Clark Ate Lunch Here*) picks up in 1988, as I began to learn about the basin and range country of eastern Idaho near the Continental Divide.

Here's an excerpt from the manuscript, in which I try to figure out what's really been going on in Idaho's Lemhi River country for the past 78 years or so — a chronicle of public lands management all too familiar in the American West:

"In the winter, the world around Leadore settled in to a vast greyness. Color vanished from the valley. Snow blew horizontally down Highway 28 in front of the houses on

the Forest Service compound, and the view out the big window in our living room offered no relief: the snow was white, the sagebrush was grey, the hills were tan, the trees on the mountains behind the hills were black under coats of snow. I began to understand why housewives in Leadore spent their afternoons crocheting comforters and baby clothes in violent shades of purple and pink and green and yellow, while watching talk shows and soap operas on their color televisions. It kept them from going totally bonkers in a colorless world."

"I was laid off from my range technician job in November, but no one objected if I walked over to the office at ten o'clock to chat and drink coffee and see what messages had accumulated in my computer inbox. When I discovered the old range allotment files, dating back to 1910, in the basement, and began dragging them out and reading them on the big table in the conference room, my boss's looks as she walked by the door

told me that she thought I was crazy. But she didn't tell me to stop, so I kept going, unfolding the delicate old maps and turning the yellowed pages that Forest Service rangers had written and long-suffering clerks had typed during other endless winters. I was carried back into another world, where

Spraying to destroy sagebrush in Idaho, circa 1960.



photo ©BLM

the rhythms of the seasons masked the issues of the decades."

"Each decade, it seemed, had its own set of problems. Before World War I, migrating flocks of domestic sheep, their herders innocent of grazing permits, entered the area every spring, driving local cattle ranchers,

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desperate to protect “their” grazing grounds, into the arms of the Forest Service. Even so, some ranchers angrily rejected the idea of paying 10 cents per month per cow to graze on the Forest, and declared that they would not abide by Forest Service rules, and would instead “take their cattle out onto the free range and herd them.” From about 1914 to the early 1920s, the roaming livestock of homesteaders was a major issue for Forest Service rangers. Homesteaders were given “on-off permits”, but it proved nearly impossible to control the amount of time the work horses and milk cows actually spent on the Forest. The problem went away when most of the homesteaders starved out, after the lead mines at Gilmore closed down in the depression of the 1920s.”

“In the 1920s, Forest rangers spent much time nagging range permittees to place salt up on the high ridges, to get better distribution of cattle and consume the grass that was “going to waste” on the uplands. This nagging had about the same effect as telling a teenager to clean up his room. And like high school kids faced with a new substitute teacher, whenever a new ranger came, the permittees abandoned everything the previous ranger had cajoled them into doing. In the mid-1950s, a new ranger on the Leadore District penned a scathing memo to the files after he discovered a permittee dumping salt blocks in the middle of the road: just testing out the new guy. In the late 1980s, I discovered, most permittees still placed salt blocks next to streams or watering troughs, on the theory that the cows wouldn’t have to walk as far that way.”

“Sometimes I came upon the bleached skulls of horses on the hillsides, a reminder that one of the most persistent management problems, until the late 1940s, was the presence of bands of mares, each with a stallion, on the Forest. Unpermitted but not wild, their presence was, ironically, the result of the Remount Program, which allowed ranchers to obtain purebred stallions and keep them for breeding, if they would make the resulting offspring available for purchase by the Army. The stallions were mostly Morgans, American Saddlebreds, and Thoroughbreds – some of the latter were stakes winners. The ranchers got a guaranteed market for colts that met the Army’s standards, and the half-bred mares upgraded the grade working stock of the area.”

“By 1920 the Forest Service considered the ranges of the Lemhi country to be fully stocked, and did not look kindly on the extra horses. But for over twenty years more, they would struggle to remove them. As a last resort, horses were

periodically rounded up, penned, their brands noted, and the owners notified by letter and public notice. The owners came and cursed and paid their fines, but somehow in a little while there were horses running on the ridgetops once again.”

“This lovely game ended when the Army mechanized and the Remount Program was abandoned after World War II. Post-war prosperity completed the mechanization of farm work and road construction and logging. Teams of horses were almost obsolete, and only a few ranchers kept a team or two to feed cattle in the winter. The Forest officers woke up one day to find that another problem had Gone Away.”

