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Reports and Research

Grazing Regulations Include Doctored Environmental Analysis

Bureau of Land Management (BLM) officials compromised the integrity of a BLM study by removing scientific concerns about the effects newly relaxed grazing regulations would have on public lands. Millions of acres of public land in the western U. S. are protected by BLM grazing rules, which regulate when, where, and for how long cattle may graze there. Julie Cart of the Los Angeles Times reported that prior to relaxing Clinton-era restrictions on cattle grazing in June 2004, the BLM edited out portions of an environmental analysis calling into question the environmental sustainability of the new regulations.¹ Agency scientists had studied the effects of grazing on wildlife and water quality and expressed concerns.

Cart reported that the BLM eliminated the original draft's warning that the "the Proposed Action will have a slow, long-term adverse impact on wildlife and biological diversity in general." Instead, the final version of the environmental analysis endorsed the new regulations, which were supported by the cattle industry, stating that the new rules would prove "beneficial to animals."²

Erick Campbell and Bill Brookes are both recently retired scientists, each with more than 30 years experience at the BLM. Campbell, a biologist, authored the section of the BLM study on the impacts of the rule change on wildlife and endangered species, while Brookes, a hydrologist, evaluated the impact on water resources. Both characterized the edits as an attempt to suppress scientific information. Campbell termed the matter "a whitewash" and "a crime." "They took all of our science and reversed it 180 degrees," he said. Brookes agreed, adding "Everything I wrote was totally rewritten and watered down."³

The BLM argued that the changes resulted from a standard editorial process and issued a statement saying the conclusions reached by Campbell and Brookes were "based on personal opinion and unsubstantiated assertions rather than sound environmental analysis."⁴

In an interview Campbell refuted those charges, saying "All the science they extracted from my narrative was peer-reviewed science. This was not gray literature...This was peer-reviewed science in major journals."⁵ The concerns of Campbell and Brookes were echoed by wildlife experts at the U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service and by officials at the Environmental Protection Agency.⁶

1. Cart, Julie. "**Land Study on Grazing Denounced.**" Los Angeles Times, June 18, 2005. latimes.com requires subscription, article available from advocacy website, accessed December 5, 2006.
2. Bureau of Land Management, "**Grazing Administration--Exclusive of Alaska; Final Rule,**" Department of the Interior, July 12, 2006, accessed December 5, 2006.
3. Cart.
4. Bearden, Tom. "**New Grazing Rules.**" NewsHour with Jim Lehrer, August 10, 2005. Transcript online, accessed December 5, 2006.
5. Mitchell, Michele and Breslauer, Brenda. **NOW with David Brancaccio, July 22, 2005.** Transcript online, accessed December 5, 2006.
6. Cart, Julie. "**Federal Officials Echoed Grazing-Rule Warnings.**" Los Angeles Times, July 17, 2005. latimes.com requires subscription, available online from advocacy site, accessed December 5, 2006.