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Final Position Statement

Livestock Grazing on 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 poor 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 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 provides for declaring certain lands unsuitable for livestock grazing, 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.

The policy of The Wildlife Society in regard to livestock grazing on Western rangelands is to support:

1. Implementation of livestock grazing systems and stocking rates that will improve, restore, and maintain western rangeland ecosystems.
2. Livestock grazing management on rangelands in the West that:
 - a. is based on scientific studies and considers all rangeland resources, trends, and interactions plus the broad spectrum of human values and needs;
 - b. provides for adaptive management, driven by the results of legitimate, field-based, experimental designs accepted by wildlife and statistical experts, 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 the full range of native 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;
 - h. recognizes and guards against the potential for disease transmission between domestic livestock and wildlife; and
 - i. is economically viable, with fees that are appropriate and competitive with private markets.
3. Enforcement of grazing regulations and strong penalties when grazing agreements are violated.
 4. Restoration of degraded habitats using native plant species. Non-native plant species should be used only when native species clearly are not an option.
 5. Consideration of alternatives to grazing, including alternate methods of vegetation manipulation (i.e. burning or mowing), or combinations of such alternatives, or grazing enclosures, 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 the results of rangeland restoration practices designed to improve degraded plant communities in the West, especially riparian habitats.
 9. Programs for predation management 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.

Approved by Council March 2010. Expires October 2015.