Someone once wrote that a great army never looks so invincible as on the morning of the battle that will defeat it. In the arid lands of the West, arithmetic is gnawing away the foundations of public lands ranching. Politicians are propping up the structure with subsidies while ignoring the larger economic forces that will bring the building crashing down. Place your bets, ladies and gentlemen. Bet on arithmetic.”

“Some problems solve themselves.”



President’s Perspective by Debra Ellers

This is my last column as board president of Western Watersheds Project, having resigned effective Aug. 14. My decision to leave the WWP board was a tough one, as I have enjoyed being part of this organization and its many accomplishments since 2001. However, I am involved in starting up another nonprofit group, Northern Rockies Land Trust, and that endeavor is taking more of my time.

WWP has meant a great deal to me, and I have become close friends with its staff and fellow board members. I have many fond memories of my time at WWP events and at work on environmental issues.

The highlights are many: visits to the Hailey office, with its posters and atmosphere of groundbreaking protection for endangered species; a tour of the enclosure near Road Creek showing how lush the grasses and aspens are in the absence of livestock grazing; my appearance as a pronghorn at the performance of Cowzilla and the Wild Things at the third annual Greenfire Revival.

WWP’s work to protect and restore our public lands from the damage inflicted by commercial livestock production is crucial, and I intend to remain a WWP supporter. WWP gets results on the ground, which is what I look for when donating money and time to environmental groups.

I wish the WWP staff and board continued success, and I look forward to celebrating “cow-free” public lands with them in the near future.

Debra Ellers is the past president of WWP’s board of directors. She lives in Boise, Idaho.

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Biodiversity Bulletin

By Katie Fite

The Squaw Valley grazing decision by the Elko (Nevada) office of the Bureau of Land Management achieves a new level of senseless industrialization and fragmentation of public wild lands.

BLM plans to construct 118 miles of new fence — at a conservatively estimated cost of more than \$500,000 dollars — to be paid for largely by taxpayers. The agency also plans to treat sagebrush with herbicide in large crested wheatgrass seedings.

Sagebrush, you see, has had the audacity to move back into areas where the BLM wants to maintain sterile monocultures of crested wheatgrass for cattle food. The sagebrush spraying would occur in the midst of a northern Nevada landscape increasingly fragmented by large wildfires, rampant cheatgrass and weed invasion — a landscape suffering from sagebrush die-offs. Despite widespread damage documented in BLM's own reports, the agency continues to stock these areas at a high level with cattle.

The barbed-wire hazard to wildlife and the wild horse herd in the area is being constructed primarily so that Barrick Goldstrike and Ellison Ranches can graze cattle and sheep on public lands without pounding Lahontan cutthroat trout and redband trout streams to death. Riparian pastures (not enclosures, meaning they still will be grazed, and grazed hard after a period of rest) are being constructed around streams so that Barrick can continue grazing very large numbers of cattle and sheep across the allotments.

Part of this scheme is “mitigation” for the environmental ravages of cyanide heap-leach gold mining. Cyanide heap-leach mining grinds up mountains and de-waters aquifers. Yes, mitigation: The mining company buys base property and the associated grazing permit, takes some measures to protect fish, and meanwhile stocks hundreds of thousands of acres of public lands to the maximum limit with cattle and sheep. The company even gets the BLM to spray sagebrush on public



Cattle-pulverized stream beds cause loss of critical fish habitat.

photo ©Rick Hobson

lands to grow more exotic grass for food for the mining company's livestock.

Sage grouse, loggerhead shrikes, Brewer's sparrows, pygmy rabbits and antelope are big losers here. Fences in open sagebrush country provide perches for nest predators of sage grouse and brown-headed cowbirds that parasitize songbird nests. They are hazards that kill or wound birds that fly into them.

Antelope have a hard time with fences no matter what the wire spacing. North of Eureka this summer, my vehicle surprised an antelope doe and two fawns ahead in the road. The antelope spooked. The doe knew about fences. The fawns didn't. Backing up, I watched as one fawn repeatedly slammed into the lower wire of the fence, hitting its neck and getting knocked down with each try. The fence had the “proper” BLM wildlife-friendly spacing that the agency vaunts as evidence of the great care it takes for wildlife on public lands.

Where is Squaw Valley country, and why should anyone care about these lands? It encompasses headwaters of the South Fork of the Owyhee River and Humboldt River tributaries. Trout streams that should be narrow and deep ribbons of cold, clean-flowing water are instead muddy mires of hoof tracks. The mud and bacteria in the brown water of the Owyhee River in Idaho and Oregon are partially caused by Squaw Valley cattle and sheep trampling the headwater streams and uplands. The sagebrush to be sliced with 118 miles of new fence is part of one of the larger, less fragmented sagebrush-steppe habitats left anywhere in the West.

