

## Anti-grazing coalition releases book

By LARRY SWISHER  
For the Capital Press

WASHINGTON — A national environmental coalition that aims to eliminate most livestock grazing on public lands has unleashed what it hopes will be a heavyweight weapon for its campaign.

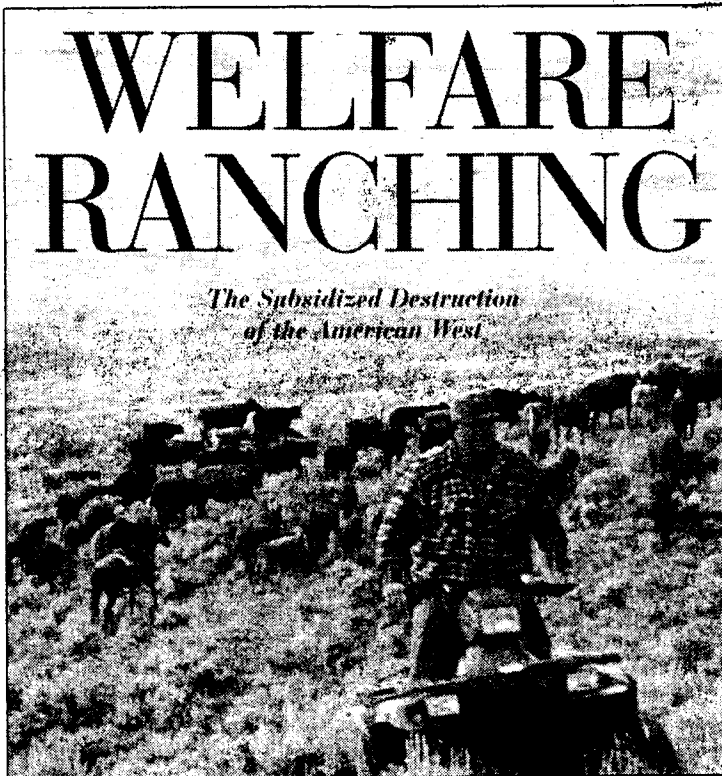
"Welfare Ranching: The Subsidized Destruction of the American West," a seven-pound book with 346 pages of articles and photographs on the negative impacts of cattle and sheep grazing on national forest, Bureau of Land Management and other federal land, was officially published on Monday.

Copies of the coffee-table-sized book are being handed out to news media, government officials and interest groups and could be ordered on the Internet or in bookstores for \$75 each. Although 10,000 books were printed and are being distributed to bookstores by Island Press, the coalition is giving away thousands of copies.

The cover illustration is a photograph of a modern-day ranch hand on typical open rangeland with a small herd of cattle in the background. The worker is wearing a cap and riding an all-terrain vehicle, in contrast to the romantic Old West image of a cowboy in boots and hat on horseback.

In advance of publication, leaders of the National Public Lands Grazing Campaign were here last week lobbying members of Congress to support their centerpiece legislative proposal: legislation to pay cattle and sheep ranchers \$175 per animal unit month to voluntarily give up their federal grazing permits or leases and permanently end livestock grazing on the associated allotment.

Although no member has introduced the bill yet, the coalition made its buyout "offer" last spring to 25,000 ranchers who hold permits. On the group's website, a permittee with Internet access can even click on a calculator that will tell them how much money he



An environmental group published this book to illustrate the damaging effects of grazing on public lands.

would receive for his grazing permit or lease if Congress enacted the buyout proposal.

A number of Western ranchers have responded positively to the proposal, because \$175 per AUM is three to four times the market value of a permit, according to Keith Raether, spokesman for the campaign and the Western Watersheds Projects, headquartered in Hailey, Idaho.

Raether described the coalition's "buyout offer" as a carrot compared to the stick of lawsuits that his group and other coalition members have frequently used to try to force state and federal agencies to allow conservation purchases of grazing leases by environmentalists who then retire the land from livestock grazing.

Up to now, environmental groups in Western states have pursued their goal of eliminating livestock on public lands by outbidding ranch-

ers for state or federal permits or going to court to require that they be allowed to do so. Some states and agencies have reacted by prohibiting allotments from being retired.

The coalition made its buyout proposal "so that ranchers aren't displaced or put out of business," he said. "This is a win-win situation. We more than compensate them and save the land from livestock degradation."

Also, the group claims it would save \$500 million per year in federal land management costs and "subsidies" to ranchers.

But livestock groups have attacked the proposal and argue that grazing benefits public lands and rural economies. The Public Lands Council, Washington, D.C., which represents Western permittee organizations, estimates it would cost the federal government \$3.2 billion.

"The buyout effort is nothing less than another attempt to remove federal lands grazing, and now they intend to use tax dollars to further that effort," PLC President Paul Frischknecht said in April.

Andy Groseta, a cattle producer from Cottonwood, Arizona who chairs of the National Cattlemen's Beef Association's federal lands committee, said livestock grazing on federal lands is necessary for the economic survival of many rural businesses, communities and counties.

"Ranchers and farmers are our best wildlife habitat. Dangers as their private lands. Federal grazing permits support countless wildlife during winter months or during dry seasons or periods of drought. Federal lands grazing permittees also improve federal land for wildlife by providing water on lands managed by the Bureau of Land Management and the Forest Service," Groseta said.

Environmentalists dispute those claims, saying that Western public land ranching accounts for less than 2 percent of the jobs in any area and less than 3 percent of beef production nationally. Raether said that recreational bird-watching in the West now produces more income than public land ranching. "Quite honestly, it's a losing proposition" because of the environmental damage caused by livestock, he said. "Tourism by far is a stronger economic engine than ranching."

The coalition's book and the multiyear campaign were funded by a \$500,000 grant from the Foundation for Deep Ecology, Sausalito, Calif.

Andy Kerr, leader of the Oregon Natural Desert Association, is director of the national campaign. Other founding members are American Lands Alliance, Center for Biological Diversity, Committee for Idaho's High Desert, Forest Guardians and the Western Watersheds Project.

The web site address is <http://www.publiclandsranching.org>.