

Public Rangeland Management:  
Reforming the Process of Decision Making  
to Encourage Environmental Protection  
and Broader Public Involvement

by

Robert P. Waugh

Thesis  
Submitted in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of Bachelor of Arts  
Center for Environmental Studies  
Brown University

May 1994

## Abstract

In this thesis I examine the role of grazing advisory boards in the Bureau of Land Management's administration of federal rangelands. These boards were created in 1934 as a new way to protect the environmental health of the range and stabilize the livestock industry. This study analyzes the grazing advisory boards from their inception in 1934 to the present day, with specific emphasis on their activities in the 1980's. From this analysis, I determine the extent to which grazing advisory boards have contributed to the deterioration of the environmental health of the public rangelands. I also examine several of the current proposals for reforming federal rangeland use, as well as make recommendations for the future of the BLM's advisory system. The actions and membership of the boards throughout their history suggests that they are highly susceptible to the influence of State and local communities, especially the livestock industry. In the 1980's, the BLM spent 96.5% of all its range improvement money to benefit livestock grazing. This was in spite of Congressional mandates to spend this money on multiple uses, including environmental protection. The evidence of environmental degradation as a result of livestock overgrazing has prompted many in the environmental and governmental spheres to call for sweeping reforms of the BLM's advisory system. The three proposals examined in this report rely heavily on the good stewardship of local interests in the West to fix the current environmental problems through a policy of "local control." Given the poor record of local interests in maintaining the health of the range through the grazing advisory boards, many in the environmental community consider this an unwise policy. Also, since many Americans from other parts of the country now wish to be involved in the decision making process for public lands, "local control" is deemed unfair because it does not provide for a balanced inclusion of non-local interests. Given the power of Western lawmakers, and the fact that they insist that State and local governments should have a role in public land policy, it is clear that abolition of the advisory system altogether is not possible. Operating on this assumption, and from the analysis of the three proposals, the reformed advisory system should ideally embody broad representation, legally sound principles, and efficient mechanisms of operation.