WWP has appealed the Elko BLM decision.

**Katie Fite is WWP's Biodiversity Director
She lives in Boise, Idaho**

WWP Moves to Protect Lacey Meadows

Western Watersheds Project in July offered the Idaho Department of Lands \$20,000 to permanently retire the Lacey Meadows grazing lease near Weippe.

WWP's offer is an attempt to resolve the ongoing dispute over who should be awarded the Lacey Meadows grazing lease.

The \$20,000 offer would give the state a far greater return on the lease than it will yield if it continues to be used for cattle grazing.

“It's a significant amount of return on an effectively nonproductive lease,” says Marvel.

The lease current nets about \$266 a year for the state's school endowment and other endowments after administrative costs are figured in.

The Lacey Meadows Grazing Association, which holds the lease, has been warned on several occasions by the IDOL that it has failed to adhere to requirements for livestock management on the allotment.

The 16,300-acre allotment is on the Weippe Prairie, where Lewis and Clark first encountered the friendly Nez Perce Indians.



Report From Wyoming

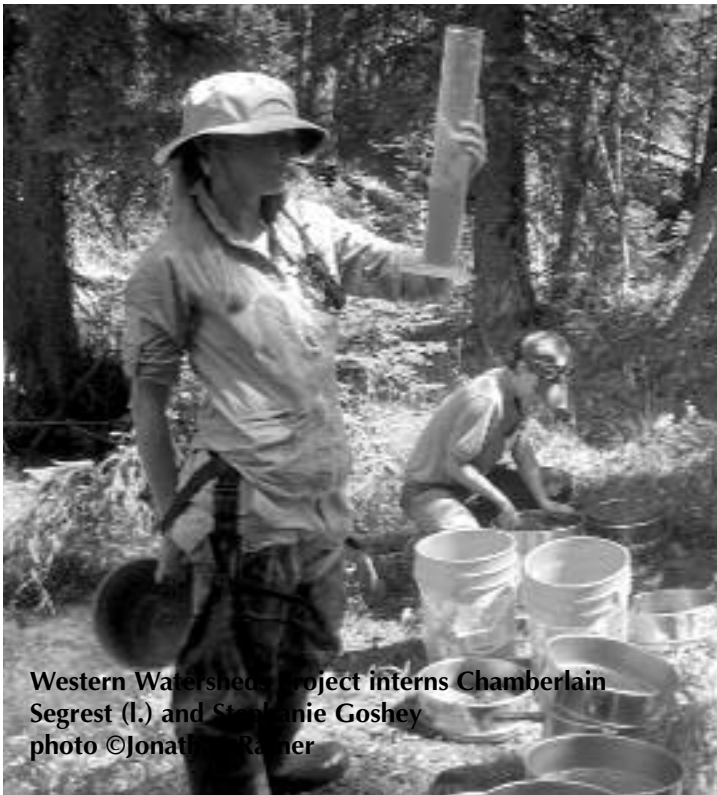
By Jonathan Ratner

It has been an incredibly busy summer here in Wyoming. We have greatly increased Western Watersheds Project's reach and impact with the addition of two interns who spent the summer in the field, collecting data for some of our high-priority projects. We have been in the Bridger

Wilderness, documenting ground cover and erosion issues caused by sheep grazing. The information will be used in the upcoming NEPA process for the area.

As part of our focus to save the imperiled Colorado River cutthroat trout, we conducted McNeil sediment core sampling in spawning streams throughout the Green River drainage. In one month of core sampling, we have done more to document sediment levels in spawning beds than the U.S. Forest Service has ever done.

Just the news that WWP would have a crew of interns in the field this summer sent shock waves through the offices of



Western Watersheds Project interns Chamberlain Segrest (l.) and Stephanie Goshey
photo ©Jonathan Ratner

the Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management throughout the state. It is the first time the agencies have had to deal with a non-governmental organization collecting data on the impacts of their management decisions that can stand up in court. This summer's project has put WWP on the map as a player to be taken seriously in Wyoming. We are already building on this experience to create a project for next summer that will be an order of magnitude greater in scope and impact on public lands management within the state.

In the process of training our interns, we have expanded and deepened our relationships with many supportive agency personnel in the Forest Service, BLM, Wyoming DEQ and

other agencies. The associations will yield benefits for years to come.

This summer, I was appointed by the governor's office to sit on the state's Non-point Source Task Force for a five-year term. The task force is in charge of distributing about \$1.5 million per year in Clean Water Act funds for projects to clean up the state's waterways. The board is also charged with updating Wyoming's Best Management Practices guidelines to reduce pollution and habitat degradation. The grazing BMP is the next document to be updated.

*Jonathan Ratner is Wyoming director of WWP.
He lives in Pinedale, Wyoming.*



Wyoming Rancher Must Face the Music in D.C.

Ruling in favor of Western Watersheds Project, a U.S. District Court judge in Washington, D.C., has denied a request by renegade Wyoming rancher Frank Robbins to move the venue of his cattle trespass case from Washington to Wyoming.

Readers of Watersheds Messenger will recall that WWP and the American Lands Alliance sued top political appointees in the Bureau of Land Management, including director Kathleen Clarke and deputy director Francis Cherry, for allowing Robbins to violate federal grazing laws.

The lawsuit targeted a settlement between the BLM and Robbins that is the subject of a separate Inspector General investigation about improper political favoritism by the agency. The action came in the wake of nine years of livestock grazing abuses by Robbins, extensively documented by the BLM's professional staff in its Worland, Wyo., office.

Earlier this year the BLM voided the settlement with Robbins after he was cited for willful trespass of cattle. Robbins' attorney, Karen Budd-Falen of Cheyenne, then filed a complaint in U.S. District Court seeking a preliminary and/or permanent injunction preventing the BLM from voiding the agreement.

In his District Court decision, Judge Henry Kennedy ruled that the Robbins case is "national in scope," citing local and national newspaper articles that characterize the case as "a local dispute turned national, in which Interior Department officials in Washington, D.C. imposed a settlement against the will of local BLM officials."

Kennedy further noted that courts in his district have long ruled that a dispute is national "if the plaintiffs challenge the decisions of top federal agencies in Washington, D.C." The judge said the Robbins case has "national implications," agreeing with WWP that "the settlement agreement (brokered by the BLM) will encourage other Western ranchers to try to circumvent local BLM officials and deal directly with Interior Department officials in Washington, D.C."

"Such issues are of national, not merely local, interest," Kennedy concluded.



Report From Utah

By John Carter

This spring and summer were inordinately busy. We conducted field surveys on critical sage grouse, pronghorn and pygmy rabbit habitat in northern Utah, and that report – which includes management recommendations – is now with the Bureau of Land Management. Our hope is that the agency will modify its current proposal for the 27,000-acre Duck Creek Allotment to protect habitat for these species and protect area springs and streams, which are severely degraded.

We presented a management plan for the allotment that would eliminate some of the miles of additional fencing and water developments proposed by the BLM. All of these developments destroy springs and fragment habitat. They are also unnecessary if livestock permittees are willing to reduce stocking levels to what the vegetation can support (while providing for wildlife) and the BLM is willing to conduct timely monitoring to ensure that overgrazing does not occur. Both conditions are big “ifs” that seldom occur.

This is a situation that ranchers have come to expect. They make little or no effort to do what’s best for the land because they know they won’t be held accountable. Under the Bush Administration and its efforts to gut environmental protection, both the BLM and U.S. Forest Service are generally taking a “hands-off” approach to the enforcement of range standards.

We just completed our analysis and review of the Caribou National Forest Draft Environmental Impact Statement for grazing livestock in the Bear River Range in southeastern Idaho. The Bear River Range is critical for Canada lynx and wolf migration, containing numerous sensitive species such as flammulated owls, boreal owls, great gray owls, northern goshawks and wolverines. Numerous timber harvests have fragmented habitat, increased road density to accommodate ATVs, and expanded snowmobile use. And now comes a proposal to continue status-quo livestock grazing.



Lynx
photo ©USFWS

We surveyed the Bear River Range two years ago and documented severe habitat destruction by livestock. The report is available on WWP’s website (www.westernwatersheds.org) and includes photos of what we found.

In the Bear River Range in Utah, we appealed the Bear Hodges Timber Sale EIS and the North Rich Allotment EIS. Both projects exacerbate past habitat damage as described in the Bear River Range of Idaho. Canada lynx from Colorado have been sighted just south of the Utah Bear River Range, and we want to ensure that their habitat is protected and functioning properly. We previously appealed the Wasatch-Cache National Forest Plan and may be litigating that appeal for failure to establish the required wildlife protection for areas such as the Bear River Range and Uintas Wilderness.

In recent negotiations with the BLM, we were able to persuade the agency, livestock permittees and congressional representatives to agree to modify a current bill to add 10,000 acres to the proposed Cedar Mountain Wilderness in Utah and eliminate some roads that would penetrate the wilderness in the process.



Northern Goshawk
photo ©USFWS

Under the proposal, the BLM would also monitor more intensively the Cedar Mountains to protect native vegetation from livestock. We’re keeping our fingers crossed that the legislation passes.

*John Carter is Utah director of WWP.
He lives in Mendon, Utah.*





Report from Greenfire

By Stew Churchwell

We've completed a couple of restoration projects at Greenfire Preserve already this year, and it is likely that we'll have additional projects funded in the fall by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. The Island Restoration Project, paid for with Clean Water Act 319 funds, was completed at the end of March. The Test Plot Project funded by FWS was completed at the end of May.

The Island Restoration Project has proven very successful, and I think it's safe to say the area has recovered almost entirely. I also think that the accelerated erosion that was occurring on the island in the East Fork has been controlled.

Indications are strong that we'll receive \$6,000 from FWS to bring in a bulldozer this fall to fill in the diversion ditch on the east side of the East Fork and re-form the natural runoff channel across the eastside field. Once that project is complete, we hope to use Idaho Department of Fish and Game habitat Improvement funds to plant trees and shrubs for a wildlife travel corridor from the river, across the eastside field to the canyons above. Target date for planting is Spring 2005.

We should also receive \$4,000 from FWS to oversee some of the 100 acres at the south end of the property that were planted in the spring of 2003.

Finally, Greenfire will soon be featured in a book about wildlands philanthropy that is being funded by the Foundation for Deep Ecology. Thanks to all of you who, with your contributions to WWP and active participation in various Greenfire projects, have helped restore this special place in the western landscape.

Stew Churchwell is central Idaho director and Greenfire Preserve manager for WWP. He lives at the preserve near Clayton, Idaho.



Deer at Greenfire
New fencing will help deer and elk forage.
photo ©Rick Hobson

Peregrines at Greenfire

By Larry Barnes

The iconic peregrine has found a sanctuary at Greenfire Preserve.

The species' resume is remarkable. It is arguably the fastest animal on Earth and has the widest distribution in the world. It is a bird of prey revered by royal falconers for thousands of years, and was one of the first species to be listed as endangered under the Endangered Species Act.

Battered by the effects of DDT since the 1950s but now recovering, the peregrine arrived at Greenfire in central Idaho in 2002, coinciding with the restoration of the preserve.

DDT was banned in the '70s, ensuring a chance for the peregrine's recovery. In the '80s and '90s Boise's Peregrine Fund augmented natural recovery by releasing thousands of young falcons.

In 1993 and 1994 I discovered the first two peregrine territories in south-central Idaho at nearby (as the peregrine flies) Redfish and Stanley lakes. The Redfish female's red leg band indicated she had gotten her start with a little help from the Peregrine Fund. (Incredibly, biologists also observed a female with a red leg band at Redfish in 2003, likely the same individual!). At the time there were fewer than 15 known territories (30 peregrines) in Idaho.



Peregrine Chicks
photo ©USFWS

Today there are about 25 known territories in Idaho. Greenfire is one of the newest. The total number of fledglings statewide continues to increase each year, and the current outlook for the peregrine is good. The Greenfire eyrie fledged no young in 2002, two fledglings in 2003, and none in 2004, or about 0.3 young per year.

Over the last 12 years the Redfish peregrines have produced about 1.3 fledglings per year and the enigmatic Stanley peregrines have produced 0.3 young per year.

Peregrines may have chosen the Greenfire area to nest because of its proximity to the confluence of the East Fork and main Salmon just a mile downstream. Peregrines often choose nesting areas that are geographically prominent, usually not far from water.

And who knows? Perhaps they have an eye for opportunity. Perhaps they saw the potential for flourishing populations of prey as they looked down upon the new plantings, the newly missing monoculture and the biodiversity-producing machine that Greenfire is becoming now that the land is free of cattle.

Larry Barnes is a Western Watersheds Project member. He teaches biology at Wood River High School in Hailey and studies wildlife during the summer.



Report from Montana

By Glenn Hockett

The Majestic Taylor Fork is a high and scenic mountain valley of public lands draped with sagebrush-grasslands that provide headwater stream flows to the Upper Gallatin River Canyon. The U.S Forest Service currently leases two small cattle allotments on approximately 16,000 acres of public wildlands in the area to provide fodder for some 450 domestic cows for about three months in the summer.



Bison Herd
photo ©USFWS

This use comes at the expense of native fish and wildlife over a much broader landscape, which includes more than 150,000 acres of habitat in the Taylor Fork, Porcupine, Buffalo Horn, Sage Creek and Tepee Creek watersheds. Wildlife migrations — in particular wild bison — are adversely impacted on a total of more than 300,000 acres of public lands (306,560 estimated) northwest of Yellowstone National Park.

Grizzly bears, wolves, bighorn sheep, mountain goats, moose, elk, mule deer and native cutthroat trout are also significantly impacted by the Forest Service grazing leases. These lands are nearly all publicly owned by the Gallatin National Forest. About 9,000 acres of critical elk winter range are owned by the Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks in the form of the Gallatin Wildlife Management Area. Thus, a small amount of cattle grazing on public lands disrupts wild bison migrations, recovery and conservation opportunities in Montana over a vast landscape of wild and remote public lands in the Greater Yellowstone Region.

We are working to change that.

Similar conflicts with federally subsidized government allotments have been resolved through voluntary buyouts and permanent retirements, including the Blackrock/Spread Creek allotment in northwestern Wyoming, which was bought out at \$78 per animal unit month, or AUM. Applying this amount to the Taylor Fork situation would require only \$106,587 to permanently retire both allotments.

You can help. Please make a call to the Hebgen Ranger District in West Yellowstone at (406)823-6961 and let District Ranger William Queen know you want the Taylor Fork managed for wildlife. Ask him and other officials to work with us to permanently retire the Cache/Eldridge and Wapiti allotments so that wild bison and other wildlife can resume their natural role in this wonderful and wild landscape.

*Glenn Hockett is Montana director of WWP
He lives in Bozeman, Montana*



ESA Status for Ground Squirrel?

Federal District Court Judge Ann Aiken of Oregon has ordered the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to determine whether the southern Idaho ground squirrel, sand dune lizard (New Mexico) and Tahoe yellow cress warrant protection as endangered species.

The three species are the subject of petitions submitted by Western Watersheds Project, the Center for Biological Diversity and the Committee for the High Desert between December 2000 and June 2002. FWS must make its determination by Dec. 20, 2004.

“The southern Idaho ground squirrel is a unique part of Idaho’s sagebrush country. Its dramatic decline is linked to livestock grazing that causes cheatgrass invasion and resultant large wildfires which eliminate sagebrush habitats,” said Katie Fite, biodiversity director with WWP.

Placing species on the candidate list rather than the endangered list has long been a tactic used by various federal administrations to delay protection of species. To date, the Bush Administration has only protected 31 plants, animals and fish compared with 394 species protected during the first term of the Clinton Administration.



Ground Squirrel, endangered by
loss of habitat to grazing
photo ©USFWS



A Safety Net for Ranchers, a Cure for the Purple Sage

By Justin Baca

The contentious saga of New Mexico rancher Kit Laney points to all that is wrong with public lands ranching in the arid West.

Laney is the Catron County, N.M. rancher who defied Forest Service directives and a federal court order to remove his cattle from federal land for overgrazing the Gila National Forest. He was arrested and indicted on eight federal charges.

The U.S. Supreme Court has long held that livestock grazing on public lands is not a right but a revocable privilege.

While Laney's misguided beliefs and actions are not representative of public-lands ranchers in the West, he is not alone in his economic plight. His case sets in bold relief the state of emergency that now exists for ranchers who rely on the drought-stricken public lands of the West to support them.

Across the West, drought, environmental regulations, litigation and conflicts with other public uses have led to reductions in grazing on public lands. Conditions even worse than those of 2003 are predicted for the next three years. Beef markets are changing, and public-lands ranchers feel the pinch.

John Whitney III, a fourth-generation rancher who holds the largest U.S. Forest Service grazing permit in Arizona, is one of them. Whitney's 158,000-acre Sunflower allotment in Tonto National Forest northeast of Phoenix has been closed for three years due to drought. Since 1996, grazing in the Tonto, which comprises 3 million acres, has been cut by 94 percent of the maximum permitted level.

Whitney explains: "The whole situation has changed down here with new restrictions and recreation just going through the roof. It's got to the point where I really need to move my operation to somewhere more suitable. But I have so much invested here. I really should get something back."

There is a solution to the plight of public-lands ranchers. The Voluntary Grazing Permit Buyout Act and the Arizona Voluntary Grazing Permit Buyout Act, bills introduced in the

House of Representatives by Reps. Christopher Shays (R-Connecticut) and Ra-I Grijalva (D-Arizona), would compensate public lands ranchers who choose to relinquish their federal grazing permits.

American taxpayers pay about \$500 million annually to subsidize grazing on 257 million acres of public lands (grazing fees return to the treasury only \$7 million). The buyout bills would not only provide a safety net for cash-strapped public-lands ranchers but would also produce enormous savings by reducing the need for this subsidy.

"Buying out federal grazing permits is good for western states and the entire nation," says Shays. "It benefits our nation's environment and budget, while providing a lucrative offer to ranchers who want to sell their permits."

"This legislation will go a long way toward resolving the ongoing and contentious debate on public lands grazing in the West," says Grijalva. "Congressman Shays and I have introduced a bill that will give much-needed relief to ranching families suffering the results of drought and other economic factors. At the same time, the bill will allow for the restoration of public lands that are no longer suitable for grazing."

Under both bills, the public lands allotment associated with a grazing permit would be permanently retired from commercial livestock grazing, freeing the land for alternative uses including recreation, hunting, fishing, wildlife conservation and watershed management.

The generous compensation to ranchers would allow them to restructure their business on private lands, transition to another business, pay off loans or retire.

We no longer live in the Old West. Time magazine estimates that 328,000 ranchers and farmers will lose their jobs in this decade alone. The scenario facing the 24,000 ranchers who operate on the most marginal lands — public lands — is bleak and getting bleaker.

The legislation is a win-win solution for permittees, taxpayers and the environment. A voluntary grazing buyout program would heal the land as well as the wounds of ranchers caught in a box like Laney, with nowhere to turn for relief as the sun sets on public lands ranching in the West.

Justin Baca is the Washington, D.C. representative for the National Public Lands Grazing Campaign (www.publiclandsranching.org).



The 'Old West' on the left, and the 'Better West' on the right. Fencelines clearly show grazing damage. photo ©Rick Hobson



Western Watersheds Board Member Profile

Name: Kelley Weston

WWP affiliation: Board member, past president, acting interim president

Family: Wife Kathleen Diepenbrock, sons Joel and Ethan, mother Susan, brothers Doug and Timothy, numerous beloved in-laws.

Occupation: Landscape contractor specializing in design, installation and maintenance of native landscapes.

Other conservation affiliations: None. WWP is the most effective organization in the region working on the most important and least appreciated issue in the West.

Memorable conservation experience: Visiting various exclosures with Jon Marvel. Seeing just how bad the land is where it is not protected and just how resilient nature is, given the chance. Reading *The Dream of the Earth* by Thomas Berry.

Other interests: Travel, aikido, high-altitude trekking, backpacking, philosophical discussions of all types.



Grizzly Bear in Yellowstone
photo ©NPS

Favorite Places in the West: The River of No Return Wilderness, Idaho. Twice hiked the wilderness for two months, north to south. Saw no one for weeks. Heard elk bugling at dawn. Climbed out of the Salmon Gorge and arrived on the edge of the gorge just in time to see the sunset through the lime-green moss draped on old-growth Ponderosa pine.

Middle Fork of the Salmon River. Skied there in March, wandering through huge herds of deer and elk. Sat in a rock shelter and imagined myself there 5,000 years ago, watching the stars while lying in a hot springs.

Specimen Ridge, Yellowstone National Park (1979). Watched bears eat mint and was nearly trampled to death by bison. Swam in a warm river.

The sage-steppe shrub lands near my home in Hailey. Every year in June I tiptoe through fields of bitterroot, smell lupine, nibble on sage to cleanse the palate, watch badgers dig for ground squirrels and am intoxicated by the fragrance of sage after a summer rain. I am in love with the West. It is my home.

Greenfire Revival Cancelled for 2004

Western Watersheds Project's annual Greenfire Revival, scheduled for the weekend of Sept. 17-19, has been cancelled for this year.

The decision to call off the revival came after consideration of two related issues. The dates for this year's revival present a conflict with the Desert Conference in eastern Oregon, slated for Sept. 10-13 at Malheur National Wildlife Refuge. Many WWP supporters will be attending — and some participating in — the conference and found that traveling to both events was problematic.

Moreover, WWP's expansion this year into other states has been a priority for our organization. Managing this expansion has required a focus of administrative time and resources in 2004 to our new operations rather than the revival at Greenfire Preserve.

While all of our board members and staff regret that the Greenfire Revival will not take place this year, we all look forward to future revivals in years to come.

Signs of the Times

"The place has come for me to say it: the antiquated Taylor Grazing Act of 1934 and two later modifications allow ranchers — many of them wealthy individuals living far from Montana and Idaho and huge corporations like Anheuser-Busch and Hewlett-Packard — to run cattle almost anywhere on public land in the West, including wildlife refuges and nearly every mile of flowing water.

Simply by paying an absurdly low [\$1.43] per animal per month (less than many fast-food burgers), these operators assault some of our most beautiful and diverse lands as well as American taxpayers who annually give \$500 million in subsidy to corporate cattle operations.

The very year we took to the rivers, the Republican-controlled Congress was considering changing the law even more to the liking of the industry. Considered against declining species — birds, plants, animals — the need for more meat in this nation is ludicrous; considered against the soil erosion and siltation that cattle create, the consumption of more beef is stupid; considered against the fecal pollution of our waters, the sale of more franchise burgers is criminal.

For the past several years, big-spending cattle corporations have killed attempts in Congress to revise the grazing act to give a proper return to taxpayers and to control the degradation of our land and water. Yet what ordinary citizen would find it unfair to fence cattle and sheep away from our creeks and rivers just as we keep them off our roads? Windmills and pumps should water stock, not natural waterways. In the arid West, stream sides support three-quarters of the wildlife, but Americans still unwittingly accept profligate and outdated laws that primarily

benefit the wealthy while permitting them to poison the rest of us downstream."

-From River-Horse by William Least Heat-Moon

Grants, gifts and thanks

Western Watersheds Project extends hearty thanks to the crew that spent the weekend of April 3-4 relocating more than a quarter mile of a fence from the East Fork of the Salmon River to the perimeter of Greenfire Preserve.

The relocation ensures easier access to the river for wildlife while preventing cattle from entering. The new fence is much more wildlife-friendly than the previous barbed-wire fence, and gaps were included to allow passage for wintering deer, elk and bighorn sheep.

Many thanks to the volunteers for this project: Ann Down, Louise and Bob Wagenknecht, Dale Grooms, Debra Ellers, Stan and Jill Jasper, Joyce Harvey-Morgan, Jennifer and Damon Anderson, Jon Marvel, Stew Churchwell, Margo Nelson, and Tom Sedgwick and Molly Connors, who drove from Bend, Oregon to participate.

Special thanks to Patrick Csizmazia, who provided his 20-foot open trailer and 1-ton pickup truck for hauling sections of the fence, and to Susan Rahman, who brought all the food for the weekend and prepared all the meals for the volunteer crew.

Patrick, Stan, Debra and Dale also worked hard to remove a massive logjam at the Greenfire bridge over the East Fork.

WWP also extends sincere thanks to the anonymous donor who contributed \$12,000 to our successful December fundraising challenge. The contribution matched the money WWP raised in the campaign.

Finally, thanks to First Choice Vacation Rentals for creating a web site for the Greenfire rental property as a donation to WWP.

WWP extends special thanks to the following WWP supporters, each of whom contributed \$100 or more to our efforts since the last newsletter.

Samuel and Eleanor Alberstadt	Keene Hueftle
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The West in Bloom as it was intended
photo ©Katie Fite



Calendar of Events

RangeNet 2004, sponsored by WWP and hosted this year by Forest Guardians of Santa Fe, N.M., will convene Nov. 11 through Nov. 13 at La Posada de Albuquerque, 125 2nd Street NW, in Albuquerque, N.M. The theme is "Envisioning Wild Landscapes: Momentum for Change."

Panel topics include "Winning the Ground Battles" on public lands, "Inspiration During Dark Days" of the Bush Administration, "Western Landscapes: Endangered By Livestock Production?", "Grazing: A Privilege or a Right?" and "The Golden Parachute: Federal Grazing Permit Retirement Campaign." A keynote speaker will soon be announced.

Forest Guardian's Billy Stern will present a slide show outlining the ecological and economic dimensions of ranching in the Southwest. Douglas Hawes-Davis' film, "Killing Coyote," will also be shown during the conference. For more information and to register online, visit WWP's website at www.westernwatersheds.org

The 28th annual Public Land and Resources Law Conference will be held Sept. 29-Oct. 1 at the University of Montana in Missoula. The theme of the conference is "Science, Democracy and Public Lands Conflict." U.S. District Judge Donald W. Molloy will give the keynote address. For more information, contact the Center for the Rocky Mountain West at (406)243-7700.

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[^] **Shadows of the past: A BLM Official of years past holds Crested Wheat, planted in the west after sage was destroyed, as he leans against barbed wire. Can we learn from past mistakes? (story, P. 1) photo ©BLM**